



Irene Shubik

TV drama producer who enjoyed a popular hit with Rumpole of the Bailey

Irene Shubik, who has died aged 89, was a television drama producer whose work ranged from sci-fi to socially relevant modern stories for the BBC's The Wednesday Play and its successor, Play for Today, and adaptations of 19th- and 20th-century literature. Her greatest legacy was Rumpole of the Bailey, which she commissioned as a 1975 Play for Today. She was instrumental in changing the name of John Mortimer's liberal defence barrister from Horace Rumbold and casting Leo McKern in the role, while the writer wanted Michael Hordern.

When BBC bureaucracy made it difficult to get a series of Rumpole off the ground, Shubik left and took the six scripts she had already commissioned to ITV. She produced the first run, in 1978, setting up a much loved drama series.

Earlier, Shubik had made a key contribution to TV sci-fi as story editor and producer of Out of the Unknown, a BBC anthology series featuring adaptations of published works, along with new ones from writers such as William Trevor and Terry Nation. The Machine Stops, adapted from EM Forster's short story, won first prize at the 1967 International Science Fiction film festival. Shubik was always looking for suitable stories to put on screen and, although she left after the first two series (1965-67) of Out of the Unknown to join The Wednesday Play, she commissioned most of the subsequent 1969 run.

Leo McKern as Rumpole, with Martin Jarvis, left, as the Rev Timothy Donkin in a 1988 episode of Rumpole of the Bailey. Shubik, below right, produced the show's first run for ITV in 1978

RONALD GRANT; UNITED NEWS/GETTY IMAGES/POPPERFOTO

She was similarly a guiding light for Wessex Tales (1973), adapted from six short stories by Thomas Hardy. She stamped her mark on it by insisting that each would begin and end with a long shot of Wessex, the characters dwarfed by the landscape.

From 1967, as a producer of The Wednesday Play, Shubik's successes included The Last Train Through the Harecastle Tunnel (1969), Peter Terson's story of a trainspotter discovering repressed homosexuality, dysfunctional marriages and suggestions of paedophilia among the strangers he meets, and Chariot of Fire (1970), Tony Parker's exploration of the mind of a sex offender facing release from jail.

However, her commitment to the radicalism of The Wednesday Play and Play for Today was more questionable. While lauding the work of Parker, David Mercer and Clive Exton, she was less supportive of those writing political dramas.

Ironically, Edna, the Inebriate Woman (1971), Jeremy Sandford's tale of a down-and-out played by Patricia Hayes - the most celebrated Play for Today work commissioned by Shubik and the winner of two Society of Film and Television Arts awards - was one that Shubik herself expended much space on criticising in her 1975 book, Play for Today: The Evolution of Television Drama.

Sandford rebutted claims she made about the factual accuracy of both that and his classic 1966 play about homelessness, Cathy Come Home. He added that she had

seemed to "sabotage" the potential of Edna, the Inebriate Woman to have a similar impact on the public.

After launching Rumpole of the Bailey on ITV, Shubik focused on historical drama. Her suggestion to the channel that it should turn Paul Scott's The Raj Quartet into a series was met with the idea of trying out his later work, Staying On, as a pilot. Julian Mitchell's adaptation, produced by Granada and screened as a single play in 1980, starred Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson in a moving portrait of old colonials determined not to return to Britain.

Shubik then revisited The Raj Quartet to devise The Jewel in the Crown (1984), working on scripts with the writer, Ken Taylor, and researching locations for this 13-part high point of TV drama that was put on a pedestal alongside Granada's production of Brideshead Revisited.

Shubik was born in London, the daughter of Jewish immigrants, Sara (nee Soloveychik), from France, and Joseph Shubik, who came from Russia and traded in the flax market. Shortly after the outbreak of the second world war, she was evacuated to Canada. On her return, Shubik gained a master's in English literature from University College London and, after being turned down by the BBC, emigrated to the US and began her career as a documentary scriptwriter for Encyclopaedia Britannica Films in New York.

In 1960, after coming back to Britain, she was appointed as story editor on the ITV drama series Armchair Theatre - and told by Sydney Newman, the Canadian-born producer, that he did not



Birthdays

Rick Allen, rock drummer, 56; **Mark Austin**, broadcaster, 61; **Susanna Clarke**, author, 60; **Toni Collette**, actor, 47; **Tim Cook**, chief executive, Apple, 59; **Sharron Davies**, Olympic swimmer and broadcaster, 57; **Lou Donaldson**, alto saxophonist, 93; **Lord (Bruce) Grocott**, Labour politician, 79; **Mark Hughes**, football manager, 56; **Jeremy Hunt**, Conservative MP and former health secretary, 53; **Roger Kellaway**, composer and pianist, 80; **Anthony Kiedis**, singer and songwriter, 57; **Andrew Knight**, media executive, 80; **Lyle Lovett**, singer and songwriter, 62; **Daljit Nagra**, poet and broadcaster, 53; **Nick Owen**, broadcaster, 72; **Gary Player**, golfer, 84; **Aishwarya Rai**, actor, 46; **Gerald Ratner**, businessman, 70; **Jim Steinman**, songwriter and composer, 72; **Jessica Valenti**, feminist writer, 41; **Prof Paul Wellings**, ecologist, 66; **Bill Woodrow**, sculptor, 71.

“She was embroiled in what became known as ‘Baftagate’

want any “costume crap”. In the same anthology format - the first featuring sci-fi stories - she created Out of This World (1962).

Newman took Shubik with him to the BBC in 1963 and she was story editor on Story Parade (1964-65), dramatisations of modern novels for the newly launched BBC2. In 1965, with Out of the Unknown, she became a producer, and she stayed in that role for Thirteen Against Fate (1966), Hugh Leonard's adaptations of Georges Simenon stories.

Before switching to ITV, Shubik worked on the BBC2 anthology series Playhouse (1973-76). Her commissions included half a dozen original dramas about the paranormal from writers such as Brian Hayles and Trevor.

She left Granada before The Jewel in the Crown went into production because she was asked by Columbia Pictures to work on the screenplay of The Girl in a Swing (1988), based on Richard Adams's novel. However, it did not go beyond a first draft.

In 1991 Shubik was embroiled in industry controversy when she chaired the Bafta TV Awards jury. She declared Prime Suspect to be best drama serial, but the seven judges publicly stated that four of them had voted for GBH. The ballot papers no longer existed and no blame was attached, but the affair became known as Baftagate.

Shubik had a 10-year relationship with Andrew Dickson, a Telegraph journalist, who died in 2004. She is survived by her nieces, Claire and Anna. Her brothers, Martin and Philippe, predeceased her.

Anthony Hayward

Irene Shubik, TV producer, born 26 December 1929; died 26 September 2019

Announcements

Deaths

HENLEY, Peter Arthur, died peacefully at Woodlands Nursing Home, Burgess Hill aged 73. Beloved brother of John and David. Funeral service at Surrey & Sussex Crematorium on Thursday 7 November at 3.30pm. No flowers please. Inquiries to Ballard & Shortall, East Grinstead RH19 2HA, tel. 01342 323092.

ROBINSON, Karen. Hey hon, don't cry, don't shed a tear, instead laugh heartily, crack a joke, eat (cheese), be merry and remember me for who I was. On 1 October 2019, aged 57, Karen Robinson, second daughter to Pat and Stan, passed away. Karen, originally of Wigan, Lancashire, lived most of her life at Dream Cottage, Harvington, Worcestershire. Karen passed away leaving a legacy of having inspired the hearts and minds of her friends, family and work colleagues with her bubbly, ever smiling, ever laughing, positive and can-do personality. Karen you are much loved and sorely missed.

In Memoriam

POWELL, Janet. 12 March 1953 - 1 November 2009. Wife, mother and sister remembered with love and sorely missed. Robin, Joanne, Suzanne, Barry and her many friends.

For Announcements, Acknowledgments, Adoptions, Anniversaries, Birthdays, Births, Deaths, Engagements, Memorial Services and In Memoriam, phone 020 3353 2114 or email: announcements@theguardian.com including your name, address and telephone number between 10am and 11am Mon-Fri.