

Birmingham date for media legend

She is renowned for wearing her fur coat to cover war stories – and at 68, Dame Ann Leslie remains as glamorous as ever.

Following her recent memoir, *Killing My Own Snakes*, Dame Ann will be a special guest at the Birmingham Press Club dinner in May.

Born in Pakistan and starting her career at the *Daily Express*, Dame Ann was one of the first female foreign correspondents at the *Daily Mail* where she has remained a special correspondent for the last 40 years.

Described by David Randall in *The Great Reporters* as one of “the most versatile reporters of them all.” Dame Ann has interviewed celebrities including Muhammed Ali and Tennessee Williams, reported in over 70 countries, been shot at by Bosnian snipers, pursued by Robert Mugabe’s secret police, seen the Berlin Wall fall and Nelson Mandela released from prison.

Press Club chairman John Lamb said: “We are delighted to be celebrating the career of one of the greatest ever reporters – surely an accolade to which every journalist aspires.”

“We are pleased to have the opportunity to make her an honorary life member of the Press Club and look forward to hearing from one of the media’s greatest figures.”

Dame Ann said of her forthcoming visit: “On and off, I’ve done work in Birmingham but this is the first time I’ll be coming here for fun.”

The dinner will be held at Opus on Thursday, May 14. Tickets are still available – details can be found at www.birmingham-press-club.co.uk or by calling Lewanna Reid at Core Marketing on 0121 643 8151.

Clarity should prove class act for parents

Birmingham-based Clarity Digital has been appointed as lead agency by the Girls’ Schools Association (GSA) as it seeks to develop its online resource for parents.

Clarity Digital’s remit will include all strategic planning, reporting and traffic generation for the association’s recently launched MyDaughter site.

The GSA, which represents 200 independent girls’ schools, developed the portal following research into how parents search for schools and their needs before, during and after the selection process.

This resulted in the site which offers advice, support and forums on all aspects of raising girls.

Clarity Digital founder Jason Navon said: “The MyDaughter website is an innovative platform for the GSA to attract and engage with new parents for its member schools as well as providing an additional support channel for parents of existing pupils.”

GSA executive director Sheila Cooper said: “We’ve made a great start with the launch of the site and now want to increase the pace and really drive usage and interaction via the MyDaughter site.”

Clarity Digital was set up at the end of 2008 by Mr Navon. It claims to be the first dedicated digital planning and reporting agency outside London.

Website is revved up

WL Digital, the web and online arm of Warwickshire creative agency Wyndham-Leigh, has completed a redesign of the UK Press and PR website for Spanish car brand SEAT.

Timed to coincide with the launch of the new SEAT Exeo junior executive car, the site makes life easier for the automotive PR sector responding to the needs of motoring journalists.

WL managing partner Sean Lees said: “We won this commission from SEAT on the strength of our belief that we could introduce a new generation website which brings real benefit to journalists and SEAT alike and leapfrogs the brand ahead of its competitors in this arena.”

“Key to this was the development of the mySEAT function within the site which hold key details of each journalist’s relationship with SEAT.”

Joint venture bucks trend with the city’s talent and resources



Fullrange founding director Steffan Aquarone outside Fazeley Studios in Digbeth, home of the company’s new office

HANNAH WALDRAM
Business Staff

A Birmingham-based film-maker is bucking the trend of London-based production by making the most of the city’s talent and resources for his new film.

The collaborative effort is the first joint venture from Immense Productions – the partnership between Guardian columnist Guy Browning and Birmingham-based producer Steffan Aquarone.

The feel-good film, *The Husband Obedience Trials*, will be produced in Birmingham and filming will take place in Kingston Bagpuize near Oxford for five weeks in the summer. Mr Aquarone said: “Very few full-length films are genuinely regionally produced, so it is great to be a part of such a breaking project. There is no reason why all production should fall to London. In my work with the Producer’s Forum I encounter so much talent in the city and we have the equipment as well as the skills.”

“Although we have a limited budget we are shooting on RED, a fantastically high-spec camera system. Birmingham has real potential to grow its success film sector over the next few years and we hope

that the Husband Obedience Trials will play a big role in that.”

Mr Aquarone, 24, founded film production company Fullrange as a student at Warwick University and is also director of the Producers’ Forum, the networking body for the region’s screen industry. Fullrange will manage the production supported by a West Midlands film

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STAEFFAN AQUARONE

crew and project director Simon Dando and post-production will take place in Fullrange’s new offices in Fazeley Studios, Digbeth.

He said: “The British film industry has been in regression for many

years and has reverted to London. Not out of choice but because there is only enough stuff to keep one film hub alive which is a great shame.

“But lots of people have been boldly setting up in Birmingham with the skills and experience so the facilities are here. It’s on the cusp of being a very well-connected place for film but the various projects and people are a bit fragmented.”

Although *The Husband Obedience Trials* is set in Kingston Bagpuize, the film contains several urban scenes which will be filmed in Birmingham. Locations include the Mailbox, the Electric cinema and one of the city’s universities.

“Birmingham is a receptive place to make film,” said Mr Aquarone. “There are great regional funds and unrecognisable locations.”

Mr Aquarone said 75 per cent of funding had already been confirmed from shareholders and sponsors including Greene King Pub Partners, Finders Keepers estate agency and O’Leary Caravans. He said they were still hoping to receive support from regional agency Screen West Midlands.

The Husband Obedience Trials follows the story of gardener Tom, who is able to talk to plants but not to women. A tale of dreams and

help from the local village, the story mirrors the film-making story, since villagers of Kingston Bagpuize will be providing props, costumes and make-up along with food and accommodation.

“It’s a very down-to-earth approach,” said Mr Aquarone. “The story of the film does reflect the story of its making and it has been a friendly and fun project to make so far.”

Writer and director Guy Browning, who wrote the “How To” column in the Saturday magazine, said: “In these dark days the need for light relief has never been greater. People might feel down, their expendable income might be down, but cinema attendance is up. That shows the power of film to entertain and help people to escape their worries.”

“This is my transition into screen writing and Steffan’s first full-length film, although he has proven his immense talent by previously producing features, shorts and more than twenty big budget corporate films. We did not have the budget, we did not have the contacts, but we had an idea that we believed in and it is amazing how people have pulled together to support us and make that idea a reality.”