

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Name: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper.mp3

Patrick

00:00:01:02

Funnily enough, Kit actually auditioned originally for Charlie and I remember watching his audition tape and being like "he is acting this so well that I'm like, literally believing that all of this Charlie dilemma that he was playing in the scene". But what I was thinking is "this is definitely a Nick, not a Charlie." To kind of find a show like this at this point in my career has just been like, it's been a whirlwind, but it's been a real privilege because anyone could have made it. It's so obviously such a special thing. And to get to be the custodian of it and make sure that it's as good as it can be is a real joy.

Liam

00:00:44:21

Welcome to PrideCast. This is a podcast about all things LGBTQ+ brought to you by ITV. During the show, we chat about being proud to be LGBTQ+ today. We speak to people from across the community to find out where they are on their journey and where they're headed. We'll also keep you updated on the latest LGBTQ+ news and the things that matter to you. This is the ITV PrideCast.

Liam

00:01:08:09

Hello there and welcome back to the ITV PrideCast. Now the podcast has been on a little bit of a break, but I'm really glad to say that we're back and we've got some great guests lined up. Well, I hope you've been having a lovely summer so far, and if you've been taking part in any pride activities, I hope they've all been brilliant and the weather has been kind to you. Well, joining me to co-host this episode is Jack Marshall, one of my colleagues on the ITV Pride network and a member of staff here at ITV. Jack, how are you doing? Nice to see you.

Jack

00:01:53:17

Hi, Liam. How are you?

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Liam **00:01:54:21**

I'm all good, thank you. Yeah. I'm good. We're in a period at the moment, aren't we where it's starting to get a bit warmer, which I don't think we're used to because it's been so rubbish weather wise, hasn't it? So I think we're all in a bit of shock.

Jack **00:02:06:12**

It's been miserable. But today in London has been killer, and I am not built for this kind of climate. I feel like my flat is one of those where it's really cold in the winter and really hot in the summer, so I'm just uncomfortable all the time. [laughs]

Liam **00:02:20:17**

It has been warm in Cardiff today. I don't think we've had as high temperatures today, but it has been warm here as well. And I did think, you know, I heard a few people say in the newsroom at work say "oh yeah, we're supposed to get a heatwave this week." And I was like, "oh, are we ready for it?" Oh well, I think we're a bit sick of the rain, aren't we?

Jack **00:02:36:17**

The answers always no. So true.

Liam **00:02:39:09**

So, Jack then, tell us! I know what you do at ITV, of course, but tell us what you do at ITV for anyone that doesn't know.

Jack **00:02:45:11**

Of course. So for the last year and a half I have been on the technology grad scheme, which is basically a post-university scheme where you just kind of do lots of different things in the tech space at ITV so that could be things like software development, cybersecurity, UX design. But as of this week, I have landed myself a permanent job.

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Liam **00:03:08:10**

Oh. Many congratulations. What lovely news!

Jack **00:03:12:16**

Thank you!

Liam **00:03:12:24**

You must be absolutely delighted - you look it!

Jack **00:03:15:05**

I am thrilled. I am so excited to start. And not just because of the higher salary, but also because I am actually starting my career in something which I'm actually interested in. So I'm very excited.

Liam **00:03:28:14**

Absolutely. And I suppose as well, you know, from doing what you've done so far this year, kind of seeing how ITV works and kind of investing your time in the company as well as ITV investing in you, you know, it's nice, I suppose, to kind of build on that now, that foundation that's been laid.

Jack **00:03:45:12**

Absolutely. And you can't get rid of me. I'm sticking around.

Liam **00:03:50:00**

Well quite right. Well I know Jack that you know, you worked really hard in your day job. And of course, on top of that, you do so much work for the ITV Pride network and tell us about some of the things that you do for the network.

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Jack

00:04:02:01

For sure, usually I do my best, but usually for ITV Pride, I'm kind of in charge of the background admin stuff. So putting in meeting invites for kind of like big discussion groups that we might have internally or like kind of planning out agendas and stuff, just kind of making sure that pride season never ends. We always have something going on around the company.

Liam

00:04:23:19

Absolutely. And I suppose it's, you know, the work that you do is really integral because it's making us as a network much more visible to colleagues across the company. And, you know, that's the whole part and parcel of raising the awareness of LGBTQ+ people in general.

Jack

00:04:39:16

Totally, yeah. And it's quite nice because obviously we have the committee, which is like a lovely group of ITV employees, but then there's also been regulars coming to these sessions, just people who are interested in kind of the cause of ITV Pride, who aren't necessarily part of the committee and part of planning everything, but just people who enjoy being there and enjoy talking about everything LGBT and prior to ITV. So it's great. Yeah. It's really nice to kind of establish the sort of network, I guess.

Liam

00:05:08:08

Well, one of the things I'm really grateful to you, of course, as well that some people might not know of, is that you do help me with the PrideCast as well, in the sense of setting up people for interviews. And, you know, you've been really, really integral to kind of setting up some great guests.

Jack

00:05:21:13

Thank you, yeah.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Liam

00:05:22:01

I really value that support because it's great to find out new people that we can speak to and it's not something that...Some people might think you can easily turn around in just a quick phone call or an email. It takes a little bit of work, doesn't it?

Jack

00:05:38:24

A lot of work sometimes. It's the most surreal thing ever, coming from, I guess, a nerdy tech background. I would never expect me to be like, emailing and setting guests up. So it's super, super interesting. I was like emailing like for instance, Patrick from today, just like, "oh, fancy popping along for little chat?"

Liam

00:06:00:03

Well, I was going to say, that led it perfectly on actually, because we are speaking to a guy called Patrick Walters today. He's done great work when it comes to being the executive producer of the hit series Heartstopper. Which, I must say, I feel like I've spoken about Heartstopper more than most other the things are on this podcast, really and how incredible as a series it's been and it's touched so many lives, hasn't it? I mean, I shouldn't probably admit this, but I've probably watched it about ten times the first series because I love it that much.

Jack

00:06:34:03

That's good. That's great.

Liam

00:06:36:05

It kind of became, I think like people watch Friends now. They just watch it on repeat, don't they, all the time as kind of background noise? And it kind of became a bit like that for me, Heartstopper. Because it was such an easy, relaxing watch, really in many ways.

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Jack

00:06:48:09

That's amazing. I mean, it's great. I mean, it's great that you talk about it so much. If you're passionate about it, it's great. I mean, I feel like I can't watch it ten times like I watch Friends because I will be crying all the time, but I remember the first time I watched it, I was hooked. I watched it all in one sitting and I fully had things to do that day. Nothing got done. Absolutely nothing.

Liam

00:07:10:04

I think for any drama - and we know this especially for working for ITV - any good drama will take you on a bit of an emotional rollercoaster in many ways, and that you'll see the rough to the smooth and the humour and the sad things in life. And actually it's a great representation of real life. I think from what I kind of saw of Heartstopper is that, you know, it kind of shows you a bit of a window into what life can be like, really. What you know, what life could be like for many people.

Jack

00:07:43:16

Yeah, for sure. And with it being kind of targeted towards such a younger demographic, it's amazing because people can really see how their life could be and how they can represent themselves in such a pivotal stage of human development, I guess. It's incredible.

Liam

00:07:58:19

Oh, definitely. And so for you then coming up so we've got the permanent job. That's something to look forward to. We're in the middle of the summer. So you know that's always an exciting time.

Jack

00:08:10:10

Pride month, hello!

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Liam

00:08:10:20

Exactly, exactly. We are in, we're recording this in pride month, which it's an incredible time, isn't it? And I think we all see the celebrations that go on, and they look fantastic. But it's also a month to be reflective I always think, and think about those that have come before us and the incredible things that they went through to kind of get us where we are today, but also to remind us that we have still got a long way to go really, haven't we?

Jack

00:08:36:19

Definitely. Yeah, for sure. And it's such a great thing that we still have pride and such a great thing that pride in London is such a big thing, pride in Cardiff is such a big thing because realistically, although it's important to kind of be mindful of where we came from, it's important to be celebratory of where we're going and how many great strides we have made towards actual equality, you know. Did you get up to much during pride month?

Liam

00:09:05:10

Well, I've just been to Pride Cymru which it takes place in Cardiff. It was celebrating its 25th anniversary this year so it was great. Oh it was absolutely amazing. It was really, really nice to take part in the parade. And then afterwards they have the kind of festival event in the castle that takes place over two days. So it's in Cardiff Castle, so it's yeah, lovely to kind of experience that and see lots.

Jack

00:09:32:04

That must have been so pretty.

Liam

00:09:33:17

It was.

Jack

00:09:34:17

Cardiff Castle's amazing.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Liam

00:09:36:01

It is really beautiful. It's a great venue to hold it in. And there was thousands of people there that attended. So yeah, great to see people coming together, but also the support of people who were cheering us along on the streets as we did the parade. It was lovely.

Jack

00:09:50:17

Aw very cool.

Liam

00:09:51:24

You know, it's lovely to see, isn't it? Because that's, you know, as we all know, and I think we see that in Heartstopper actually in terms of allyship, how important that is to see people coming to support you and showing solidarity with the community. It's more important than ever now, actually, it's more important in this time when we see the things that are going on towards the community, we realise how important it is to have that backing from our allies. So, yeah, wonderful to see.

Liam

00:10:21:19

Well, Jack, thank you so much for joining me to co-host this episode. I'm really looking forward to chatting with Patrick and seeing what he has to say. And I think we just have to finish off by saying what we're chatting about here is huge congratulations to you. What wonderful news about you securing your permanent job here. Wonderful news.

Jack

00:10:40:13

I'm only doing this to brag. That's it. [laughs]

Liam

00:10:43:08

Quite right. Keep on bragging, that's for sure. Oh, Jack, thank you so much.

Jack

00:10:47:07

Thank you, Liam.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Liam **00:10:57:04**

Patrick Walters, thank you very much for joining us both here on the ITV PrideCast. How are you? How's your day going?

Patrick **00:11:04:01**

My day is going well. Yeah. Thank you for having me. It's just a pretty normal Monday in the office today, so. Yeah, I've just been doing Zooms and stuff.

Jack **00:11:12:22**

Oh, lovely. Are you based in London?

Patrick **00:11:15:22**

Yeah. So See-Saw has got an office just by Spitalfields Market. Yeah.

Jack **00:11:19:19**

Oh, I'm so jealous. That sounds amazing. I found I've been walking around London today, and it has been so hot, I just can't. I'm not built for this kind of weather.

Patrick **00:11:29:10**

It's very sunny and beautiful at the moment. Rarely.

Liam **00:11:32:06**

We definitely don't get much of that, do we? I think we're not very used to it, are we at the moment? But you must be kind of getting into the stages, I guess, Patrick of things ramping up for Heartstopper season three. Tell us then what your involvement is, because you're the executive producer on there, aren't you? On the series?

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper
Patrick **00:11:52:21**

Yeah, that's right. So I guess in terms of what the executive producer does: I work at a production company I just mentioned, See-Saw Films. And they'll have usually a team of executive producers who are all sort of on the lookout for stories, ideas, novels they might be reading that could be turned into television series. And so you're looking for the genesis of the idea in whatever form that comes and then your job is to develop it and to pitch it to the channels that might make it and hopefully find one that wants to make it with you. And then you oversee that process of making the show once it's been greenlit creatively. So you sort of bring a whole range of different amazing people together in order to make the show and then eventually release it and it's quite a long process.

Jack **00:12:50:12**
That's amazing. Literally the whole process you're involved in then I guess. It's like your baby.

Patrick **00:12:55:08**
Yeah. That is the kind of the fun part of being an exec producer in TV is that you do follow it all the way through. At the moment we're just in the final stages of post-production on season three of Heartstopper, and then I'll work with Netflix on how they're hoping to kind of market and publicise the show as well. And so you'll be part of that whole creative conversation up until the release of it. And that really is then when it goes off. But yeah, it's very satisfying when you've been working on something for years for it to finally come out.

Jack **00:13:32:01**
For sure. So it's a year-long process. So even like you mentioned the genesis, it started that long ago.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Patrick

00:13:37:04

And it's actually one of my quickest in terms of like, they can take much longer than that. I've worked on things that I've started developing, and then it takes five, six years before it comes out. But actually with Heartstopper, when I first read the graphic novels, it was only sort of only a year or two before we were kind of in production on the first season. But a typical season of it, I guess I'm trying to think when we started shooting Heartstopper... Season three would have been in the autumn of last year, and it's going to be on Netflix in October, so it takes about a year from the point at which you start filming it, usually for it then to be landing on the channel.

Liam

00:14:18:16

And Patrick, what you were saying there then in terms of you're on the lookout for stories that could be turned into TV dramas and series dramas. And so tell us then how that process came about finding Heartstopper, because I suppose it's a bit different in the sense of finding a novel or anything like that, you know, traditional novel, in that it's a graphic novel, isn't it? So it's a bit different.

Patrick

00:14:44:07

Yeah, it was brilliant. It was just a lovely moment of like, I became aware of the graphic novel at a really good moment. It was just when Alice had been self-publishing it for a little while. But she got the publishing deal for the first volume to come out with Hachette. And so I think that created a little bit of buzz around the title, but it was still a little bit underground. And I remember reading it on her website, you know, she'd put it up there for free, and I think you can still read it there. And I just remember being so sort of taken with it, it was so sweet and pure and really uplifting. And then it was very soon after that that I was sat in a room with Alice and kind of speaking to her about my experience of reading it and why we should do the TV show together. So it was it was a quick process.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Ho

Liam

00:15:37:08

It seems to have taken the world by storm. And I know that's often a phrase that can be overused, but I think the reception that you've had from it, it's just incredible, really. I mean, the amount of people that I speak to from the community, but also allies as well, that say they've watched it and they just absolutely love it. I mean, what wonderful feedback for you to receive. You know, it must be incredible to hear things like that.

Patrick

00:16:04:11

Yeah. It's great. It's such a brilliant show in terms of the audience response. I think that's been one of the most exciting things about the first two seasons coming out. You get all of these amazing people filming themselves watching it for the first time and then they put that footage on YouTube so you can actually literally watch people kind of freaking out about each plot development, which is always really funny and very sweet.

Jack

00:16:31:08

Totally. I just remember around the time when season one was coming out, it kind of felt like it came out of nowhere. It seemed like it went from nothing to everyone talking about it. What was that reaction like from yourself? Just kind of waking up and seeing everyone talking about it?

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Ho
Patrick **00:16:48:00**

Yeah, it was really overwhelming, I remember, because it felt like we were such a little show and there wasn't that much heat on us in terms of when we were filming the first season. And the actors weren't as famous as they've now become. So feeling like you were doing something special, which I think the whole creative team did when we were making the first season, we had an expectation that hopefully it would connect with an audience. And so we were sort of waiting to see whether that would come to pass. But when it did, almost kind of so immediately, it was like really, really super overwhelming. I remember I think it was like maybe a couple of days after, we have an amazing series producer who I work with called Zorana Piggott, and we were just kind of both...well, I was really overwhelmed. I remember I called her up, I was like, super emotional just feeling the love for the show spreading around the world. Something that everyone who was in one of those kind of key positions in the making of the show, I think, really valued. But also, you know, it took a bit of getting used to and a little bit of recovery from.

Liam **00:18:01:04**

I think for a lot of people in the community, Patrick, it was something that we'd needed for so long. And I think that's what you tend to hear from people across the generations that they never had this kind of show in their life when they were growing up. And I think that not only testament to the to the actors of the show, but also, of course, to yourselves as the producers to spot a story out there like this and make it available to a bigger audience.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Patrick

00:18:29:19

Yeah. I think there's this sort of healing process that the show has tapped into, which is that there's been this transition from life for young LGBT people feeling quite hostile and feeling like you carry around a lot of shame from that hostility that you're met with, or not met with if you don't feel you can come out. And so the idea to show a very pure and uplifting love story between two young queer people. I stress the 'young' now, I think it's the real thing that felt revelatory to people and felt like a new point of connection and also felt like, 'oh my God, why has it taken that long?'

Jack

00:19:16:03

Totally. And it's like being on a platform as accessible as Netflix. I mean, everyone has a Netflix subscription, right? And it's young queer kids who might still be in the closet, could watch something like Heartstopper and immediately identify with the characters on there. It's probably not immediately measurable the impact it has on the next generation, but I'm sure it's massive. So it's really great.

Patrick

00:19:39:06

And it's so wonderful to, as you make the show, you're sort of surrounded by these actors that have such confidence in the message of it, and they're so at ease with their identities. And as someone who's slightly older than them, watching them, I feel such pride and also that there's been such a gear shift from when I was at school, for example, in their attitude. And that's been really wonderful too.

Jack

00:20:08:00

That's amazing.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Ho

Liam

00:20:10:06

I was going to say there as well, because just seeing behind you, Patrick. Of course, you've got the graphic novels there, and did it feel a bit like you'd got you come across gold dust in a way? Because you've kind of got a storyboard there and a template for you to use and go from to make the show. I mean that's not something that really I don't think has been done before. Not that I know of anyway.

Patrick

00:20:34:04

Yeah, it's really brilliant because, I mean, an even more lucky position is that Alice Oseman, who drew the panels of the graphic novel, then turned her hand to screenwriting so that the person that I was developing the creative of the TV show with had actually been the person who drawn all of those amazing, iconic comic panels. And we really did just use that as the Bible. And it was like you had so much of the show storyboarded already, and that was really, really useful for our director, Euros, who always had the panels there with him on set as we were shooting. So we were really trying to get all of Alice's beautiful graphic symmetry and composition that was in the comic, into the show.

Liam

00:21:18:05

I gotta say, I think it's rather uncanny, actually, how Kit and Joe looked so much like Nick and Charlie from the graphic novels. Its incredible casting them, you know? Fantastic really.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Ho
Patrick **00:21:30:18**

Yeah. It was real fun to cast it because it felt like for each character, the person that we needed just walked in, which isn't always the case. And we had a really short amount of time to cast it with our casting director, Daniel Edwards, because we needed to hit specific production dates, and we did this big public open casting call where we were kind of inundated with lots of audition tapes. But what was brilliant was we felt that we found the right kind of physical match to the graphic novel with the actors that we really believed in in terms of their craft and the fact that they could really, technically pull it off in terms of the acting that was required, which I was very, very nervous about. Going into it, I was sort of worried that that would be a really, really hard thing to achieve. Um, but luckily some of the casting gods sort of shone down on us.

Jack **00:22:25:04**

Did you find being a fan of the graphic novel already made it harder experience to cast? Because I guess you would have had this preconceived conception in your head of what the characters should look like, and should sound like. So did you find that the two actors filled those roles perfectly?

Patrick **00:22:41:16**

I think there was a real feeling with both of them. Funnily enough, Kit actually auditioned originally for Charlie and I remember watching his audition tape and being like "he is acting this so well that I'm like, literally believing that all of this Charlie dilemma that he was playing in the scene". But what I was thinking is "this is definitely a Nick, not a Charlie." And then we went on a journey with Kit where we've sort of broached that with him and, and asked him how he felt about both characters and all this sort of stuff, and it just made perfect sense that he would end up playing the Nick role.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Jack

00:23:21:15

Totally. That's amazing. Season two introduced so many more characters - what was the casting process like for that? Was it kind of similar?

Patrick

00:23:32:18

Yeah it was similar. We found lovely Leila who played Sahar in another open casting call that we did and she's just got such charm and wit and just cracked everyone up constantly throughout.

Jack

00:23:45:18

Oh, great.

Patrick

00:23:48:09

It was a little more relaxed, I have to say, for seasons two and three, because you've got your core ensemble. So, you basically have a similar amount of time to cast less roles. So it is a little bit easier from a kind of technical point of view.

Jack

00:24:03:22

And I guess like it's important that the characters actually gel well together. What I really like about Heartstopper season two is you can genuinely see the characters having fun with each other, like in between scenes. So it just shows that they're really...there's like a nice dynamic already, like even off screen, you know?

Patrick

00:24:19:23

Totally. They're all thick as thieves, honestly. Rhea just opened as Sally Bowles in Cabaret which we're all super excited about. Rhea plays Imogen and in the show. And I was there for the gala night the other night, and so many of the other cast were there to support her. And it's felt like that whenever anyone's done a big new thing, they're really in each other's corner, and they're all so talented that I just, as a producer, feel so lucky that we found them all. And it's now really exciting to watch them go on and do all these new things and be wowed by them in different roles.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Liam

00:24:58:00

It's amazing, isn't it, really, how this show is going to open so many new doors for so many of them, really? And I suppose that kind of makes me think. And I know this is such a hindsight question now, but when you were on set for season one, did you think that it was going to be a big hit? Did you think it was going to be what it is really?

Patrick

00:25:21:21

I hoped that it would be, I guess is the answer. I had an expectation that it could be. I guess when you're, you know, I've worked on a few shows and some of them have not had the audience response that Heartstopper's had, but I've believed in them and loved them, you know, in a really strong way. I think you never want to count your chickens before they've hatched. But I felt with Heartstopper that there was such a magic in the process of season one, and I really, really believed that it could do what it did. So when it did, it was kind of like, it's just such a relief. But yeah, you're always nervous. You're really, really nervous before a show goes out because you just don't know what the response is going to be honestly.

Liam

00:26:05:08

I suppose as well, the calibre of actors in the show and the faith of them in Heartstopper, from the likes of Stephen Fry as the school headmaster to, you know, Olivia Colman as Nick's mother. Absolutely amazing, really.

Patrick

00:26:22:03

We were totally as shocked as anyone. I mean, I couldn't believe it when Olivia Colman said yes. And she was so generous and brilliant with her time, and was so wonderful in the show. She'd had a working relationship with our director, Euros, because he'd directed her in other things. And so we had that sort of hotline, and Euros did a really brilliant job of being like, "come, it's a beautiful, wonderful show." And she was just like, "yeah, why wouldn't I?"

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Jack

00:26:52:22

That's so great. I mean, part of me was so surprised because she was such a major part in season two. And I was surprised because she's THE Olivia Colman, right? But the fact that she invested so much of her time into something like Heartstopper really shows that she believes in the message. It's really great to see.

Liam

00:27:10:08

When I think of one thing I absolutely love, Patrick, when you see throughout the series is those little touches that aren't in your face, but they really make a difference. So I'm thinking like, you know, the light shining on some of the shots and it's kind of like a rainbow you see in some of the shots. And it's those little touches which actually speak volumes, but as I say, they're not really in your face. They're quite subtle, really.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of H

Patrick

00:27:37:05

Yeah. I think that was such a great collaboration between our heads of department. So for example, between the cinematography. So where lighting like you're suggesting is coming through, where you've got maybe the bisexual flag colours or the pride colours, all of that was really well thought through with the cinematographer, who would then be in conversation with the costume designer and the hair and makeup, so that the looks that the characters had were going to complement the lighting. And wherever they could, they'd find a way to try and be as inclusive as possible in the messaging of how they did that, they really did. I'm just thinking in season one, there's that moment where Nick watches Tara and Darcy have that kiss in episode three and he's like, "oh my goodness, that's queer people being openly affectionate with each other." Kizzy and Corinna, who play Tara and Darcy, their costumes -- Adam, our costume designer, had made sure that there was a lighting setup within the costumes that they were wearing that would complement the lighting that Diana, our amazing DOP, had had for that moment, which was always to try and factor in those colours in order to make it even more meaningful for a queer audience.

Liam

00:28:48:03

I think one of the things I really love as well, Patrick, is that it's as though no stone is unturned when it comes to exploring any issues within the LGBTQ+ community. And I think last year - sorry, not last year, last season, - what was done brilliantly, which I don't think we've ever seen before, is the subject matter of being asexual. And, you know, I just think that it's so forward thinking and it will be so impactful for so many people that have never really seen that kind of thing before.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Happy Valley
Patrick **00:29:20:12**

Yeah, hopefully. I think with Tobie, who plays Isaac, that storyline has been really sensitively executed and I think it's something we're going to build on in season three as well. But just kind of giving that whole spectrum of the queer experience that it's not always... obviously Nick and Charlie have this kind of 'happily ever after' feel to them, and that's really important in its own way. But then there's that aroace representation in the show as well. And I think, you know, we always try and Alice does really well in the writing to kind of show that there's a variety of different queer experiences.

Jack **00:29:59:14**

Totally. And I feel like asexuality is such a big one where there's such a lack of understanding amongst those not just outside the LGBT community, but also within the LGBT community. So hopefully this will start so many conversations about understanding. What I thought was really interesting about Isaac's character, actually, was how the asexuality subplot wasn't really explored as much in the graphic novels as it was in the TV show. That's true, right?

Patrick **00:30:25:16**

Yeah, that's true because Isaac isn't even in the graphic novels because his character is called Aled that for a sort of slightly complex reason, Alice didn't bring into the TV adaptation and created a new character. And so it felt like we had a bit of a blank slate there to bring in a new storyline just specifically for the TV show. I'm glad that worked.

Jack **00:30:50:24**

For sure, yeah. What was the decision then to kind of make Isaac's character asexual? Was there kind of...I guess you have to have equal sensitivity in addressing the matter.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of H
Patrick **00:31:00:14**

Yeah, I think it's always something Alice had spoken to me about is that she wanted to have asexual representation in the show. And so we kind of thought from as early as season one and casting Tobie that that was sort of the route that we take that character in. And I think Alice does a really, really brilliant job of trying to show an active and engaged story there, especially in a show that like...part of what can make it tricky sometimes is that Nick and Charlie take so much focus. But we have this amazing ensemble cast, and all of the actors are so good and so working in the Tao and Elle storylines and the Tara and Darcy storylines, or Imogen or Isaac or whoever is tricky because there's only so much space in a half hour show. But I think what Alice does really well is take a small amount of screen time and make it very, very meaningful. So that was a real happy outcome with the Isaac character.

Liam **00:31:57:04**

I think that's a really lovely point there, Patrick, because, as you say, the main plot is around the storyline of Charlie and Nick, but I often found myself feeling very moved by those other plots that aren't so much of the focus really, especially Tao and Elle. I think that that story is incredible and I suppose anyone who's not part of the community, or they are part of the community, it really does show them that person's life that they may not necessarily be aware of. And actually it kind of, you know, shows two people who live very ordinary lives. And, you know, it's not a big issue as to who they are.

Patrick **00:32:36:13**

Completely. I think when we were thinking about season three, we, for example, with the Elle character, Alice and I spoke to Yaz and wanted to make sure that she felt we were kind of representing that character as truthfully as possible because there's a specific experience there, and that was such a fun process. And there's a lot of storyline in season three that's informed by those conversations with Yasmin herself. So it's exciting to do it in that way, for sure.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of H

Jack

00:33:09:07

So we can look forward more in-depth conversations regarding trans representation and asexuality representation in season three. Is there any other sort of new themes that are being addressed?

Patrick

00:33:21:13

Yeah, I think season three feels more mature than the first two seasons. The characters are growing up, and there is a kind of emphasis on what happens next when you start maturing with a friendship group and you're getting to that age where you're not a young teenager anymore. You're starting to think about your adult life and stepping into that adulthood. And so the questions that the characters are grappling with are a bit more adult, and there's certainly a kind of tonal shift into a slightly more adult space in season three which I'm excited about and really proud of the work that everyone's done there. There's more of an emphasis on Charlie's struggles with his mental health, and that takes quite a lot of the spotlight in season three, and it's I think it's a very moving storyline. And hopefully we've done it justice in the adaptation.

Jack

00:34:15:23

Totally. I thought it's such an interesting kind of theme to touch on as well, because obviously in season two, they talked about Charlie's eating disorder and how being bullied for being gay affected him so much. And it really puts into perspective how the queer experience can affect people in different ways. And it's such an important representation to have on such a major platform like Netflix. It's really great to see.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Patrick

00:34:41:06

Yeah, hopefully. I think it's one thing to tackle those themes in a show that is always going to be uplifting in terms of like its tone and what we're trying to do. Like we don't want it to be miserable in any way. But at the same time, there are the themes of darkness, and there is that acknowledgement of what it can be like for young queer people still. So I think it's a really important shade to have in. And I think it means that season three feels very distinct from the other two seasons. And I felt that about season two, actually, that it was really different in its story and in its content to season one. And I feel with season three, hopefully that's the same thing again. It feels like a very sort of standalone story.

Liam

00:35:29:21

It does feel, Patrick, that it's so nice, I think in many ways to see LGBTQ+ content that does have a happy side to it, because I think for a lot of people, for a long time, they've watched content that can often end with a very sad ending, and it's often quite depressing to watch and actually to see something that is the opposite in many ways, that does have lots of happy storylines throughout, even though it does, like you say, touch on the sad topics, of course. Do you feel that we've gotten that stage in society now where we are starting to see better representation of LGBTQ+ lives? And Heartstopper is a good turning point for that?

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Patrick

00:36:16:04

I mean, I definitely think that representation is better. Definitely in terms of where it was, because it was really, I guess when I first started working in TV, it felt like you could have very few gay shows. You know that if you had one gay show in a year on TV, that that was probably as much as you could expect and you wouldn't get them every year. I think the thing that still needs to be conquered is a sense of like, Heartstopper might feel like, "oh, that's the young gay show so therefore that box has been ticked" and it's sort of celebrated, but it's still sort of viewed in a kind of like, "oh, it's LGBT. It's in that box" kind of thing. And the thing that I find is hard to sometimes conquer in the industry at the moment is that sense that there can be more LGBT shows and that there should be more LGBT characters across the board in all shows, and I still think that there's not enough, really. So just because there's one Heartstopper, it doesn't mean that that's done and therefore doesn't need to be done again. It should be done again with a different voice in order that we keep the momentum of the gear shift that's happened.

Liam

00:37:36:05

One of the things that I found really interesting when chatting to people, and this is across generations, actually, is that you'll speak to younger people, and they talk about the LGBTQ+ networks that they have at their school. And I find that mind boggling, actually, because it definitely wasn't any of that when I was at school, that's for sure. But when you speak to someone who went through life living through section 28 or before that, and they've watched Heartstopper and a couple of people, I've heard them say that they really enjoy it, but they find it incredibly triggering as well to watch because it's so emotional for them to see a positive representation that they didn't experience themselves. Is that something that you've come across yourself?

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Patrick

00:38:20:01

Yeah. I guess there's this feeling of slight melancholy that it can inspire in people in terms of like the watch itself is so joyful and they might really respond to it, but then afterwards you kind of have this feeling of, "oh my goodness, what whole generations were deprived of for such a long time." And that can feel sort of sad and like that there's still a kind of, I guess, like I mentioned earlier, that sort of healing process to go through something that wasn't ideal. And certainly, I felt that feeling in terms of the making of Heartstopper myself and it just does feel so different and so much more open and accepting than it did when I was at school, where many, many times gay was used as an insult and it was something to sort of be avoided. You know, you just wouldn't talk about it really, because it was such a sort of tricky topic and no one wanted to be branded as gay because it was such a kind of negative thing. And that really was my experience. And so to be on set with all these amazing young, talented teenagers who just have no issue with that, and it's not even a kind of consideration for them, it's a really accepting and tolerant space, is really moving and kind of sad in a way. But I feel like you can only go forward. And so a big part of the satisfaction of having worked on Heartstopper and being part of this experience with those guys has been a really wonderful healing experience. So I hope that that's the energy it kind of puts out into the world.

Jack

00:40:00:13

For sure, yeah. It's just so lovely to have a positive gay story on a mainstream streaming service. I remember previously watching content like It's A Sin and Pose. I would just cry because like a lot of the themes are so sad. But I remember watching Heartstopper season one for the first time all in one sitting, and I was like, weeping even more so. And it was just cause it was just so beautifully made and it was really something I wish I had when I was in high school.

Patrick

00:40:27:17

Yeah, that's the main thing. Yeah, it feels good that it inspires that feeling in so many people for sure.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Liam

00:40:34:13

I wanted to ask Patrick, actually, with that. I mean, you touched on it there, like in terms of not experiencing that yourself when you were younger and from the content that you were watching and I just wondered, from your own experience, if you don't mind us asking, how do you how do you identify?

Patrick

00:40:49:14

So I identify as gay.

Liam

00:40:50:13

And so with that then, thank you for sharing that, do you feel now that we are getting to a place where, across the board things are getting better in society, or do you feel like there's so much work to go? Because I think sometimes we can look back and think, "yes, we have made fantastic strides." But then you see some of the protests that go on in society towards certain sections of our community and you think, "oh yeah, it does feel like sometimes one step forward, two steps back" I sometimes think.

Patrick

00:41:21:24

Yeah, totally. I agree, I think that there's steps forward, certainly in terms of what I'm talking about, which is sort of my experience of the TV industry and making TV shows and steps forward towards better representation in what's shown and that certainly has made strides. But then you can look at the news and you just feel completely hopeless and like that there is such a lack of tolerance and empathy. And I think that's kind of why it feels even more important to be making more shows like Heartstopper, because I genuinely think, you know, not to kind of overdo it, but to show young LGBT lives on such a big platform like Netflix is hopefully making those people feel seen when there's so much else in the media cycle that's making them feel dehumanised all the time. So it really is one of the kind of last defences we have against that kind of horrible culture war that can take over and be so, so damaging.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Liam

00:42:30:13

I often find as well that, especially TV and the series are produced, they can often have a more powerful impact on making change than sometimes government policy, the actions of protests and things like that. TV can often have such a powerful impact and reach huge audiences, of course.

Patrick

00:42:52:11

Yeah. I mean, that was a really exciting part of the whole Heartstopper when it launched. Like, you know, there was an MP who got up in the House of Commons and started talking about the show and trans representation and Yasmin Finney, a Labour MP called Luke Pollard. And that felt like a real moment for us because we were all able to go, "wow". It's a little show that was made with a lot of passion and we didn't know exactly where it would get to. But to feel like it was having a place in a room like that for that moment was really significant.

Jack

00:43:26:07

That's amazing. I guess with you being a content creator, I guess the idea of putting escapism out there for people is equally important as kind of motivating change. What sort of content do you think is needed now in this kind of political climate?

Patrick

00:43:42:24

Yeah, I think there's a call for all types of content, honestly. It's quite tough out there in the industry at the moment, making enough shows that can cover the whole range of experiences is the key. So it's like, where are the next Heartstoppers? And also, I do think there's a place for all different types of queer drama, comedy shows in terms of like, you can't just be like, "oh, well, we've got to make super, super happy shows and that's the only kind of tone and flavour we can show about gay lives." Because yes, it's important when you don't see that to address that. But it's also important to just kind of keep going and making sure that all those stories are out there. And it's hard, it's hard to get stuff made. So yeah, that's the trick, I think.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Ho

Liam

00:44:36:16

For you then, some of the content that you have watched throughout your life, is there anything, especially of an LGBTQ+ nature, that has really struck you and, and kind of stopped you in your tracks and, and blown you away?

Patrick

00:44:51:16

Yeah, I get this question a lot. I do remember watching Queer as Folk and just as a young person feeling like, "oh my goodness" that a show like that could exist completely blew my mind. The idea of lead characters fully embracing a gay identity and like, having the sort of hijinks of that show was just incredibly exciting. And so I think of that. Yeah, that always sticks out to me. But there's like so many touchstones of representation like soaps, I think are really super important. And I remember John Paul and Craig in Hollyoaks, for example, is another one where I was like completely rapt, just because the intricacies of gay life that are soap's able to get across when they do those storylines, that can be so monumental.

Jack

00:45:47:24

Totally and it's all about normalising, I guess, having those kind of storylines in something like Hollyoaks, Emmerdale, or Coronation Street. It just kind of shows that the gay experience is very normal and it's a normal life just like everyone else's experience.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Patrick

00:46:02:02

Yeah, completely. And I think when it's in soaps, for example, you get the characters. The soaps love their characters, right? So they're going to try those storylines out on a beloved character that's been in a long running soap and so you're sort of feeling that the care has been taken. And I think that's the same logic applied to Heartstopper. Alice loves these characters. Everyone who works on the show absolutely loves them and knows their personalities inside and out. And I think when it feels inauthentic is when you've got a show that is basically a kind of straight perspective show, and then they're like, "oh, well, let's just put one of the supporting characters as some version of an LGBT spoke storyline" kind of thing, where it's like it's a box ticking thing. And I think you can feel that when someone's identity has been put first before the character's actually formed. So hopefully that's the kind of ley line of the similar approach between the soaps and Heartstopper.

Liam

00:47:02:09

I suppose as well, like showing characters are more than just their sexuality, in the sense that, you know, we know how much Nick loves rugby. We know how much Charlie loves playing PlayStation games and things like that. And I think that adds...I don't like to use the word normalising because I don't think there's such a word, is there really? But it is a sense of showing people that they are more than just their sexuality.

Patrick

00:47:30:05

Completely, yeah, that's exactly it. You've got to do the work in order to have it be, and that's where the writers come in and it's so important. It should feel authentic.

Jack

00:47:41:18

And you mentioned before about how Alice is obviously passionate about these characters. Does she have a lot of involvement, like behind the camera kind of helping to direct or adjust the characters? Or is that more the director's job?

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of H

Patrick

00:47:56:09

No, Alice and I work really closely with the director. So for our first two seasons that was Euros Lyn who I mentioned before, but also on our third one, we've just been working with an amazing director called Andy Newbery. And Alice is an exec on the show with me so we are thick as thieves throughout the whole process. And yeah, she's really stepped into this role with such confidence. Yeah, it's a kind of real creative process of trust where we kind of know each other now so well, three seasons in, that we don't really have to have these kind of big discussions about how we do it. But, for example, when Alice is writing drafts of the screenplays, she'll send them to me and then we'll discuss and work out what the next part should do. Cast things, she's always across that. When we're shooting the show we're together on set and kind of making sure it's all in line with the creative vision. I've just been with her many, many days doing the post-production on season three. We actually just watched the whole season back to back together to finally just to check it was all... kind of producer eyeball where you just make sure everything's no mistakes. Um, so yeah, it's kind of like we're now giving it over to Netflix and they're going to ready it for October.

Jack

00:49:20:12

That's great. It's crazy to hear how early everything needs to be done before it actually goes to Netflix. Like it's still 3 or 4 months away and it's all ready to go. You know? It's amazing.

Patrick

00:49:31:00

Yeah, they need a bit of time because it goes out in so many countries, they've got to like sub it and dub it and do all of that. Make sure it's ready for every territory that it launches in which is loads. So yeah, they need a bit of time, but actually I think this one we've done it in good time. It's been down to the wire on a few.

Jack

00:49:52:01

Oh, really? Lots of late nights.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of H

Patrick

00:49:54:15

Yeah.

Liam

00:49:55:11

And were you happy with it, Patrick? In the end, were you all pleased with it?

Jack

00:49:59:18

Yeah. No. Hated it [They all laugh]

Patrick

00:50:01:17

I'm very, very happy. I always want to make sure Alice is feeling it's the best thing it can be, because you kind of go on this journey where she's put so much love and care into the scripts, and you want to make sure as a producer that you're doing right by that and that everything's realised in the best possible way. And I think the actors have done such a brilliant job this season, like Kit and Joe, particularly some real heavy scenes. And the themes, as I've said, are way more mature. So it feels like everyone came with their A-game. And yeah, really, really, really excited for people to see it.

Liam

00:50:37:12

What I really loved actually, about the end of season two especially, and you see it in season one, of course, as well. And I'm sure we're going to see it more now in season three. The support that both Charlie and Nick give to one another and in different ways. But, you know, I mean, obviously we see Nick standing up for Charlie with the bullying and things like that, but the emotional support that Charlie gives to Nick, I think for anyone who's watching that it's very it's lovely really, because I suppose sometimes as a queer person, when you're starting out, it can feel quite a lonely place, can't it, really? And to see something like that, it's incredible.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Ho
Patrick **00:51:17:14**

Yeah no it's great. I mean, I think one of the things that Kit and Joe have to do a lot of is these big dialogue-heavy conversation scenes where the boys are kind of working through their relationship and kind of like trying to articulate these things that are quite heavy. So it's like whether Nick's kind of worried about Charlie and his eating disorder, or whether Charlie is kind of plugged into the fact that Nick's not feeling right about something, and how Alice writes that truthfully so it doesn't feel inauthentic. And then how the boys kind of come to those scenes and perform it. And I think they just have such chemistry as actors, and they have such trust between them that usually they do those scenes in like the first take. You're like, "whoa, okay, we got it" kind of thing. They do that brilliantly and that sense of support that you're talking about comes from their brilliance as actors and from the screenplays that Alice has created for them.

Jack **00:52:23:10**

I thought it was also quite interesting because you mentioned that Alice obviously writes the scripts, but it's also based on a graphic novel that she's also written. And it's interesting that there are some deviations between the show and the novel. Can we expect more of that moving forward? Because I guess there was going to be more of a shift towards seeing them more as older teens, young adults. Right?

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Ha

Patrick

00:52:46:13

Yeah. I think there's always a certain amount where we are creating new stuff for the TV show, and it tends to be, I think, the two most common reasons we do that. One is we've got more space to show the supporting characters and their storylines. So a lot of the Tao and Elle stuff, and the Tara and Darcy stuff isn't in the comics because there just isn't space for Alice to put it in there, but then she can have real fun with it in the adaptation. And then also, I guess there's always a hunger in TV for the plot and hooks and everything to be as dramatic as possible. It's just a way of storytelling that in a graphic novel you don't have. Your audience is there and you don't quite have to drive the story with as much kind of "what's going to happen, what's going to happen?" So that's usually a conversation we have with Netflix, just making sure that the scripts are like as full throttle as they can be without it getting in the way of the tone. And so, yeah, there's definitely lots of hooky moments at the end of the episode like that often we don't have in the comic and that Alice kind of works through in the scripting process.

Jack

00:54:03:11

Oh, amazing. That must be so much fun for her, I guess, to kind of explore the stories in a different way. And you're saying Netflix are going to amp up the drama? I'm expecting chase scenes. I'm expecting explosions for season three.

Patrick

00:54:18:05

Yeah, maybe not quite explosions. [laughs]

Liam

00:54:23:06

Gosh. You know incredible writing that she does. And incredible to think that you've got that template to use, as we discussed earlier.

Patrick

00:54:33:01

No, it's really fun making it.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of H

Liam

00:54:35:02

I suppose life-changing for you as well, Patrick.

Patrick

00:54:39:10

Oh it's been joyful. Like, honestly to kind of find a show like this at this point in my career, it's been a whirlwind, but it's been like a real privilege because anyone could have made it. It's so obviously such a special thing. And to get to be the custodian of it and make sure that it's as good as it can be is a real joy.

Liam

00:55:03:10

Well, you know, I think on behalf of so many people, a massive thank you. Because I think, you know, as I said earlier on, I think a lot of us kind of needed this show in our lives. You know, what a forward thinking show. It's progressive, it just kind of shows you what the world should be like, and it's really, really wonderful to see.

Patrick

00:55:23:06

Oh that's lovely, thank you.

Liam

00:55:25:10

Patrick, thank you so much for sparing the time and we can't wait to see the next season. Before we know it it'll be here and I think we'll be all binging it like mad.

Jack

00:55:36:07

Absolutely. Cannot wait.

Patrick

00:55:38:01

Oh. Thank you. Thanks for having me.

Clip: ITV Pride Cast w/ Patrick Walters, Exec Producer of Heartstopper

Liam

00:55:47:18

Well, that was certainly one for all the Heartstopper fans out there, wasn't it? A really great chat with Patrick Walters, the executive producer of the hit Netflix show. Thank you so much for coming on the PrideCast, Patrick. It was really great to have you on. And of course, a big thanks to Jack Marshall for co-hosting this episode and for all the work you do to support the podcast and the wider ITV Pride network. And a reminder, if you're looking to meet fellow members of the LGBTQ+ community, there's plenty of ways that you can do that. If you work for ITV, why not join the ITV Pride network if you haven't done so already? Thanks again for listening to this edition of the ITV PrideCast. I hope you can tune in for the next episode.