

# “THE GROWING PRACTICE OF CALLING IN CONTINENTAL FILM GROUPS”<sup>1</sup>

## THE EUROPEAN INFLUENCE ON PRODUCTION OF EARLY BRITISH TV ADVERTISING

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**Abstract:** While the development of commercial television advertising in Britain is often framed in the context of the American model, this paper will argue that London advertising agencies looked across the Channel to French and Dutch production companies and personnel, particularly in the first five years of commercial television, from 1955-1960. Using case studies, this paper will illustrate the involvement of these Continental companies and personnel on the production of advertising films for British commercial television, and identify the reasons why they were replaced by their British counterparts from the early 60s.

**Keywords:** television, advertising, UK film production, television history, advertising history

### 1 “This Was Britain’s Year at Cannes”

On 23 June 1961, the headline on the front page of *Audio-Visual Selling (AVS)*, one of the trade publications of the advertising industry, announced that, “This was Britain’s year at Cannes”. For the first time a television commercial, entered by a London advertising agency, produced by a British production company with a British director, had won the Grand Prix for television commercials at the International Advertising Festival in Cannes.

Perhaps more remarkable was that, in an international competition, a slapstick parody of British gardening programmes, and starring the television comedian, Benny Hill, had won over the judges.

<sup>1</sup> Steven Hamilton, ‘A Production Man Looks Back on 1955,’ *Commercial Television News*, 6 January 1956, 2.



Figure 1. Schweppes Tomato Juice, *Gardening*, 1961. Directed by David Paltenghi, produced by Anglo-Scottish Pictures.<sup>2</sup>

Video 1. Min Kim Hyeon, *Cannes Lions Winners (1954-2012)*. Please visit the [online version](#) of the article to watch this video.

Hundreds of British commercials had been entered for the competition since 1955; for the last three years Britain had entered more television commercials than any other country. In the previous year there had been 584 films in competition from 25 countries, approximately half were television films and British production companies were responsible for 166 of these (and just 74 cinema commercials).<sup>3</sup> However, much to the chagrin of the advertising industry, British television commercials had always lost to American, French or Italian entries: so this was, for the advertising industry, a major coup.

It was also a significant achievement for a production industry that had little experience of television, or making short advertising films, prior to the launch of commercial television. Cinema advertising was a minor advertising medium, and cinema advertising films were not constrained by the precise timings of television spot advertising. This paper will explore how the advertising agencies, that wrote the advertisements, and commissioned the films, and the film production industry, which made them, re-configured themselves to adapt to this new advertising medium.

More specifically, although American advertising is often seen as the precursor for early British commercials, this paper will use two case studies, that of Joop Geesink's *Dollywood*, and *Screenspace* with André Sarrut, to illustrate how, in the first few years, advertising agencies drew on the expertise of production houses and directors from mainland Europe.

It will then argue that this was a short-lived phenomenon because of factors unique to Britain ensured that a British production industry could swiftly acquire the skills and techniques to match Continental competitors. Of particular importance was the preparedness of feature film directors and cameramen, including Alexander Mackendrick and Jack Cardiff, who had already had feature film success by 1955, to work on commissions for television advertising. This readiness of cinematographers to make television commercials was an aspect of British advertising production that was very different to America, where there was an almost complete divide between feature films and advertising production. As Jo Gable writes, "According to John Schlesinger, every major British director except David Lean has directed commercials. American feature film directors, on the other hand, seem to have absolutely nothing to do with television advertising films".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Audio Visual Selling*. Cannes Festival Flashback, 23 June 1961, 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Audio Visual Selling*, 240 British entries, 17 June 1960, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Jo Gable, *Tuppenny Punch and Judy Show: Twenty-five Years of TV Commercials*, Michael Joseph, 1980. p.30.

In addition, the advent of commercial television advertising stimulated an entrepreneurial spirit among both existing production companies, and new entrants, who could recognise an opportunity for profit in this new advertising medium. This aspect of British success will be illustrated through two further case studies, for Television Advertising Ltd. (TVA) and Anglo-Scottish Pictures. The combination of experience, and new commercial opportunities, ensured that Britain established a remarkably skilled, creative and prosperous advertising production industry that would, by the 1970s and 1980s, be respected worldwide.<sup>5</sup>

## 2 Researching the Early Television Advertising Industry

Little academic attention has been focussed on the period of early commercial television advertising in Britain, and few writers have addressed the emergence of television advertising production. The advent of ITV in Britain is most frequently written of as the launch of a new television channel, not a new advertising medium.<sup>6</sup> Those writers who have taken advertising as their topic have tended to take a theoretical approach<sup>7</sup>, which has led, as Liz McFall<sup>8</sup> has argued, to advertising remaining an over-theorised area, lacking in empirical research. Alternatively, the writer's focus has been on *advertisements* as texts, rather than their production.<sup>9</sup> Even writers, like Nixon, Schwarzkopf and West<sup>10</sup>, who have examined the advertising industry in the 50s and 60s, have concentrated on individual advertising agency case studies, rather than aspects of the production industry.

The limitations of the current body of work on advertising films has been discussed in the recent (2016) publication from the British Film Institute (BFI), *Films that Sell: moving pictures and advertising*, the BFI's first collection of papers on advertising.<sup>11</sup> While this is a welcome addition to a very small library, it attempts a breadth of coverage that includes commercial films for all forms of release: theatrical, television and other sites, and has case studies from many countries; the result is that early British television advertising is still hardly addressed.

This paper, therefore, draws on a wide range of primary sources including the trade press, interviews with practitioners active in the 1950s, material held by the History of Advertising Trust (HAT), the on-line archives at the British Film Institute (BFI), International Movie Database (IMDB) and Dutch Vintage Animation, and fan sites. All these sources have inherent problems for the researcher. Writers for the trade press had specific agendas, often promoting their

5 See Winston Fletcher, *Powers of Persuasion: The Inside Story of British Advertising 1951-2000*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.96 and Peter York, 'Bigger! Better! Richer! The golden age of advertising,' *The Independent*, 2008, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/bigger-better-richer-the-golden-age-of-advertising-787689.html> [Accessed 21 August 2015].

6 These would include Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume 5: Competition*, Oxford University Press, 1995. Catherine Johnson and Robert Turnock, *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years*. Open University Press, 2005 and Bernard Sendall, *Independent Television in Britain: Origin and Foundation, 1946-62 v.1*, Macmillan, 1982.

7 These would include William Leiss, Steven Klein & Sut Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products and Images of Well Being*, New ed. of 2 Revised ed., Routledge, 1997. Frank Mort, *The Commercial Domain: Advertising and the Cultural Management of Demand in Becky Conekin*, in: Frank Mort and Chris Waters, eds., *Moments of Modernity?: Reconstructing Britain - 1945-64*, Rivers Oram Press, 1999 and Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* 25th ed., Basic Books, 2001.

8 Elizabeth McFall, *Quaint Device: a genealogical study of advertising practices* [thesis] 2001, <http://0www.theses.com/catalogue.urls.lon.ac.uk/idx/scripts/it3.asp?xml=Z:\index\idx\docs\all\51\it00301861.htm&subfolder=/search> [Accessed November 25, 2011], and Liz McFall, *Advertising: A Cultural Economy*, Sage Publications Ltd, 2004.

9 For example, Renee Dickason, *British Television Advertising: Cultural Identity and Communication*, University of Luton Press, 2000 and Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* Reissue, Marion Boyars, 1978.

10 Including Sean Nixon, 'Apostles of Americanization? J. Walter Thompson Company Ltd, Advertising and Anglo-American Relations 1945-67', *Contemporary British History*, 22(4), 2008, 477-499; Stefan Schwarzkopf, 'A Moment of Triumph in the History of the Free Mind?' British and American advertising agencies' responses to the introduction of commercial television in the United Kingdom' in: Michael Bailey, ed., *Narrating Media History*, Routledge, 2012 and Douglas West, 'From T-Square to T-Plan: the London Office of the J. Walter Thompson Advertising Agency 1919-1970', *Business History*, 29(2), 1987, 199-217, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3115545>. [Accessed 13 June 2012].

11 Patrick Vonderau, Bo Florin & Nico de Klerk, *Films that Sell: Moving Pictures and Advertising (Cultural Histories of Cinema)*, British Film Institute, 2016.

own organisations. Practitioners are recalling events of over 60 years ago; memories are fallible and individuals tend to over-state their role in events. The film archives hold little television advertising, mainly retaining feature films and sponsored cinema films.<sup>12</sup> Fan sites are often the only source for the TV commercials but these are rarely dated accurately, and do not include data on the production company, advertising agency or director. Therefore, a process of triangulation has been used to link the films, with data on the people and organisations involved in the production; for example, films from fan-sites have been cross-checked against stills published in the trade press.

### 3 Did Television Advertising Rescue the British Film Production Industry?

This paper also contributes to a larger question: the extent to which the production of advertising films for television rescued the British film production industry. In 1955, the Association of Cinematograph Technicians (ACT), the film production union, was very concerned at the high level of unemployment in the industry. Although feature film production in Britain had recovered after World War II, it never reached pre-war levels and, after 1954, went into a decline, which would not reverse until the 1990s.<sup>13</sup>

However, feature films were not the only form of film production in the 1950s. There was another production sector, Shorts and Documentaries. The Association of Specialised Film Producers (ASFP) was the representative organisation for the technicians that made these sponsored films for commercial and public organisations. Some of these films were produced for theatrical release as second or third features, others were solely for training, recruitment or trade shows. The journal of the Cinematographers trade union, *The Cine-technician*, published regular lists of these productions.<sup>14</sup>

Commercial companies like Unilever, Anglo-Iranian Oil and Shell commissioned these films, as did public sector organisations, including the Ministry of Food. The advertising agencies were rarely involved; the manufacturers and government departments commissioned the production companies directly. In addition, some organisations including the Ford Motor Company and British Transport, had in-house production teams. However, government departments were beginning to close-down their in-house production resources, one of the largest, the Crown Film Unit, closed in 1952, having produced over 400 films since its inception as the Empire Marketing Board twenty-two years earlier. Sixty staff lost their jobs.<sup>15</sup>

Some within the production industry were optimistic that ITV would address this decline. Howard Thomas, a director of Associated British Pathé wrote, "If only half of the commercials were filmed [rather than broadcast 'live' or produced abroad] this would represent two hours of film a week – more than half the entire output of the British Film Producers Association".<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to understand how Thomas made this calculation; the only variable that was known, in April 1955, was that six minutes of advertising would be permitted for every hour of broadcasting. Nevertheless, television advertising became an important income stream, and it would be a valuable addition, to the research on the British film industry, to understand its financial and creative contribution.

12 Production company archives often only hold their feature films and sponsored cinema films. For example, the Halas and Batchelor archive consists of 3,721 film and video items, yet only eleven are listed as containing television commercials. The trade press indicates that Halas and Batchelor produced well over 100 TV commercials, so much of their output does not seem to have been deemed worthy of retention. See Jez Stewart, 2016. Robin Hood and the Furry Bowlers, 'Animators vs Advertisers in Early British Television Commercials' in: Patrick Vonderau, Bo Florin and Nico de Klerk, *Films that Sell: Moving Pictures and Advertising (Cultural Histories of Cinema)*, British Film Institute, 2016.

13 Stephen Fellows, 2016, <https://stephenfellows.com/how-many-feature-films-are-shot-in-the-uk-each-year/> [Accessed 10 November 2016].

14 *The Cine Technician*, July-August, 1952, 94-96, <https://archive.org/stream/cinetechician00asso#page/n61/mode/1up> [Accessed 10 November 2016].

15 *The Cine Technician*, March-April, 1952, 43, <https://archive.org/details/cinetechician00asso> [Accessed 5 November 2016]

16 *Commercial Television News*, 'A help not a menace,' 27 April 1955, 7.

#### 4 "There Was Nobody in the World with the Know-How to Produce 30 Second Advertising Filmlets"<sup>17</sup>

In 1955, the smallest, and least prestigious, sector of film production in Britain was cinema advertising. This was the only sector of film production that advertising agencies had been involved in. Clients and manufacturers commissioned the production of their sponsored films directly with the production company; it was only for cinema advertising that advertising agencies created the ideas for their clients, and also commissioned the production company to shoot the films.

However, this form of advertising only accounted for a tiny, and declining, share of advertising spend in Britain, just 1-2%.<sup>18</sup> The result of the size and status of cinema advertising was that most clients, and their agencies, would only have experience of working in static paper-based media. Even with newsprint rationing, press advertising accounted for nearly 90% of all advertising spend in Britain, in the 1950s.

Cinema and radio were low-status media for advertising agencies. Brian Palmer, who wrote the first television commercial to be broadcast in Britain, was a very junior copywriter at Young and Rubicam in 1954, and explained that, as the latest recruit, he was not given press advertising to write, that was retained by the senior writers, leaving him with radio and cinema work.<sup>19</sup> The result of the low status of cinema advertising was that even the largest London agencies rarely produced an advertisement for the cinema, and no agency had experience of producing films for television.

#### 5 Creative Control Moves to the Advertising Agencies

However, the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) were determined that their members, the advertising agencies, should control this new medium creatively and be the major financial beneficiaries from its success. To this end, they established industry agreements with the ASFP for the production of television commercials, on the basis that their members, the advertising agencies, would commission the films. The IPA also agreed with the television companies that advertising agencies would receive the same media commission of 15%, as they did when they bought other media. Thus the model of working for television advertising films, became the same as that of press and cinema advertising; not sponsored film production.<sup>20</sup> The advertising agency developed the creative 'idea' for the commercials, chose the director, and commissioned the production company to shoot it. The client was kept at arm's length from the production process. One advertising agency, J Walter Thompson (JWT), even put directors including Alexander Mackendrick, Guy Hamilton and Joseph Losey on a financial retainer; providing them with a regular income in between feature film commissions.<sup>21</sup>

The production companies appeared to have been compliant in surrendering creative control, and the client relationship, to the advertising agencies, in return for a new income stream and regular work. As Frank Hoare, Head of the ASFP commented, "TV [advertising] in this country is doing away with idle time among British production units and studios between pictures, long an economic bugbear".<sup>22</sup>

17 Winston Fletcher, *Powers of Persuasion: The Inside Story of British Advertising 1951-2000*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p.34. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/9534191/Winston-Fletcher.html>.

18 Colin Seymour-Ure. *The British press and broadcasting since 1945* 2nd ed., Blackwell, 1996.

19 History of Advertising Trust (HAT) HAT21/572, *The Impact of Commercial Television Advertising, 1954-1964*: Interviews with advertising agency, production company and ITV personnel active in the first 10 years of commercial television advertising in Britain. Interviews conducted by Alison Payne.

20 For advertising agencies there was a significant financial difference between the sponsored documentaries and cinema advertising. The time slots for short films classified as "advertising" were bought by the advertising agencies and they received media commission of 15%. Media commission was the major source of income for agencies in the 50s and 60s. In contrast, the sponsored films did not deliver media commission, so there was no incentive for agencies to become involved in their production.

21 Tom Rayfield, *Fifty in 40: The Unofficial history of JWT London 1945-1995*, Rayfield Writers, 1996, p.96.

22 *Commercial Television News*, 'A help not a menace,' 27 April 1955, 6.



## 6 "We Have to Look More and More to the Continent for High Quality Production"<sup>23</sup>

This lack of experience, and confidence, within the advertising industry meant that not all advertising agencies, or their clients, were satisfied with the production expertise on offer from British production companies. The largest British agencies, and American multinationals including JWT, Young and Rubicam, McCann Erickson, and Lambe and Robinson, had offices on mainland Europe, as well as London, and admired the technical sophistication of cinema advertising in France and Italy. Given this traffic across the Channel, it is not surprising that London agencies were open to considering the use of Continental production companies, and, in the drive to retain business, British production companies were active in establishing partnerships with foreign directors.

The use of Continental production companies brought prestige, experience and a veneer of sophistication to the advertising agency and client. Even before commercial television had launched in Britain, Lynne Reid-Banks wrote that, "many agencies and clients are clamouring for that touch of je ne sais quoi".<sup>24</sup> Reid-Banks went on to describe the cinema commercials, from French director André Sarrut, and the Franco-Russians Ladislav Starevitch and Alexander Alexieff, as "little masterpieces", albeit expensive, and requiring more shooting time, than their British counterparts.

Two companies that were particularly successful in gaining commissions for British commercials were Screenspace, who offered the service of French director, André Sarrut, and the Dutch animation company, Dollywood.

## 7. Dollywood: Humour, Puppets and Beer

Joop-Geesink's Dollywood was set-up in 1947, and made promotional films using the full range of film techniques: live-action, animation and puppetry. Their first clients were Dutch, but, by 1953, Dollywood had established a relationship with the British brewing company, Guinness, to make cinema films for Britain, and had made animated commercials for American television, such as those for Beechnut chewing gum.



Figure 2. Beechnut Chewing Gum, *Variety Show*, 1955. Produced by Joop Geesink's Dollywood<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> John Fitzgerald, 'We have to look more and more to the Continent for high-quality production,' *Commercial Television News*, 15 November, 1957, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Lynne Reid-Banks, 'Advertising tie-up with French producers,' *Commercial Television News*, 15 June, 1955, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Den Dragon, *A Dutch-Vintage-Animation, Joop-Geesink's Dollywood*, 2016, <http://www.dutch-vintage-animation.org/index.php/en/beeldarchief/stop-motion-films/215-beech-nut-variety-show> [Accessed 10 November 2016].



Figure 3. Guinness cinema commercial, *Weight and See*, 1953. Produced by Joop Geesink's Dollywood.<sup>27</sup>

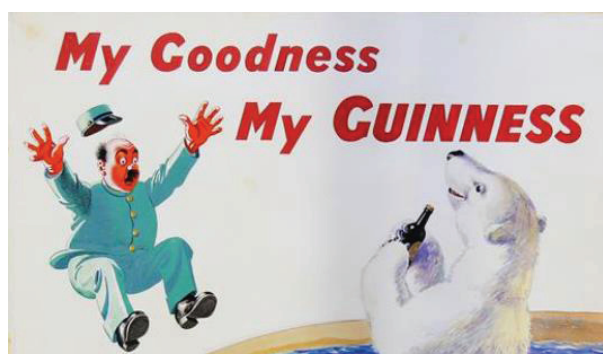


Figure 4. Guinness poster, *Polar Bear*, 1950s. Artist, John Gilroy.<sup>28</sup>

Video 2. *Beech Nut - Variety Show*, 1955. Please visit the [online version](#) of the article to watch this video.

Dollywood were internationally renowned for their technical expertise in animation and puppetry. Their founder, Joop Geesink, travelled widely in Europe and America drumming up new business. The model of cinema and sponsored film production, where the client worked directly with the production company, meant that Dollywood had built relationships with the clients, rather than the advertising agencies.<sup>26</sup> However, in London, advertising agencies were responsible for creating advertising for television, and the (re)negotiation of this relationship can be illustrated by comparing Dollywood's 1953 cinema commercial for Guinness with its first television commercial, broadcast on the launch night of commercial television in London, on 22 September 1955.

The 1953 cinema commercial for Guinness announces itself, in the opening frame, as a "Joop Geesink's Dollywood Production", titled "Weight and See", mimicking the style of feature film credits. It is a sophisticated piece of film-making in full colour, using a mix of puppetry and animation. The story is simple; two men are moving girders with a crane, which begins to falter under the weight of the girder. Seeing this, one workman drinks his Guinness, his muscles bulge, and he easily hefts the girder onto his shoulder and walks off with it. The strapline used is "There's nothing like a Guinness for strength".

<sup>26</sup> Leenke Ripmeester, 'The Geesink Collection: Selection Criteria Reconsidered' in: Patrick Vonderau, Bo Florin and Nico de Klerk, *Films that Sell: Moving Pictures and Advertising*, British Film Institute, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Wilmster UK, *Ultimate Guinness UK Television Adverts Collection*, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xI-E243PcLg> [Accessed 10 November 2016].

<sup>28</sup> Guinness.com, 2016. <https://www.guinness.com/en-gb/advertising/gilroy> [Accessed 12 November 2016].



Figure 5. Guinness television commercial, *Sea Lion*, 1955. Produced by Joop Geesink's Dollywood.<sup>30</sup>

Video 3. *Ultimate Guinness UK Television Adverts Collection Ads Idents Commercials*. Please visit the [online version](#) of the article to watch this video.

The idea of this film is drawn from one of Guinness' most memorable posters, designed by John Gilroy in 1934, for the advertising agency S.H. Benson. S.H. Benson had coined the strapline, "Guinness is good for you", and had held the account since the 1920s. However, S.H. Benson's Guinness poster campaign had evolved in the 1950's, and now featured a range of Guinness-stealing zoo animals and their hapless Guinness-drinking keepers, and it was this campaign that S.H. Benson wanted the advertising community, and their clients, to see on the first night of commercial television.

S.H. Benson announced, in *TV Times*, the listings magazine for commercial television, that their posters would be "coming to life" on television, and the opening frame of the commercial repeated this announcement.<sup>29</sup>

Compared to the cinema advertisement, the television commercial is far less sophisticated in terms of its animation and technical quality. The black and white commercial is predominately live action; the zoo-keeper's Guinness is stolen by a sea-lion who balances the glass on his snout as the zoo-keeper runs frantically to retrieve it. The zoo-keeper was played by Charlie Naughton, the well-known Scottish comedian and one of the Crazy Gang. The strapline used is S.H. Benson's creation, "Guinness is good for you".

Video 4. *Guinness - Sea Lion*, 1955. Please visit the [online version](#) of the article to watch this video.

With the advent of commercial television the advertising films for Guinness had been moved firmly under the creative control of S.H. Benson, who had diplomatically retained the production company that had the confidence of the Guinness client.

Dollywood were a truly international film animation company, however, by the early 60s the fashion for animated commercials in Britain declined, and, although the company continued to make sponsored films for Dutch companies, they became financially overstretched. Joop Geesink filed for bankruptcy in 1971.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Turnock, *The expansion of television in the 1950s and 1960s: institutions, society and culture*, 2007, 84, <http://0-www.theses.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/idx/scripts/it3.asp?xml=Z:index\idx\docs\all-1\it00617526.htm&subfolder=/search> [Accessed November 25, 2011].

<sup>30</sup> Guinness Ads, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMnOgXyTWso> [Accessed 10 November 2016].



## 8 André Sarrut: Parisian Sophistication and Cinematic Gloss

French directors and production companies started to make commercials for British television in the first months of ITV. The Franco-Russian director, Alexander Alexieff, established a partnership with AdVision and Gaston Charpentier with Impact Films. Unlike the companies of Joop Geesink, there is little published information on the advertising produced by these French directors; however, one of the most prolific appears to have been André Sarrut who was represented in London by Dimitri de Grunwald at Screenspace.

Information on these Continental directors, and their contribution to British advertising, has been gleaned from contemporary trade press, and, inevitably, what is available is dependent on how successful the directors were in self-promotion. However, even with this proviso, there is valuable material to be gained from a detailed reading of the trade press. In addition, IMDB and the BFI hold data on the feature films and documentaries of Sarrut, Starevitch, Charpentier and Alexeiff, however, there is little mention of their British television commercials, and few survive.

Sarrut had started his career designing advertising posters and was well-established as a director of cinema commercials in Paris by the 1950s. When commercial television launched in Britain, Sarrut and Dimitri de Grunwald, actively promoted their technical expertise and French cinematic sophistication, aiming to differentiate their approach from British directors.

Sarrut had a number of commercials shown on ITV in the first month of commercial television. To promote his work Screenspace organised a screening of fourteen British commercials directed by Sarrut in October 1955. These commercials included spots for Dettol disinfectant, Walls Ice Cream, Wolsey Socks and Penguin Biscuits.<sup>31</sup> As well as using the production facilities of Screenspace in London, Sarrut also shot British commercials at Comète Studios in Paris. Not satisfied with a French director and Parisian studio, Sarrut's two-minute commercials for PAM (Television and Radio Ltd) also used specially commissioned music by Joseph Kosma, the Franco-Hungarian composer who had composed the soundtracks for films by Marcel Carné and Jean Renoir.<sup>32</sup>

## 9 "You'll Be a Little Lovelier Each day, With Fabulous Pink Camay"

In 1958, Lambe and Robinson commissioned Sarrut to direct five sixty second television commercials for Camay toilet soap on behalf of their client, Procter and Gamble. The press coverage of the production continually reiterates the relationship of the campaign with "the world of feature films", pointing out the expense of the production, the cost of the sets and the use of a famous Parisian restaurant and the Grand Hotel as locations.<sup>33</sup> In overblown prose, Sarrut is described as "a man who tackles a commercial in much the same way as D.W.Griffith must have approached *Intolerance*." Although the television audience would not be aware that the production company was French, the commercial illustrates the belief that being French, or Parisian, was the acme of sophistication to British consumers. The voice over, in the commercial, reiterates that the soap contains "Specially imported French perfume, costing over 5 guineas an ounce". The BFI do list some commercials in this campaign but the only example available is *Grand Hotel*, on a fan-site.

31 *Commercial Television News*, 'Sarrut spots screened', 14 October 1955, 2.

32 *Commercial Television News*, 'Sarrut spots for PAM,' 9 March 1956, 3.

33 Stu Knowles, 'Feature Films in Miniature,' *Audio-Visual Selling*, 9 May 1958, 6.



Figure 6. Camay commercial, *Grand Hotel*, 1958. Directed by André Sarrut, produced by Screenspace.<sup>34</sup>

Video 5. *Camay – Grand Hotel*, 1958. Please visit the [online version](#) of the article to watch this video.

These Sarrut commercials for Camay won a prize at the International Advertising Festival in 1958, providing a platform to demonstrate the competence of a London agency in creating and commissioning television advertising.

Sarrut continued to direct British commercials, but the fashion for French production companies and directors declined in the late 50s. This decline seems to have been the result of a number of factors. Firstly, these directors appear to have commanded a premium price and required lengthy studio time. As Britain's production industry responded to commercial television advertising, studio facilities became more easily available and there was an increasing choice of experienced, and possibly cheaper, home-grown directors. Secondly, Continental directors and production companies had worked directly with clients on mainland Europe, which gave them much greater creative control. This model was more attractive to directors like Sarrut, but anathema to British advertising agencies who were intent on retaining control of the creative 'idea', thus more amenable British directors may have been preferred.<sup>35</sup> Thirdly, the Common Market (European Union) was in development offering a much larger pool of prospective clients using commercial television and cinema in Germany, Italy and France. Responding to this, Screenspace opened a German office in 1958.<sup>36</sup> Both Screenspace and Dollywood were, therefore, less dependent on the British market.

However, Continental production companies and directors would not have been replaced by their British counterparts if advertising agencies had not been confident that these could deliver the same creative and technical expertise. That these skills became available in London was the result of the evolution of a particularly British model of advertising film production.

## 10 British Ads by British Companies for British Tastes?

At the launch of ITV, the American style of TV advertising was seen as demonstrating a model of loud selling and haranguing salesmanship; aspects of commercialism that the British Parliament had been eager to avoid in the 1954

<sup>34</sup> Tellyads, n.d., Camay *Grand Hotel*, [http://www.tellyads.com/play\\_advert/?filename=VA0284&advertiser=Camay&type=vintage](http://www.tellyads.com/play_advert/?filename=VA0284&advertiser=Camay&type=vintage)

<sup>35</sup> *Audio-Visual Selling*, 'Continental TV productions are leading the field,' 6 February 1959, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Audio-Visual Selling*, 'Call us early, give us enough time', 16 May 1958, 20.

*Television Act*.<sup>37</sup> Although, by 1955, many countries had launched commercial television including Cuba, Brazil and Italy, Britain was unique in the world, in that only spot advertising was permitted.<sup>38</sup> Sponsorship was forbidden, and the channel received no public funding.

With feature film production declining, there was significant financial pressure for British production companies to persuade the larger advertising agencies, which were responsible for the majority of television commercials, to give their television advertising commissions to them. If British production houses could deliver the quality of the French directors and Dutch animators, then television advertising production would be in British hands.

Dozens of British production houses started up, some were very short-lived, but others had a long and profitable existence. Two examples, Anglo-Scottish Pictures and Television Advertising Ltd. illustrate different routes into television advertising production and rather different working practises.

## 11 Television Advertising (TVA): Specialists in TV

TVA was established as a direct response to the financial opportunity offered by commercial television, and rarely extended into sponsored films for theatrical release. The company was set up by Mark Chapman-Walker and Ronnie Dickenson in 1955. Dickenson had worked at Hulton Press, and later became a founding partner of the creatively innovative advertising agency, Collett, Dickenson and Pearce.<sup>39</sup> Chapman-Walker had been the Conservative Party's Director of Publicity, in 1952, and a founder of the pro-commercial television lobbying group, the Popular Television Association.<sup>40</sup> Neither of the founders had direct experience of film production so they poached the talented and experienced producer, James Garrett, from Pearl and Dean Advertising. Garrett had started his career at British Transport Films in 1947, and would go on to establish Garrett Productions in 1963, which became Britain's largest advertising production company in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>41</sup>

TVA believed that offering the skills of experienced directors of feature films and television programmes would appeal to advertising agencies. To this end, they used Karel Reisz, who had worked in the Ford Motor Company's in-house production department, before he made feature films, and Michael Law, Joe Mendoza, Richard Lester and Terry Bishop, who had already made sponsored cinema films and television programmes, to make commercials for their clients. Their house advertising in the trade papers, as the example below illustrates, continually reiterated the skills of all their staff.

Unlike most film production companies, whose studios were outside London, TVA's three studios were in Wardour Street, close to the Soho offices of the largest advertising agencies. TVA lacked the established client relationships of Dollywood or Anglo-Scottish Pictures and focussed their business

37 *Television Act 1954* (2 & 3 Eliz.II, c. 55), HMSO and Independent Television Authority, 1955, *Principles for Television Advertising*, June 1955, ITA.

38 INTAM, Ltd., *The Intam Data Book on International Commercial Television, etc.*, London Press Exchange and INTAM, Ltd., 1960, *Amendments to the 1960 edition*, London Press Exchange, 1960.

39 John Salmon and John Ritchie, *Inside Collett Dickenson Pearce*, Batsford, 2000.


40 Bernard Sendall, *Independent Television in Britain: Origin and Foundation, 1946-62, Vol. 1.*, Macmillan, 1982, p.20.

41 History of Advertising Trust (HAT) HAT21/572, *The Impact of Commercial Television Advertising, 1954-1964*: Interviews with advertising agency, production company and ITV personnel active in the first 10 years of commercial television advertising in Britain. Interviews conducted by Alison Payne.


AUDIO-VISUAL SELLING, March 20, 1959

**No. 2 IN THE SERIES**


## Meet the people



**MICHAEL LAW** joined T.V.A. in 1956 to direct commercials, after working on both feature and documentary films for a number of years, many of which he spent with the late Richard Massingham's unit. He was one of the first experienced film Directors to invest that experience and ability in the new unknown business of making advertising films and did much in these early days to promote the now general thinking that imaginative and creative contributions were required from production units no less than from agencies. In the course of the last two and a half years, he has made many successful live-action films for T.V.A. ranging from some of the early *Daily Mirror* and Schweppes productions to the current series for Hovis, Kit-Kat, Polo and for some of the more recent Persil films.



**BILL DUNLOP**, Construction Manager, joined T.V.A. in June, 1955. He is one of the very early few. After 21 years on the feature side of the film industry, he finds satisfaction in the constant challenge that the making of commercials produces. Last year, his experienced team of almost wholly feature-trained people put up just over 300 individually designed and constructed sets for commercials. This is more in number than the major studios produce together for entertainment films and while he is prepared to admit that there is some difference in scale, he will concede nothing on their quality.



**THELMA CHALK'S** first experience in the film industry came when she joined T.V.A. three and a half years ago. Since then, she has worked on the production side and on shopping magazines. She is now in charge as Production Controller of a host of those essential jobs which are part of the diverse service provided by Production Companies. Some of the many things for which she is responsible are the preparation of all quotations, cost control, the progressing of all films, the checking of artistes contracts and the effecting of the music clearances.

## Behind the scenes

Different people with different skills, but with at least one thing in common; they have invested their experience in making advertising films with T.V.A. A company grows only by the talents it attracts -- and these are attracted by vision and planning. That's why T.V.A. attracts and retains a staff of professionals who collectively can translate good scripts into good commercials -- professional productions that stand out from the rest. We've got our own studios and the right equipment, but more important still, we've got the right people. Meet them each week in this series, or better still make a date to meet them personally.

### T.V. ADVERTISING LTD

*Sales & Administration Offices:*  
54 GREEK STREET, LONDON, W.1.  
TELEPHONE: GERRARD 4226

*Studios:*  
FILM HOUSE, WARDOUR STREET, LONDON, W.1.  
TELEPHONE: GERRARD 6461

Figure 7. House advertisement for TVA, 1959.<sup>42</sup>

efforts on the advertising industry. This included screenings of their commercials to London and regional advertising agencies.

## 12 Shirley Wilson – the First ‘Persil Mum’

In 1959, TVA produced a series of three commercials for the Unilver brand, Persil: *Mother Cares*, *Shirley Wilson* (below) and *Woman Alone*. Persil was brand leader in the washing powder market in Britain and one of the

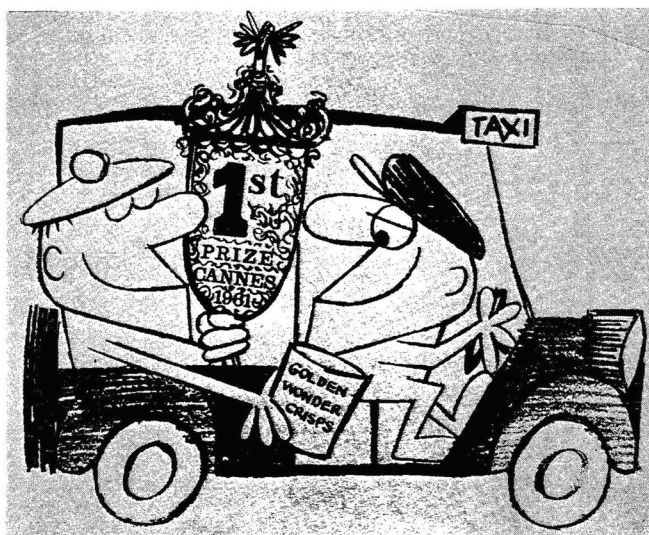
<sup>42</sup> *Audio-Visual Selling*, March 20 1959, 4.



A. Payne, "The Growing Practice of Calling in Continental Film Groups"



Figure 8. Persil Washing Powder, Shirley Wilson, 1959. Directed by Michael Law and produced by TVA.<sup>44</sup>



Category 14 won in 1959, 1960 and 1961 by  
**TV CARTOONS LTD.**  
 38 Dean Street, London, W.1 GER 9385

Acknowledgements to  
 REX PUBLICITY, GLASGOW  
 and GOLDEN WONDER CRISP CO.

Figure 9. House advertisement for TVC, 1961.<sup>45</sup>

biggest spenders on advertising. This was a prestigious commission, and these commercials were the first to establish the "Persil mum" as an iconic character in the brand's television advertising, an icon which was to remain a Persil brand property for the next 20 years. The campaign had been created by JWT and their copywriter, Renee Balsom. Michael Law directed all three commercials and they illustrate a high level of technical skill in both direction and cinematography for television, a standard which matches the quality of Sarrut's Camay commercials.<sup>43</sup>

43 Tony Bennett, 'Naturalness is the keynote of these spots,' *Audio Visual Selling*, 12 June 1959, 7.

44 *The Hasszanussi History Museum Of Laundry: The Laundry Lab*, 2011. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKxZqq3CYRo&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKxZqq3CYRo&feature=youtube_gdata_player) [Accessed 21 November 2016].

45 *Audio-Visual Selling*, 30 June 1961, 6.





Figure 10. *A Family Tradition*, 1954, produced for Shippam Ltd by Anglo-Scottish Pictures.

Video 6. 1950s - *Persil [Confidence]*. Please visit the [online version](#) of the article to watch this video.

TVA also took advantage of the fashion for animated commercials, setting up a subsidiary company, Television Cartoons (TVC). They recruited the Canadian, George Dunning, to run TVC, after United Production of America's London office folded, and Dunning found himself unemployed. TVC also employed Richard Williams and Jimmy Murakami. All three had established reputations as animators and, by 1961, TVC were producing dozens of cartoons each year. TVC won first prize in the television cartoon category, at the 1961 Advertising Festival, for their commercial for Golden Wonder Crisps. TV Cartoons promoted this success by advertising in *Audio-Visual Selling*.

TVA and TVC's specialisation in television advertising delivered a very successful business, producing hundreds of films each year. In August 1960, *Television Mail* listed over 300 commercials produced by TVA and 50 by TVC, compared to 185 from Anglo-Scottish Pictures who made both television commercials and sponsored films.

### 13 Anglo-Scottish Pictures: "the Enterprise of Six Ex-Servicemen"<sup>46</sup>

The founders of Anglo-Scottish Pictures had been in the same RAF Film Unit during WWII and, by 1955, they were a well-established company, producing sponsored documentaries for theatrical release for clients like the Ministry of Health, Cadbury's Chocolate and the Foreign Office. The BFI holds over 100 of their sponsored cinema films from 1947 to 1977.<sup>47</sup> Anglo-Scottish built its own studio, Halliford, near Shepperton.<sup>48</sup> This location reflected the model of feature film production, where companies sited their studios outside central London.

Unlike TVA, Anglo-Scottish already had a reputation and a body of work to show potential clients, when commercial television launched, and they continued to make sponsored films for theatrical release and for corporate PR. Their film for Shippam Ltd., a company that made meat and fish spreads, *A Family Tradition* (1954), was shown at roadshows

46 John Mountjoy, 'The enterprise of six ex-servicemen,' *Television Mail*, 26,9,59,17.

47 For example, the company's 1949 film, *Lancashire Hotpot*, (BFI 214193), was commissioned by the Ministry of Labour to encourage women to return to work in the Lancashire cotton mills.

48 Paul Sheridan, 'RAF and Navy 'bods' make first class commercials,' *Commercial Television News*, 22 June 1956, 4.

★ **ANGLO - SCOTTISH** ★

offer

**FOUR STAR DIRECTORS**

for ★ ★ ★ ★

**Commercials**

★ LEONARD REEVE . . .

★ DAVID PALTENGI . . .

★ KENNETH CARTER . . .  
for live action with sparkle

★ JULIAN CAUNTER . . .  
for model animation at its best

**ANGLO - SCOTTISH  
PICTURES LIMITED**

125 PALL MALL  
LONDON SW1

WHITEHALL 0308

★

Figure 11. House advertisement for Anglo-Scottish Pictures, 1960.<sup>51</sup>

and libraries to a quarter of a million people over four years. The South East Screen Archive at Brighton University holds this, and many other Shippam's films (below).<sup>49</sup>

In spite of a successful business making promotional films, Anglo-Scottish were quick to see the opportunity in television commercials. Within nine months of the start of ITV, they had shot the prestigious two-minute Cadbury commercials for the launch nights of both the Midlands and North ITV regions. In addition, they produced a campaign of nine stop-motion commercials for ICI paint, and campaigns for other brands including Quaker Oats, Cadbury Drinking Chocolate, Red and White Cigarettes, Rolex watches, Gillette razors, Zal Cleaner and Pure Lemon Juice.<sup>50</sup>

49 Brighton University, *South-East Screen Archive*, <http://screenarchive.brighton.ac.uk/detail/3269/> [Accessed 5 December, 2016].

50 Paul Sheridan, 'RAF and Navy 'bods' make first class commercials,' *Commercial Television News*, 22 June 1956, 4.

51 *Television Mail*, 21 May 1960, 22.

Anglo-Scottish cultivated directors who were experienced in sponsored cinema films, like Leonard Reeve, and the new specialists in television advertising, including David Paltenghi, rather than directors of the more prestigious feature films and television programmes. Their house advertisement promoted the skills of these directors (below).

Their traditional model of acquiring clients had been to woo manufacturers, rather than advertising agencies, and they appear to have continued to have a successful business in client-commissioned sponsored films. These included a number of the films in the "Films of Scotland" documentary series, among which were *Silver City* (1957), *Busman's Holiday* (1958) and *Enchanted Isles* (1957).<sup>52</sup>

Anglo-Scottish Pictures, and their director, David Paltenghi, had already received 'Honourable Mentions' for their commercial for Martini at the 1958 International Advertising Festival<sup>53</sup>, and it was Anglo-Scottish pictures that produced Britain's Grand Prix-winning television commercial at Cannes. Commissioned by the advertising agency, Clifford Bloxham, for their client, Schweppes Tomato Juice.

This is a television commercial that exemplifies a British ad for British tastes. The commercial parodied the familiar format of the television gardening programme. It was one execution in a campaign that Clifford Bloxham Advertising had created for their client; each of the commercials parodied a different television or film genre.

In spite of this success, Anglo-Scottish maintained their business in sponsored films for training and public relations until the company closed in the late 70s.

## 14 "British Films Triumph at Cannes – No Resting on Laurels after This Victory"<sup>54</sup>

By the early 60s, although André Sarrut and Dollywood continued to produce commercials for the British market, the volume appears to have diminished. As this paper has suggested this is likely to have been due to a combination of factors: the opportunities available to them in the wider European market, the determination of London advertising agencies to keep creative control, and the likelihood that it was simply cheaper and more convenient to use production personnel and facilities from Britain, even if the shoot was to be on location.

However, the the British film production industry had responded magnificently to the opportunity offered by commercial television advertising. By the early 60s, London advertising agencies appeared to have no qualms about commissioning local production houses to make commercials for their largest and most prestigious clients. The London production industry had benefitted significantly from the preparedness of feature film directors and cinematographers to make TV ads, and the established sponsored film production companies providing their skills to the advertising agencies. In addition, an entrepreneurial group of companies and individuals, including TVA, had convinced the advertising industry that British advertising could be produced in Britain with all technical expertise and creative flair of their Continental counterparts.

<sup>52</sup> *The Films of Scotland Documentaries - Resources - Filmography* (no date), [http://sites.scran.ac.uk/films\\_of\\_scotland/Resources/chapter03.htm](http://sites.scran.ac.uk/films_of_scotland/Resources/chapter03.htm) [Accessed: 26 May 2017].

<sup>53</sup> *Audio-Visual Selling*, 3 October 1958, 3.

<sup>54</sup> *TV Mail*, 'Britain gets three firsts at Cannes,' 23 June 1961, 3.

## Biography

Following a career as a brand planner and communication strategist, in advertising and marketing agencies, I am now a freelance consultant and writer and received my doctorate from Birkbeck College in 2016. My thesis assessed the impact of the launch of commercial television advertising, in its first ten years, on the creative and production industries, the viewers and broadcast regulation in Britain. My research interests lie in the impact of new media on the creative and production industries, and the history of television in the UK.