

BROADCAST

Indies flock to rising trans disabled writer

By Tim Dams | 24 November 2021

Jack Thorne-championed Jamie Hale scores four scripted developments

Award-winning poet and playwright Jamie Hale is moving into TV with four scripts in active development with Gaumont, Red and drama exec and disability advocate Sara Johnson.

Hale, a trans and disabled writer, had their work thrust into the spotlight earlier this year by His Dark Materials writer Jack Thorne during his MacTaggart address at the Edinburgh TV Festival.

Thorne quoted from Hale's poetry collection *Shield*, about the experience of people with underlying health issues shielding during the pandemic. Earlier this month Hale was named as a Jerwood Compton Poetry Fellow for 2021/22.

Hale, who last week curated and directed performances by d/Deaf and disabled artists at the CRIPTic Pit Party at the Barbican, began their TV writing career as a researcher and contributor to the writers room for *The End of the F***ing World* creator Charlie Covell's upcoming Netflix series *Kaos*. Covell had previously seen Hale perform in a showcase of trans artists at the Barbican.

French producer Gaumont, which is responsible for Netflix's *Narcos* and *Lupin*, is working with Hale on a script about a transgender man coming to terms with his past. The series is in scripted development with Channel 4.

Describing Hale as 'an industry leader in the making', Gaumont UK development producer Jessica Connell said: "Jamie is a gifted storyteller. Their extensive career in poetry has given them a flair for the visual medium which translates beautifully to screenwriting."

Meanwhile, Red has two projects in development with Hale – *Not Dying*, an adaptation of their 2019 solo show at the Barbican, and *Crushing It*, a disabled-led romantic comedy co-created with Hayleigh Barclay.

Red chief exec Sarah Doole described Hale as an extraordinary talent whose writing, in which storytelling intersects with poetry, unveils the everyday challenges that many of us don't have to face.

“But because they do this with wry humour, dignity and warmth, there's nothing preachy or worthy about their work: it's simply a different - and often unexplored - perspective.”

She said that both projects being developed with Red will challenge preconceptions and propel viewers out of their comfort zone. “Jamie's astonishing gift is to make the invisible, visible.”



Jamie Hale credit: Becky Bailey

Hale's fourth development, with executive producer and disability advocate Sara Johnson, the founder of Bridge06,

is one that Hale describes as passion project about severe disability and how it need not be a tragedy but can bring a complete and joyful life.

Johnson, former creative director of Endor Productions, said: “Jamie has a moral core and strong sense of their place in the march towards disability representation of stories and talent, and I am beyond lucky to be working together to bring that to the TV industry.”

Marginalised writers

Drawing on his background as a poet, London-based Hale, 30, says they are interested in exploring the ways that people understand themselves, and try and be understood by others – and how to explore that internal journey through a visual medium like television.

Hale explains: “I draw on a mixture of personal knowledge and research and my own experience. But by no means do I want to limit myself to only ever writing characters who have shared parts of my life.

“Marginalised writers are often expected to write from our experience, as if it were a unique and outsider position, rather than being able to explore universal themes, even if we’re doing so drawing from our own lives.”

Hale’s big TV break came after one of their scripts was shown to C4 by Covell, and they were given the opportunity to pitch projects to the broadcaster. One was picked up, and Hale partnered with Gaumont to develop it.

Hale is quick to pay tribute to Covell for her support in the Kaos writers’ room, even when it meant working remotely from hospital when needed.

“It was the warmth, inclusivity, and commitment to not just accommodating but supporting me as a disabled writer that led me to consider writing for television - something that had never previously crossed my mind. Charlie has remained a huge support for me since that point.”

Hale also acknowledged the support of Jack Thorne, both for citing their poem in his MacTaggart lecture that explored disability discrimination in the industry, and for offering advice and encouragement as a writer.

Hale met Thorne through Crips Without Constraints, a series he introduced for d/Deaf and disabled Graeae theatre company, for which Hale wrote. “Jack gave me some incredibly useful advice that I think has really shaped my work.”

Hale clearly feels grateful but rather embarrassed by the high-profile support he has received from the TV industry so far. “There are so many incredible deaf and disabled people making their way in the industry. There’s always the risk that one or two people’s voices end up becoming so ubiquitous, that you don’t hear other people’s stories.”

Asked for their views on the industry’s track record around disability, Hale says it has been “incredibly poor.”

“There is so little support for people entering the industry,” says Hale. “Unless you have an incredible confluence of luck, like I have, you are often pushed back by all of the barriers you face so early on that nobody notices and brings you in and gives you the support you need to develop work to that level.”

“The fact there has been such an under-representation at the highest levels is because there’s an under-representation throughout.”

Sea change

Thorne’s MacTaggart speech has helped the industry wake up to its need to do much more to improve the participation and representation of disabled people.

Speaking at C4’s Inclusion Festival last week, industry leaders including BBC director general Tim Davie and ViacomCBS Networks UK and Australia president Maria Kyriacou [said that disability inclusion is a key focus for improvement](#).

“I hope it is not just a moment,” says Hale. “The industry needs to take this moment and turn it into a sea change rather than a flash.”

Surveying the drama landscape, Hale picks out a number of shows that they have enjoyed over recent months – and learned from too.

Vigil was fascinating to watch from the perspective of a writer – in particular “the way that each character had their own moral centre, and their own complete and rounded set of justifications and beliefs.”

I May Destroy You, meanwhile, “taught me so much about writing with and from trauma and finding joy in it – about really shaping a scene with those moments of lightness, levity and humanity.”



Hale is also a fan of The End of the F***ing World which 'builds naturalism in from an unreal set up', Happy Valley for its "internal character growth" and The Virtues for the way it uses silence and space.

Hale's indie partners are confident they will achieve success as they shift their focus to TV.

Red's Doole said: "Since we began working with them over a year ago, the thing that has stood out most with Jamie has been passion and drive. They're not defeated by anything: this is someone who was rehearsing their play and writing their life story while lying in a hospital bed with life-threatening infections! They are quite simply

Jamie Hale credit: Becky Bailey

superhuman."

