

# The Widow

PRESS PACK



TWO BROTHERS  
• P I C T U R E S •

# The Widow

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## SERIES OVERVIEW

For three years, ever since the love of her life **WILL** died in a plane crash in the Democratic Republic of Congo, **GEORGIA WELLS** has lived as a recluse in the Welsh countryside, away from civilisation and the comforts of 21st-century living. Her life changes one day when she spots Will in the background of a TV news report about the Congo...

Shocked to her core, but filled with determination that Will is still alive, Georgia returns to the country's capital, Kinshasa, for the first time since the plane crash. There, she reunites with **JUDITH GRAY**, Will's enigmatic erstwhile business partner, and **EMMANUEL KAZADI**, a local Congolese journalist she met three years previously after his wife was also a victim of the crash

Meanwhile, in Rotterdam, Holland, a blind Icelandic man, **ARIEL HELGASON**, applies for a medical trial in the hope that his sight can be restored. There he meets **BEATRIX**, another candidate for the trial. But Ariel's keeping a secret. One that links him to Georgia's husband. To Will. It's only a matter of time before he gets pulled back into that world.

Oblivious to the extent of the danger she faces, Georgia sets out across the country in pursuit of Will, while **MARTIN BENSON**, the closest person to family Georgia has, searches for answers elsewhere. It's a journey that will lead her to the volatile region of eastern DRC, where we'll meet an array of characters like the child soldier, **ADIDJA**, the unhinged **GENERAL AZIKIWE** and a mysterious white man by the name of **PIETER BELLO**.

It's said that people go to the ends of the earth for the ones they love. Georgia is going to do just that.

## EPISODIC SYNOPSES

### Episode One

#### *Mr Tequila*

A woman's search to uncover the mystery of what happened to her husband leads her to the Congo, where she's forced to seek the truth about what happened to the man she loved.

### Episode 2

#### *Green Lion*

To find the truth about her husband, Georgia must first work with Emmanuel to find Pieter Bello. Meanwhile, Beatrix makes a shocking discovery about how Ariel lost his sight.

## CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

### **Georgia Wells (Kate Beckinsale)**

Georgia Wells has lived through the highest peaks and the lowest troughs life has to offer. Since the shocking death of the love of her life Will in a plane crash three years ago, Georgia withdrew from the outside world to the seclusion of rural Wales, away from civilisation and the comforts of 21st-century living. This is where we meet her at the beginning of the series. Yet beneath her grief-stricken, vulnerable shell, Georgia hasn't lost her innate resilience, relentless determination and fierce loyalty. These qualities will come into play when a chance sighting brings her out to the Congo to find the man she loves.

### **Judith Gray (Alex Kingston)**

Headstrong yet enigmatic, Judith Gray has lived in Kinshasa, the Congo's frenetic capital, for nearly a decade. Unmarried, she devotes herself entirely to her work, a clean water charity. Its success can be attributed to the deep-rooted connections she worked hard to forge in the country. As Will's erstwhile business partner, Judith offers her home as a safe-haven to Georgia when she first arrives in Kinshasa, though their conflicting beliefs of whether Will is still alive will put their alliance to the test.

### **Martin Benson (Charles Dance)**

Martin Benson is a man driven by reason and fact, which is no surprise given his esteemed career in military intelligence. Now retired, he has long been a devoted godfather to Georgia, but their relationship has become estranged since tragedy struck. In the journey to find out whether Will is still alive, Martin's dry wit and circumspection will prove a necessary antidote to Georgia's unstoppable – and at times reckless – determination.

### **Will Mason (Matthew Le Nevez)**

A charming jack-of-all trades, Will Mason first came to the Congo five years previously, when he was hired by Judith. His affable character made him a valuable ally in Judith's ambition to expand her clean water charity and they worked there together for two years. However, when the domestic flight he was aboard crashed into the Congolese rainforest, Georgia was left a widow. Now, the possibility that Will may after all still be alive will lead those who were close to him to question if they ever really knew him at all.

### **Adidja (Shalom Nyandiko)**

Quietly brave, with a maturity beyond her years, Adidja is no normal twelve-year-old child. Having been cruelly torn from her home by a Mai-Mai militia, she was forced to use all her intelligence to survive her new captive lifestyle, moving guerrilla-style through thick Congolese forests and learning to master an AK47. But despite being denied crucial childhood years, Adidja hasn't lost her optimism, and her hope that she will be reunited with her family has never waned.

### **Pieter Bello (Bart Fouche)**

In equal parts charismatic and corrupted, Pieter Bello, formerly of the South African infantry, moved to the Congo under a cloud of disgrace. Driven by greed and bolstered by his own temerity, Pieter is a dangerous player in the pervasive world of outsiders to the Congo, who are all too ready to reap the benefits of the country's mineral wealth and lawlessness. Having quietly built connections to a Mai-Mai militia, he'll go to extreme and violent lengths to stop these profitable ties from being broken.

### **Emmanuel Kazadi (Jacky Ido)**

Emmanuel Kazadi is a journalist with a deep sense of justice. He loves his country, but is frustrated by the corruption that pervades. When he and Georgia met under the cruellest of circumstances years earlier, they formed an unlikely bond; their shared pain bound them together, despite their

lives being worlds apart. Emmanuel's unwavering loyalty will prove indispensable in Georgia, as she makes her first tentative steps in her journey to find Will.

**Ariel Helgason (Ólafur Darri Ólafsson)**

Ariel Helgason lives in a world of darkness ever since he lost his sight in a plane crash, three years earlier. Despite this, the once God-fearing Ariel hasn't lost his propensity for hope. At the beginning of the series, he travels to be part of an experimental scientific trial, taking place in Rotterdam. There, Ariel finds human connection and a chance to atone for his sins. But in his search for sight, Ariel will have to face the ghosts of his past, and soon finds himself being drawn back to the last place he ever wanted to go again – the Congo.

**Azikiwe (Babs Olusanmokin)**

A calculating player in a ruthless game, Azikiwe is an elusive character. With a web of loyal servants reaching far across the vast country, he has serious status in the Congo. However, while his power is long-held, ever since Azikiwe's mind became unhinged, the lengths this disturbed despot will go to in order to hold onto that power have escalated from dangerous to deadly.

## INTERVIEWS

### KATE BECKINSALE PLAYS GEORGIA WELLS

**Q: What appealed to you about *The Widow* and the role of Georgia?**

"In the first couple of scripts Georgia appeared to be this rather mysterious and fairly tortured figure. You could tell she was both fragile but also displayed strength and courage. And you didn't fully understand how all of that fitted together. I found that very intriguing - to see where the writers Harry and Jack Williams would take that person."

**Q: Georgia has suffered loss in her life. Has that changed her as a person?**

"It has definitely changed her. At the start of the story she is a woman reeling from bereavement after her husband was killed in a plane crash. She hasn't quite found her place in the world since then. Or really processed any of that. Georgia has lost her husband and is in a difficult place."

**Q: What sort of world does *The Widow* investigate?**

"It deals with a woman's grief and her picking her way out of that. It also looks at deception in a lot of forms. Trying to uncover physical and emotional truths. Also a big character in *The Widow* is Africa itself. So there's quite a lot about what is happening politically in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Along with the role of the child militia. One of our characters is a little girl who has been taken away from her family by the militia."

"There are many strands to the story. That was very much what the Williams brothers wanted. Harry and Jack picked directors Sam Donovan and Olly Blackburn who shared their vision for *The Widow*."

**Q: What was it like filming in South Africa?**

"We had quite the gamut of experience in Africa. We arrived in January when it was incredibly hot. One of the things you heard a lot on this project was, 'Cape Town has five different types of weather a day.' Which you think is just a cute saying. But it's actually true."

"I fainted one day from being too hot. And then by the end of the African shoot, which was in their winter, we had thermals on. Which was quite odd. I don't think I'd ever really thought of Africa as being somewhere that you would require thermals for."

"It seemed impossible to imagine at the beginning when you're an English person panicking about how hot it was. Then to suddenly find you had three coats on and a hot water bottle at the end."

"We filmed a scene at a township in Cape Town which was a pretty extraordinary experience. Most of the people in the scene who weren't principal characters were people who lived there. I spent most of my time with eight or nine kids who were incredible."

"I had never seen anywhere like that in person before so it was extraordinary. I think they have done a really good job of capturing how overwhelming it is in there."

"It was quite a tough few days. It happened to be a time when an awful lot of the crew had a stomach bug. That was a bit tricky because the bathroom situation wasn't amazing. Cape Town was also experiencing a drought at that time so everybody was being extremely careful about water, flushing loos and all of that."

**Q: Did you get much time off in Africa?**

“We were really lucky because at weekends we were able to go and see quite a lot of things you don’t see every day in London or LA. There was a wonderful place called Cheetah Outreach where they rescue all sorts of animals, not just cheetahs, from big game hunters and people who are breeding them to be shot for sport.

“I’m usually a bit nervous of things that feel like a zoo. But this really wasn’t at all like that. We got to hang out with young cheetah cubs who are like big lovely cats. And then we met some adult cheetahs. We met meerkats and we also went somewhere where they had lions and baboons. It really was amazing on the days off we had.”

**Q: You speak fluent French. Did that help when filming in Africa?**

“That was one of the things I didn’t anticipate about going to Africa. I probably spent a solid 40 per cent of my time there speaking French to one person or another. We had a very international cast. Jacky Ido, who plays Emanuel, and I spoke exclusively French. And also with a lovely actress called Mathilde Warnier.

“It’s quite common for people in various parts of Africa to have French as their first language. So I spoke French at least every day and sometimes all day. That was great. Which I hadn’t expected to do.”

**Q: What was it like filming scenes of Georgia’s remote cottage in Wales?**

“We were snowed in a couple of times in Wales. It was a bit of a shock after filming in Africa. A different sort of packing. We also filmed a couple of days at Heathrow Airport which is quite familiar to me.”

**Q: Could you live that lifestyle as a recluse?**

“I could easily live that life as a recluse. I was an only child until I was about nine and then I got step-brothers and sisters. But I was always somebody who would get shouted at on playdates at other people’s houses for raiding their book shelves and reading. So as long as I had enough books I could easily find myself becoming a bit of a Howard Hughes.

“Having said that, we did all that remote stuff in Wales and then I realised I was really near to Michael’s (Sheen) parents and went on a nice trip to see them. So I did break up my reclusiveness with my ex-in laws.”

**Q: Your Instagram account has over two million followers. Does social media allow you to show who you really are as a person?**

“When I first started posting on Instagram it was in support of a movie I was very proud of called Love & Friendship. I had always resisted social media. As an English person I like to reserve the right to complain about as many things as I possibly can when I’m chuntering away to my family.

“But I don’t feel like I’m able to complain about lack of privacy if I’m constantly posting pictures of myself having a boiled egg or going to the shops and things like that. So I had no interest or any sense of that social media world at all.

“Then I was asked very nicely if I could just do it for the movie. And it was interesting because I’ve been working since I was probably 16 or 17 and I had only ever known things I’d said going through a filter of a journalist. Who might not necessarily quote it in the tone that I felt it was.

“It’s quite frustrating to find this kind of patchwork image of yourself has been built up through a few thousand people who don’t know you speaking on your behalf. So one of the things I did find quite liberating was that social media really is the only area that is completely undiluted.

“Whether people like it or not, I think it’s much better to be liked or loathed for what you are actually like than some hybrid version that isn’t you. That feels a bit peculiar. I’ve actually really enjoyed it.

“I’ve been very lucky. My followers, on the whole, seem to be people who like a laugh and want to say funny things. Everyone seems rather protective and sweet with each other on my Instagram. So I’ve found it a very good experience. But if it started to feel oppressive, I wouldn’t have a problem not doing it.”

**Q: Georgia tells another character not to worry. What do you worry about?**

“There’s quite a lot to be worried about in the world at the moment. There is an awful lot of instability everywhere and an awful lot of frustration. Those two things together can feel quite dangerous. So I do worry about that.

“Anyone who has got a child of any age is a bit more of a worrier than they were before. Especially given what the world is like at the moment. So I mostly worry about things like that. And also just, where’s my phone?”

**Q: Another character tells her: ‘We can never hide who we are.’ Do you agree?**

“I think some people are quite good at hiding who they are. For a while. They can do it for long periods of time. But ultimately it tends to come out.”

**Q: Your mother has kept memorabilia from your life. What are some of your favourite items?**

“My mum keeps everything. Not just about my career. I’m much more interested in the fact she’s got all of my Oxford essays and all my exercise books from primary school and secondary school. And diaries. Things like that which give you a little bit of a window into who you were. It’s fascinating.

“She has letters from my best friend who used to go to America every single summer and we would write these incredibly long letters back and forth to each other. So those are things where I love to go home and have a rummage about in.

“She has my father Richard Beckinsale’s This Is Your Life book from his appearance on the show with Eamonn Andrews in 1977 which is really cool. That’s a lovely thing to have. We also have like a million old video tapes which we can’t watch unless we find a video player. She’s a pretty good custodian of all of that stuff.

“It’s also nice to show some of it to my daughter Lily. Funny, embarrassing things which have been nice to show her over the years.”

**Q: Your daughter Lily has an ambition to become an actress. Would she like to work with her mother?**

“I think I would be fairly low on her list of people to work with. She would be more interested to work with somebody she hasn’t met.”

**Q: Living in Los Angeles do you get to see much British television?**



"I make sure I get to watch it. I actively seek out very silly English television in a way I never would if I was living in England. It's one of those odds things about when you're away from home. You miss things you probably wouldn't think about if you were in England. There's a very low chance of me eating a Bird's trifle at home. And yet if I go to the English shop in LA and see it sitting there I'm highly likely to buy it.

"Obviously everyone has access to the really great British dramas and all of that and comedies. But I do find myself looking out for Loose Women and things like that which make me feel kind of cosy."

**Q: Which comedies do you like?**

"The sitcoms my dad was in are, of course, extremely important to me. But aside from them I loved Only Fools and Horses, like everybody. While the naughty boy side of me, which there is one, likes The Inbetweeners and Bad Education. Things like that. I'm quite up for naughty behaviour in a school."

**Q: Aside from paid employment, what has your choice of profession given you?**

"It's always difficult when actors talk about what acting means to them or has given them. But it is a real privilege to - as an adult - be asked to learn something you'd never considered doing before. Whether it's singing or fighting or going underwater.

"If you're good at something it's quite easy to just only do that. So one of the things I like about this job is you're constantly being faced with things you might be terrible at. As a child you have that all of the time. Whether it's physical education things that you're rubbish at or school subjects. I think it builds a certain resilience in people to have to keep coming up against things and possibly fail multiple times before getting the hang of it.

"As adults we're not put in that position very often. Once you've passed your driving test and got a job you're only really doing very badly in your relationship. But for us, as actors, we get to walk in and they go, 'Right. Are you any good at gymnastics?' And you go, 'Oh no...' But you have to have a go.

"I do think there's something psychologically quite good about having always to be ready to go, 'I know nothing.' The older you get the more you realise that's the case. But it's quite a good thing to keep having that happen."

## **ALEX KINGSTON PLAYS JUDITH GRAY**

### **Q: Why did you want to be involved with The Widow?**

"I read the first three episodes and thought Judith was incredibly complex. A woman with a journey. I wanted to see if I could understand her. That's what appealed to me about the character. Also, I had never worked in South Africa before. Much of the story is set in the Democratic Republic of Congo but it was impossible to film there because it is just too dangerous.

"So, the idea of working in South Africa really appealed to me. That country totally got under my skin. I absolutely loved it. The people, the crew, everybody in production were just so nice and really hard-working. That was a bonus.

"I felt very much that we were all in this together. We were all part of a team who were trying to tell this story. And even though I may have been in front of the camera, the people who were behind the camera are working much longer hours. Their job is just as important.

"It's not a good thing but also a fact of life that people on the crew are not paid what people in Europe or in America in this business expect to be paid. So we had a lot of crew. As a result of that jobs got done. It was very unusual to be working with such a large crew, incredible caterers with everything just there.

"That's what keeps productions going to South Africa. It is really busy and vibrant and that's not a bad thing. With work being created and people paid. Studios in South Africa now have amazing facilities. And you also get great coffee in Africa. So we were on fire."

### **Q: Who is Judith?**

"Judith has set up a charity which operates in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She feels her vocation is to help people who are suffering there. Especially people in extremely rural or hard to get to areas where there is no infrastructure. Giving them clean water. It's a relatively simple idea but it's effective. That is what she is about.

"We find out later in the series that her mother is back home in England but other than that she appears to have no other family. So Judith is devoted to her work. She wants to feel she is doing something worthwhile. It's a relatively small world she works in and so everybody knows everybody else. Then one of her co-workers, Will, is involved in a plane crash.

"In a way, Judith doesn't know why she does what she does. She can have a knee-jerk reaction to things. We find out more about her background as the story unfolds."

### **Q: What sort of world does The Widow investigate?**

"Writers Harry and Jack Williams have tapped into an area that nobody had been talking about until we began filming. Then suddenly there were headlines appearing. I just thought, 'How ironic.' It's just so upsetting to know there is abuse of the vulnerable. Whether in church, schools, football clubs or wherever. Right from the opening scene in The Widow we see child soldiers in the jungle and the story develops from there.

"The Widow also illustrates links between our world in the West and Africa. The continent of Africa is so rich in terms of its natural resources. Gold, diamonds, minerals.

"I find it so shocking that a few individuals reap the benefits and the wealth doesn't go back to the people. The majority of the wealth is taken out of Africa and goes to China and the rest of the

world who have laid their claim in a very divisive and corrupt way many years ago. When the African people didn't really know what it was, they had. I find it so upsetting. It's not right."

**Q: How would you describe Judith's relationship with Georgia (Kate Beckinsale)?**

"Judith has her reservations about the reason why Georgia believes her husband Will has somehow survived a plane crash a few years ago now. She thinks, 'Can't you just move on? He's gone. Accept it.'

"Judith employed Will but didn't know Georgia terribly well. They perhaps met once or twice when Judith was back home in England. So there is no friendship or connection between the two women. Then suddenly Georgia turns up on Judith's doorstep in the Congo with a belief that Will is actually still alive. Judith is, of course, quite rightly sceptical.

"What's nice is that there are these two strong female characters who are both coming to the story from different angles. That was fun to play."

**Q: What was the filming experience like?**

"The house we used for Judith's home was located in the suburbs of Cape Town. Even though we were not filming in the Congo there was still a definite edge. One had to keep one's antenna sharp at all times. You can't let your guard down.

"The suburbs are not grand at all. There are dirt roads. But that neighbourhood is affluent by local South African standards. Judith's house has a pool, for example. But everybody's house is gated or fenced with razor wire. It's a very strange way to live. But that's just how people live there.

"While we were filming, we heard of really tragic situations where people were being mugged and killed for money. That's part of life there. So you have to be careful. Pretty much everything we did was filmed on location.

"The first week we went out to South Africa, prepping before filming, there was news about two people working for non-governmental organisations in the DRC who had been kidnapped by one of the militias and they were found beheaded. They were out there trying to negotiate with different militia to surrender up their child soldiers and had a degree of success with that. But, obviously, they rubbed somebody up the wrong way and that was it.

"It's incredibly hard. I guess at a certain point you have to leave because you are just going to get burned out. You have to be an incredibly strong personality. But these places cannot be abandoned.

"Some people might find that 'edge' exciting. It makes you feel alive. You look at how war correspondents endlessly put their lives at risk to report from places that are just so dangerous. That must also, in part, involve the adrenaline giving you some sort of high, in a way. At the same time you know you are doing good because these things do have to be reported."

**Q: Was the weather an issue during filming in Africa?**

"It was hot. But I don't mind the heat. That adds texture to the show and that's what you want. We also went through a drought with a countdown to having no water anymore. In the hotels and apartments where we were all staying you were advised to only shower every other day and for no longer than two minutes. It literally was real water rationing.

"I was thinking, 'I've got to shower.' Because at the end of our working day we're filthy. I found a champagne bucket in the apartment I was staying in. And every other day I would straddle the champagne bucket and try and catch as much of the water as I could in the bucket. So at least I could use it to flush the toilet. I was trying to do my bit."

**Q: Judith says: "In a mad world, only the mad are sane." The world in general appears to be a little mad at present?**

"It's terrifying. It seems like the end of the world order as we have known it and generations in the past have known it. But I think it will eventually mean changing for good. Politically governments are going to look very different in future. The very fact we have somebody like Donald Trump as president indicates that. It's fascinating being here in England with everything that has gone on. Clinging to the sofa in horror."

**Q: One of the child soldiers climbs a tree in the jungle because she wants to see the whole world. Have you ever been anywhere where you felt that was possible?**

"In a way it's almost the opposite. I've been to places that, for me, have been spectacular. But have actually made me feel how small and insignificant I am. So it's less about looking at an amazing vista and going, 'Wow, I can see the whole world.' You're standing in a desert and seeing the most extraordinary sky full of stars."

"Knowing that if we didn't have the most horrendous light pollution that we have, everybody would be able to see an extraordinary night sky and it might remind us that we are all so insignificant. And that actually might make us think differently about how we relate to the world."

"At the moment when you wake up in a city, you get up, you go to work, you do your job, you watch TV, whatever it is you do. But you don't have any real sense of being connected to the greater world and the planet Earth. Whereas if one was able to look up into the sky every night and see those stars and constellations, you would know that you are just a small blip. I think right now that would be really helpful."

**Q: One character says: "We can never hide who we are." Do you agree?**

"In the end truth will out? That quote does ultimately ring true. Sometimes it takes a lot longer to discover the truth about people. People can spend their whole life hiding who they are. On the whole you can sense if there's an energy about someone that's not right. I certainly can and I just avoid those sorts of people. I really do listen to my instinct because I think it serves me quite well."

**Q: One main focus of The Widow is a plane crash. Are you a nervous flyer?**

"I have to fly a lot for my job. I'm a relatively happy flyer. As long as I can lie flat. I can sleep on a plane. Even if there is turbulence, I tell myself it's like being a baby in a cradle and I'm just being rocked. That keeps me calm."

**Q: Are you good at working out screen drama puzzles before the end?**

"I'm a total Miss Marple when it comes to that. I love to try and work it out before the end. Sometimes I'm right and my husband looks at me like I really am Miss Marple because he hasn't got a clue. But then other times I'm spectacularly wrong. But I do enjoy trying to figure it out for myself."

## **CHARLES DANCE PLAYS MARTIN BENSON**

### **Q: What appealed to you about The Widow?**

“I had read two episodes when I agreed to do it. I fancied being out in South Africa a bit. I’ve worked with Kate Beckinsale (Georgia) twice before and she is a terrific, wonderful actress. And I liked the character of Martin Benson.”

### **Q: Who is Martin Benson?**

“Martin has known Georgia for a long time. Probably since she was a little girl. Her father and Martin were in the same Army regiment and Martin is a kind of surrogate father to her since her own father has died. Martin feels very guilty about a decision he made that affected her life.

“Before he retired Martin was in military intelligence so Georgia believes he can help her. But he thinks her theory about her missing husband is completely wrong. It’s just wishful thinking on her part. Then Martin becomes drawn into it and agrees to help her.”

### **Q: What sort of world does The Widow investigate?**

“The Widow exposes the risks of trying to operate according to our codes of behaviour in what might be called the First World when you are dealing with situations and governments in Third World countries.

“Places like the Congo are lawless. Unless you are somebody like Martin, an ordinary civilian going to those countries in these circumstances just wouldn’t survive. But because of his military training and history he knows what they are going into. Yet even with that expertise and knowledge, it’s like guerrilla warfare compared to properly run wars - if there is such a thing.

“There were a lot of questions to be asked in The Widow about these characters, their history and what their intention was.”

### **Q: What was it like working with Kate Beckinsale (Georgia) again?**

“I’ve actually known Kate since she was about 10. I did my first television with her mum Judy. She has phenomenal energy and very bright.

“It doesn’t matter what is going on in her life. She comes to the set and produces the goods. In terms of age she seems to have stopped at about 30.

“I also worked on The Widow with an American-Icelandic actor called Ólafur Darri Ólafsson. He is a great big teddy bear of a man. A lovely man. A joy to work with.”

### **Q: You discovered new members of your family in South Africa after taking part in an edition of Who Do You Think You Are? Were you able to meet up during filming for The Widow?**

“I invited my great niece and her husband to come to the set one day. So they came down to Cape Town from Pretoria. I’ve done two or three jobs in South Africa now and I like working over there.

"It was moving into the South African winter when I was there filming. I used to be able to take the cold. But the last two or three jobs I've done I seem to have been cold all of the time. I think I'm going to write a film about a guy who buys a small hotel just behind a beach in Jamaica.

**Q: Where else did you film?**

"I filmed in Rotterdam. I had never filmed there before. I hadn't been to Holland since a Royal Shakespeare Company tour in Europe around 1977. It's an extraordinary place. It was bombed and mostly flattened during the war. There is not much of old Rotterdam left. Unlike Amsterdam.

"When we were shooting there we were in the middle of the 2018 winter Beast From The East. I only just got there. Flights were cancelled so I took the train. I went on the Eurostar from London to Brussels and then from Brussels to Rotterdam. But coming back it was an hour and 15 minutes into London City Airport. Which is fantastic. I'm determined to go there again.

"I was in Amsterdam recently for something else and I'm getting very fond of the Dutch and Holland plus the fact it is so near. I think I might take myself there for a weekend at some point.

"We also filmed scenes in Wales. There was a lot of snow there and it was bloody cold."

**Q: Is there a great difference today between the scale and ambition of a production like The Widow and a big screen movie?**

"Not really. The dividing line between television and film is becoming increasingly blurred now. The job for actors is essentially the same. The people on the crew are doing the same job in a television series as they would on a movie. Really the only difference is there are more people involved in the decision making for a television series."

**Q: Martin has an old school dictaphone. Do you still use veteran classic technology?**

"I've still got what was in its day a state-of-the-art music centre. It weighs a ton and I can't bear to part with it. It's a belt-driven turntable with a valve amplifier and it's terrific.

"I was talking to someone recently about a film I did in the Arctic in about 1996 living on an ice-breaker in the Bering Sea. At night I would go and stand on the top deck of this ship looking at the Northern Lights, listening to Wagner on my Sony Walkman. And they said, 'What's a Sony Walkman?'

"Having said that, I've also been involved now in performing in two video games. They are extraordinary."

**Q: Out in Africa you can be cut off from both phone contact and the internet. How would you cope?**

"On those occasions where you can't find your mobile phone a kind of panic sets in. I have a habit of putting my phone in my pocket and when I get in my car it drops out without me realising it. It's not until later that I think, 'Where's my phone?' And I'm looking all over the place. Usually I'm able to park my car pretty close to my house. So I get the landline phone and go out, sit in the car, dial my mobile number and then I can hear where it is.

"Every now and again I write letters. Because I quite like getting letters. So I write to people I haven't seen for a long time."

**Q: A child soldier in The Widow climbs a tree in the jungle because she wants to see the whole world. Have you ever been anywhere where you felt that was possible?**

“When I went to Machu Picchu. That’s quite something. I was working in Buenos Aires and I had a choice when I finished the job. I could stay there and have tango lessons. Or go to Peru and Machu Picchu. So I decided to do that instead.”

**Q: One character says: “We can never hide who we are?” Do you agree?**

“I would hope it does eventually come out. We all have public and private faces. Especially in this business. I think it’s useful for people in our business to retain some kind of mystery. Because if everybody knows everything about you then they will move on to something else.”

**Q: One main focus of The Widow is a plane crash. Are you a nervous flyer?**

“I don’t mind flying. Since we’ve had to be so security conscious, gone are the days when you could turn up at the airport half an hour before the flight, show your passport and get on the plane. It’s a whole business now of getting there two hours beforehand to go through security and so on. Although I cut it fine a lot of the time. It’s all that business that’s boring. But actually flying, being on a plane, it’s just like getting on a train for me. I do it all the time.”

**Q: Are you good at working out screen drama puzzles before the end?**

“Most of the time I’m good at working things out when I’m watching a TV puzzle on screen. But I don’t watch a lot of television. I don’t get the time.”

**Q: You seem to be busier than ever. Does that come as a surprise?**

“I am busier than ever. It is a surprise. This business is swings and roundabouts. But I haven’t stopped really for the last three or four years. Or even before that.

“I guess Game of Thrones has something to do with that. Because if you’re part of one of the most successful television series that’s ever been made, hopefully there is going to be a bit of a spin-off from that. So I’ve gone from job to job to job now. I’m in the middle of The Crown at the moment and I start another film before I even finish that.

“I have been very lucky in my career. I’ve travelled the world and I do a job that I love. I rarely take holidays because I travel so much. A holiday for me is staying at home. It’s given me a way of life and the opportunity to do a job I love doing.”

## **HARRY AND JACK WILLIAMS - WRITERS / EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS**

### **Q: How did The Widow come to the screen?**

**Harry:** “I had just started dating a woman who is now my fiancée who is a widow. So it was a thing we were talking about in the way we do when we’re working. We talk around areas and subjects. She had written a blog about losing someone close to you which was very touching and moving. That area felt like something that was interesting to us. An emotional way in. We do thrillers. That’s what we’re more known for. And the idea of using that emotional jumping off point and blending in a conspiracy thriller felt like a really interesting marriage.

“We sit and talk about lots of different things then follow the stories and see where it might take us. And stop and tear our hair out. Then eventually continue once we’ve figured it out. We plot the whole thing out roughly and then do a more detailed breakdown of what the episodes are. Then we divide them up and write them.”

**Jack:** “With The Widow, perhaps more than any other show, we got further in the plotting process before writing anything. Because it’s so interlinked and serialised. Almost like chapters in a book. So we actually plotted out most of the series before writing the episodes. It’s different in that sense. It’s quite a sprawling complex story. What’s exciting is by the final hour you, hopefully, feel that journey that can seem like it’s sometimes going off on tangents all actually marries up and adds up in the end. One of the sequences near the end was very big and ambitious. When you finally sum it all up for the audience. Our second director Olly Blackburn did a remarkable job on that.”

### **Q: Why did you set much of The Widow in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)?**

**Jack:** “I had done some reading about the Congo and just found it fascinating, a place of contradictions that not a lot of people know about. So it always stuck with me. Then when Harry started talking about this character we talked about what would be the most interesting combination. And the two ideas fused together. We started to come up with a story taking Georgia Wells (Kate Beckinsale) to this place and really putting her through the wringer emotionally. It just felt a really good fit.”

### **Q: Did you realise how topical the drama would be in light of the recent disputed election in the DRC and further ethnic violence?**

**Jack:** “It’s always hard when you write about somewhere like the Congo where it’s so fluid politically and things are always on the move. Which is why we tried to take a step back and talk about the country as a whole and the general patterns there so it doesn’t feel dated. But at the moment, it feels oddly prescient following the election there and ethnic violence.”

### **Q: Why could you not film in the Congo?**

**Jack:** “We really wanted to film in the Congo. Our lead director Sam Donovan and our producer Eliza Mellor did go to the DRC for a recce for a week. Against the strenuous objections of every insurance company in the world. But it was just too dangerous. Even to film some general views. So sadly we weren’t allowed to. We then worked with a brilliant designer to film in South Africa. Every frame had to be treated and dressed. You can’t just go to South Africa and pretend it’s a street in the Congo. Everything had to be rebuilt.”



**Q: What themes do you explore in The Widow?**

**Jack:** “The setting in The Widow is absolutely intrinsic to the story. As with everything we write we don’t pick places just because of how they look. As it becomes clear over the eight hours, this story is one that could only ever be told in the Democratic Republic of Congo and could only be told in the DRC now.

“The Widow is a conspiracy thriller with a big emotional heart. But by the conclusion, without being tub-thumping or issue led in any way, there is an element where it has some food for thought about the world we live in and the way we choose to exploit our natural resources. We wanted to write something about the connection to the West. To things we use every day.”

**Q: One character talks about the darkness beneath the beauty of the DRC. Was that an important line for you?**

**Harry:** “That really sums up the whole thing. There is such darkness underneath.”

**Jack:** “It’s a beautiful environment but the way people live and interact there is sometimes human nature at its most desperate and violent. There’s such a contrast between that and some of the kindness and empathy you also see there.

“There are people who wear their heart on their sleeves and say they are doing good things. But for their own reasons. Which, again, is true to the theme of the show. The things we say we do are different from the reasons we actually do them.

“As you read the news, it’s both gratifying and horrifying how we have actually written something that is reflecting the reality of what has subsequently happened in the real world. If you do a real life thing it’s the story of what has happened. You just write it down. But if you wrote that in a drama people would say, ‘That’s too convenient.’ We expect our fiction to have rules in the way that, obviously, real life doesn’t.”

**Harry:** “We say it all the time. That the world is too mad today to do it justice. It constantly surprises. And it seems to be getting madder and madder.”

**Q: Rotterdam is also a major location in the drama. Why choose that city?**

**Harry:** “We went to Amsterdam for our drama Baptiste. But even before we’d had the idea we had passed through and saw Rotterdam on the way. Rotterdam is very striking, angular, urban and symmetrical. Visually it’s the antithesis of the Congo. So it just felt like, ‘What’s the biggest contrast we can make visually?’”

**Q: What were your thoughts in the casting process?**

**Jack:** “It’s really exciting to have someone like Kate Beckinsale play Georgia Wells. A film actress who hasn’t done TV for over 10 years. She brings so much to the role. I don’t think viewers will necessarily know what to expect from her. From the first episode we’re trying to work Georgia out and why she is like she is. That gives us a lot. Kate is, certainly to a TV audience, a bit more of an enigma. She has done a variety of roles. The hope is to confound that expectation with an audience who don’t necessarily know what kind of person she is.

“The Widow was so dependent on getting the right person to play the role of Georgia. This character who is emotionally closed off. It was such a different character for us to write. What’s exciting about Georgia for us is that when you first meet her she can seem a little brittle and cold

almost. She is a character who is emotionally shut down. Who has suffered immense and unfortunate tragedy. She is the epitome what the show is about. Hence the title The Widow. Having suffered that loss, what do you do and how do you recover? It's a natural reaction to wall yourself off."

**Harry:** "And then how do you open yourself to people and dare to love anyone again after you have lost so much? It's a really difficult thing to do that. Knowing you have lost so much and that could happen all over again. That felt like a very potent emotional story to tell for us."

**Jack:** "We also have people like Ólafur Darri Ólafsson who is an amazing actor. He had a much smaller part for us in The Missing 2. When we started writing that role we always had him in mind. And we were lucky enough to get him."

"We had casting directors in America, England, Africa and France. Which gives you a range and access to people we're not as familiar with here. Like Bart Fouche and Jacky Ido, a French actor who lives in Los Angeles. Plus Babs Olusanmokun who plays General Azikiwe. We were just blown away by him. We couldn't believe it when we saw the audition. He was busy doing another American show and we tied ourselves in knots to get him out to do the role. And we're so glad it worked out. Once we saw him audition, we couldn't have anyone but him."

"We also have Shalom Nyandiko as child soldier Adidja. We saw a lot of people for that. It was a very hard role to cast. But as soon as we saw her we fell in love with her. She gives an amazing performance. It's a really important role. She had to act in two languages and doesn't have a lot of previous acting experience. But she was brilliant."

**Q: Do you have big debates about when you should drop in 'reveals' for the audience to give them more clues as to the bigger picture?**

**Harry:** "Very much so. You never want to hold things back, be cynical about it and just be playing a trick. It has to be something that comes organically from the story and feels natural. Equally the audience are leaning in for the answers to those questions. So it's essential that you land them properly and they have an impact. That's a constant source of discussion. Audiences want to find that stuff out for themselves. They will be curious. Just being handed it all makes it slightly less interesting."

**Jack:** "To some extent it's a question of holding your nerve. Particularly with The Widow. In episode three and four you learn a lot about Georgia that you don't know in the first two episodes. Which makes it harder to empathise with her fully in the opening episodes because she is holding things back. Writing it you think, 'Should we tell people more so they love her from the start?' But you just have to hold your nerve."

"It's important we meet her in a closed off way and see how she interacts with the world. Before we tell people more about what has happened. We don't want to start by asking people to love her. That never really works. This is a more interesting way of telling the story. We don't want to alienate people. We want them to stay with us for the journey. Because, trust us, it's worth it."

**Q: Is there a great difference now between the scale and ambition of a production like The Widow and a big screen movie?**

**Harry:** "There doesn't seem to be a great difference now. Looking at the scale of a production like this shooting for six months in three countries. And looking at the actors and talent available to you. It's indistinguishable in many ways."

**Q: Do you think about the fact that with smart TVs and streaming people can now access your work all over the world?**

**Jack:** “It’s brilliant. We never write with that in mind. But it’s always a huge relief and honour that people watch and engage with it. Something like this is on ITV in the UK and Amazon are showing it all over the rest of the world.”

**Q: One character in *The Widow* says we can never hide who we are. Do you agree?**

**Jack:** “One of the reasons we write is because people are hard to work out. Some people surprise you and some just never change. I don’t think we necessarily believe that. But that guy definitely does.”

**Harry:** “People do a pretty good job of it a lot of the time.”

**Q: A plane crash is at the heart of *The Widow*. Are you nervous flyers?**

**Jack:** “I’m a pretty terrible flyer. I hate it. I try and avoid it where possible. But I think I’m improving. We’re working through it. I couldn’t believe I was writing about a plane crash. I really didn’t want to. I think we really capture that terror on screen. It was a case of, ‘If it can’t terrify me then it won’t terrify anyone.’ So when I finally watched it and had nightmares about it I knew it was good. But I can’t watch that scene anymore.”

**Harry:** “I couldn’t watch most of the rushes of the plane crash.”

**Q: Is it an increasing challenge to keep today’s sophisticated drama audiences on their toes?**

**Jack:** “You have to work harder than ever. We feel it every time we sit down to write. You come up with an idea and some characters you think are interesting. Then you start to write a scene and think, ‘Well, OK, I’ve seen that before. How do we make it different?’ It just gets harder and harder.

“We’ve found that even since we wrote the first series of *The Missing*. I’m not claiming ever to be wholly original. No-one can be. But we spend a lot of time discussing scenes and ways to make them surprising or different enough so that we - who write a lot of TV and watch a lot of TV - can look at each other and go, ‘That feels different and surprising.’ It just takes us longer to do than it ever did because there is so much drama around.”

**Harry:** “It makes me want to want to watch less. So that I know less.”

## CREDITS

Harry Williams	Executive Producer/ Writer
Jack Williams	Executive Producer/ Writer
Christopher Aird	Executive Producer
Sam Donovan	Director – eps 1, 2, 3, 4
Olly Blackburn	Director – eps 5, 6, 7, 8
Eliza Mellor	Producer
Dianne Beatty	Line Producer
Alison-Jane Roney	Line Producer
Stuart Howell	Director of Photography
John Lee	Director of Photography – eps 4-8
Daniel Greenway	Editor – eps 1, 2
David Thrasher	Editor – ep 3,4
Kim Gaster	Editor - ep 5 & 7
Peggy Koretzky	Editor – ep 6 & 8
Darryl Hammer	Production Designer
Kate Carin	Costume Designer
Francesca Van Der Feyst	Make Up & Hair Designer
Gary Davy	Casting Director
Alan Gerhardt	Production Sound Mixer
Dominik Scherrer	Composers