The Confessions of Frannie Langton
Press Pack

DRAMA REPUBLIC

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Press Pack Contents

Character biographies.....3
Adapting The Confessions of Frannie Langton by Author and Screenwriter Sara Collins.....5
Karla-Simone Spence interview 6
Sophie Cookson interview 11
Steven Mackintosh interview.....18
Patrick Martins interview 22
Andrea Harkin interview 26
Carol Harding interview.....33
Rebecca De Souza interview.....39
Episode summaries.....46
Character and cast credits.....47
Production credits.....48
About Drama Republic 49

Character biographies

FRANNIE LANGTON
Frannie Langton is a previously enslaved young woman who is brought from Jamaica and sent into service in the home of a wealthy London couple. She is a literary, book loving woman having been educated as a girl in Jamaica - part of a sinister experiment. She has never known love...until she meets her Mistress...

MADAME BENHAM
A beautiful, passionate, French woman who is trapped in a loveless marriage. She finds some escape in books, as well as her opium addiction and numerous love affairs. She falls in love with Frannie.

GEORGE BENHAM
Considered one of the greatest scientific thinkers of his day, George Benham is a highly esteemed but cold and arrogant man whose livelihood is propped up by slavery and who wants to ensure its continuance.

JOHN LANGTON
An embittered and vile man whose treatment of 'his' slaves in Jamaica is cruel, including inhumane experiments.

OLAUDAH 'LADDIE' LIGHTNING
Taken from his mother as a young boy and given to Madame Benham as a pageboy, Laddie makes his living boxing but his real ambition is to reveal to the truth about George Benham.

Character biographies

HEP ELLIOT
An anti-slaver who is conflicted because she is financially dependent upon her cousin George Benham - and desperately in love with his wife.

LINUX
Housekeeper to George Benham and a cold, angry woman whose dislike of her Mistress Benham is only outdone by her overtly racist hatred of Frannie Langton.

SAL
A **loving friend to Frannie. S**he rescues her from the streets and brings her to work in her spanking parlour. Warm, funny and straight talking, Sal works tirelessly to try to save her friend.

PHIBBAH
On the face of it, a cold and guarded woman, but Phibbah has a deep well of love for Frannie, which she struggles to repress. Frannie is in fact her child.

LORD PERCY
As the oldest brother in the Benham family, Lord Percy is not only extraordinarily wealthy, he is also very concerned to keep the family name unstained. He will go to any lengths to achieve this.

PRU
Pru is a naive, sweet-natured young maid in the Benham household. She is happy with her lot and thinks Frannie should settle for hers too.

WILLIAM PETTIGREW
Frannie's well-intentioned novice barrister who hopes to save her from the death penalty.

THE CONFESSIONS OF FRANNIE LANGTON
by Sara Collins

When I was offered the chance to adapt my novel *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* for television, I knew straightaway that I didn't want to write yet another period drama where the only thing that happens to the black characters is slavery. My life-long irritation with the depiction of black characters in historical fiction as nothing but victims of that institution was the reason I'd written the novel in the first place. But I also wanted to avoid the sort of colour-blind fantasy about interracial romance that seems to be in vogue nowadays - deliciously anachronistic, but occasionally guilty of indulging the audience's self-serving reasons for pretending slavery never happened at all. Instead, I wanted to dramatise a passionate love affair between a black woman and her white mistress in Regency London. We've been led to assume this kind of thing would never have happened, which is precisely why it's the story I wanted to tell.

At the heart of the story is Frannie, who falls in hopelessly in love with her mistress Marguerite after being brought to London from Jamaica and sent into service in her husband's household. United in their longing to escape society's limiting expectations, they slip into an intense emotional and sexual entanglement with each other. But we know it will end badly: when we first meet Frannie she has been arrested on suspicion of murdering her employers, having been found asleep next to her slain mistress, 'covered in blood'. As she struggles to defend herself by recalling the story of their relationship, what unfolds is part murder mystery and part gothic romance - as tormented, compulsive and self-destructive as the genre implies. The result, I hope, is a dark psychological drama that shifts between a stifling Jamaican plantation, a lush Regency mansion, and the crucible of an Old Bailey courtroom, keeping us on our toes as to whether we believe Frannie, or whether it matters if we don't.

Sadly, depicting a black woman (in any era, but even more so in a period piece) who is driven by an unbridled desire for all the things the world says she isn't supposed to have - sex, love, an education, control of her body and her choices - might still be viewed by some as subversive. But every time I faced the blinking cursor of the draft screenplay, and the challenges that came with getting the series made, I reminded myself that it was a rare opportunity to embody the sensuality and psychological complexity that characters like Frannie have for too long been denied. I hope we have managed to convey her passion as an act of defiance against impossible odds. It has been a privilege to imagine her story and to witness Karla-Simone Spence's breath-taking performance in the title role, full of tenderness and intelligence , vulnerability and rage.

INTERVIEW WITH KARLA-SIMONE SPENCE

Karla-Simone Spence, *Frannie Langton*

What attracted you to *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*?
"It's an incredible story. I was really intrigued by Frannie's journey. She's an incredibly witty, resilient woman. As soon as I read the scripts I was like, 'I have to play her.' I really wanted this role.

"I poured everything into my final round of auditions. When my agent called to say they were offering me the role, I screamed and had to mute myself because I just went crazy. I was really happy. I had waited for this moment for a really long time and it was worth the wait.

How would you describe this story?
"It's a period drama, set in the 1800's. It's Frannie's story and she wants the world to know what she went through from her own account. When Frannie arrives in England from Jamaica with John Langton (Steven Mackintosh) she is technically a free woman. She could run into this new world, but where would she go? Frannie is a survivor. She has made difficult decisions in order to survive. So in that moment she chooses to stick with the devil she knows. A choice that has led her to where we find her at the beginning of the show."

Do people make assumptions about Frannie?
"In the show people assume many things about Frannie and the life that she has led. Including that she can't read or write. But she has a great love of reading and for books. She can be the most intelligent person in the room but can't always show it.

INTERVIEW WITH KARLA-SIMONE SPENCE CONTINUED:

"They assume that Frannie would be subservient, having been a former slave. She is not. Only when it suits her to be. They assume that her connection to Madame is an obsession that carries ulterior motives, but this is simply not the case. Frannie is young and hasn't really experienced love before. She did eventually know who her mother was, but she never had that maternal bond. Frannie never felt that she was nurtured and looked after.

"So when she discovers Madame (Sophie Cookson) it is such a breath of fresh air for her. She has never had a romantic connection with anyone. When she first meets Madame she feels this magnetic attraction, that she doesn't quite understand. Initially, Frannie is very impressed with Madame's literary taste. Madame is very forward in her thinking and voices her thoughts, just as Frannie does and Frannie admires that.

"But in 1820's, England, love between two women is a forbidden love. Society does not approve, but Frannie doesn't care. She has always lived her life having to conform and being a certain way. Now she doesn't want to hide anymore.

How did you, Sophie Cookson and director Andrea Harkin approach filming the more sensitive scenes on set?
"It was really collaborative. We had an amazing intimacy co-ordinator called Adelaide Waldrop. We sat down and discussed what we were trying to convey with the intimate parts of their story. It was important for us to show that there was real love between them. It was a really comfortable experience."

How would you describe Frannie and George Benham's relationship?
"Frannie can't stand George Benham. He is the reason for so much of the pain she has suffered in Jamaica. Yet he doesn't see that. He believes he was doing things for the greater good, but Frannie soon learns that she can use George Benham to her benefit to get what she wants."

What is Frannie accused of?
"Frannie is accused of the double murder of the woman she loves, Madame Benham, and George Benham (Stephen Campbell Moore) Madame's husband. Frannie does not believe she has done it, but it doesn't help that Frannie is found in bed with the body of her mistress and cannot remember much of the night in question.

INTERVIEW WITH KARLA-SIMONE SPENCE CONTINUED:

This is a consequence of taking a great deal of Laudanum with Madame earlier in the evening. Laudanum is an opioid that was used as a form of medicine, but was often abused."

How does this society look on men like George Benham compared to a black woman like Frannie?
"In 1820s, England, rich white men were in the highest level of society. Everyone listens to what they have to say and they are very well respected. No one was really interested in what a woman had to say, they had to fight to be seen. Now imagine being a Jamaican Black woman, in a white world. There's extra layers of oppression that one has to fight."

Until relatively recently history was as written and told by men. Women's history has often been lost because it was never written down and recorded?
"Frannie says to Madame, 'Men write to separate themselves from the common history...women write to try to join it.' and it rings so true. Madame tries to write her own biography, but can never be allowed to publish it. Women wanted to be a part of the story. But if there is no account of the lives they have led and stories that they have had to share, no-one is going to know what they went through.

INTERVIEW WITH KARLA-SIMONE SPENCE CONTINUED:

"George Benham is able write 'his-story' and publish it. So years later all anyone will know is what he did from his own account and how he would like people to see him. But Frannie is not going to let anyone else tell her story. She wants us to know her real story, as told by her."

How did you approach Frannie's accent?
"I had a couple of sessions with a vocal coach called Joel Trill and then I went off on my own and created the voice that is Frannie's. I am of Jamaican heritage, so I'm very familiar with the accent. But it would have been different in the 1800s. So I focused on creating a posh Jamaican accent and once I found her voice it was all I could hear. I love doing accents, because playing a character feels more immersive and less like myself."

What does The Confessions of Frannie Langton look like on screen?
"The show is set in the Georgian era. One of the popular hairstyles back then was a high bun, which Frannie wears. The style back then included empire line dresses and corsets, which I enjoyed wearing as they helped me to understand how Frannie would have lived, how she carried herself and how she breathed."

What was it like working with Sophie Cookson as Madame Benham and other cast members?
"I can't imagine a better Madame to my Frannie. We filmed the love scenes towards the end of the shoot. It was nice to see Frannie being loved and I had a great time building that relationship with Sophie.

"I enjoyed working with all of the cast to be honest, I feel very lucky to share this story with them. I remember the chemistry read I had with Patrick Martins, who plays Laddie Lightning and I instantly knew he was the one. I really enjoyed working with Patrick and can I just say Steven Mackintosh was also a dream to work with, despite our character's difficult relationship, I had a great time with him on set!"

And director Andrea Harkin?
"Andrea has been a dream to work with. She trusted me completely with what I wanted to do with Frannie. There was never a time where I felt we were disagreeing about what should be happening in the story. I trust her vision and we make a great team!"

Did you meet Caelen, who plays young Frannie, or Kiera, who plays teen Frannie?
"I saw Kiera briefly, she was busy on set. I could tell she was a natural! I get to speak with Caelen, we took some photos together, which was really sweet. The casting was incredible. I'm really glad that they were chosen to help tell the story of Frannie."

INTERVIEW WITH KARLA-SIMONE SPENCE CONTINUED:

Can you tell us about some of the filming locations?
"The locations were amazing and so beautiful. We filmed at massive mansions with huge lawns and gardens. The detail in the architecture was very impressive. I really liked the ceiling in the entrance of Duncombe Park.

We were filming all around Yorkshire and the crew did an amazing job at transforming the locations back in time. We filmed the court scenes at Dewsbury Town Hall and it was made to look like the Old Bailey."

What might Frannie have been if she had been alive today?
"I have no doubt that Frannie would have been a published author. I imagine she would have travelled the world, maybe even had a family. She could have done anything she put her mind to."

How do you reflect back on playing Frannie Langton?
"Sadly, I wasn't shocked by anything that happens in the story. It was upsetting reading the script, reading the novel and just hearing everything Frannie had endured. That struck home with me because she has been through so much. I feel so deeply connected to her. I feel that Frannie is me and I am Frannie.

"Frannie is not one of those characters that just fades away. She is one of those characters that bury into your soul and stay there in hibernation. We went on so many emotional rollercoasters together. I'm grateful and honoured that I was able to play her. Her story is so rich and so much happens over the course of four episodes. It's rare that a leading role is written for a woman like me. I'm just so happy that Sara Collins wrote this story and I was able to bring her to life.
"I really want people to watch this show because I want them to meet Frannie. To fall in love with the woman that I fell in love with, despite her flaws. Just to hear her story, because she really wants people to hear it. I think she is worth the watch."

INTERVIEW WITH SOPHIE COOKSON
Sophie Cookson, *Madame Marguerite Benham*

What appealed to you about *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*?
"I was intrigued because there seemed to be lots of Gothic overtones, which is something I'm always excited by. When I finally read the script I found it to be an incredibly dark, compelling read. There are moments of real brutality, raw emotion, pain and suffering. But all of that is contrasted with moments of pure joy, love and light. I loved the fact that Sara Collins had created this complicated world where no-one is quite who they seem.

"All of the characters are complicated and they often overlap in their desires or wants in places where you might not think. Sometimes it feels like a game of chess. And there are these beautiful moments of love. What it is to be human and in a very dark place, in a shocking, terrible time in our history. Sara brilliantly highlights that even in the worst, darkest places there is still light and hope."

Who is Madame Marguerite Benham?
"Madame is the wife of George Benham (Stephen Campbell Moore). She was born in France and comes from a bourgeoisie family that had to escape to England when she was a child. So even though she comes from quite a noble background she essentially grew up as a pauper.

"As a woman in Georgian London society so much of her identity is squashed. She is not allowed to be who she wants to be. Even though it might seem like Frannie (Karla-Simone Spence) and Madame have nothing in common, Madame knows what it is to have something taken away from you and to be forced into a set of circumstances that she's not necessarily comfortable with.

INTERVIEW WITH SOPHIE COOKSON CONTINUED:

"Her husband George ensures Madame doesn't escape from the gilded cage he has created for her. It's horrendous for someone to have so much power over you. A woman at that time was still seen as little more than a possession. Madame is there to serve a physical purpose. She says she married her husband for his money because she had no social standing. While he wanted her for her looks because he needed someone who will present a certain way.

"The greatest shame for Madame is that she is incredibly smart, astute, intellectual, loves studying and would love to be a writer, yet as a woman isn't allowed to do any of that. She is a trophy wife. But underneath that there is an incredibly exciting, vivid woman. Frannie and Madame spark a creative rush in each other. There's the lust and the physical attraction. But it's also a meeting of minds. A very cerebral connection. It gives both of them a lot of energy. The first bit of excitement or true hope or joy that Madame has experienced in a long time.

"Both of these women are trapped and so hungry for more. It's such a surprise to find it in the place they do. Madame is very used to being shepherded around various dinner parties or other engagements with her husband or going to parties with her husband's cousin Hephzibah 'Hep' Elliot (Jodhi May). So Madame is totally floored when she meets this incredible young woman Frannie on her doorstep.

"Both Madame and Frannie feel trapped with nowhere to run. Frannie is, technically, a free woman in London. But there is no 'out' for either of them. They are both trained to stay, to obey, to not break the rules and not cross that line. Also, there is nowhere for them to go and no money available to them to do that.

"Their love is a forbidden love. It breaks so many taboos. They are two women, from different class backgrounds and a different race. Frannie is Madame's servant, essentially. They are aware of all of that and I think in the beginning that's possibly what makes it even more exciting. As the relationship then grows that becomes an increasing hindrance to them. Frannie speaks about running away and is much more fanciful. Even though Madame indulges that fantasy, that dream, she is also more aware that it is totally impossible."

How did you, Karla-Simone Spence and director Andrea Harkin approach filming the more intimate scenes on set?
"I was very lucky to have worked with Andrea before when we had also dealt with sensitive material. It's important with all of these intimate scenes that they drive the narrative forward. There's an interesting power relationship going on between Madame and Frannie. We made sure there wasn't one person driving it. That it was a very equal, balanced relationship. In the rest of the story, it's all about lack of balance. And here we really wanted there to be a real synthesis of bodies and minds. It needed to feel very equal.

INTERVIEW WITH SOPHIE COOKSON CONTINUED:

“Our intimacy coordinator, Adelaide Waldrop, was brilliant at making sure that everything was telling a story. There is so much to unravel. Even though Frannie is supposed to be Madame’s servant, she would never have dealt with a dress like that before. Tiny little details that create a rich tapestry of what their connection is and what their backgrounds are.”

Is Madame’s French background important to her?

“Madame has not lived in France for a long time but has retained a lot of her French-ness. Sometimes as a way to spite people. It’s often used as a negative in the house that she is French, but she holds on to that because it’s part of her identity that no one else can tamper with. It’s almost out of contempt that she retains her accent.

“She has leant into her French-ness, because it’s a very important part of who she is. Madame thinks she doesn’t want to be like all of these other boring English women! She wants to be more exotic and ruffle feathers, so she can be as French as she likes including when she needs to annoy her husband.

“I’ve never really done a French accent before, but it was about finding a hybrid of this upper-class English accent with a bit of French. We didn’t quite know what it was going to be until we were filming, and I think we came to a nice mélange.”

INTERVIEW WITH SOPHIE COOKSON CONTINUED:

How does Madame cope with her circumstances?
"It was quite common at this time for people to take laudanum. It's not necessarily seen as a social habit but something not out of the ordinary. But there is a line that Madame crosses and it becomes something she needs in order to function. She is suffering a lot and there is also a pain in Frannie that she sees that mirrors her own.

"Madame talks to Frannie about the miscarriages she, Madame, has suffered. She is constantly covering up for feeling a failure. As a woman, as a human, she is not able to be who she wants to be in any sense. She misuses alcohol and laudanum because she needs to numb herself. It's so tragic because she is really hurting.

"Madame was a very harrowing character to have to embody. She is constantly aware of how fragile her existence is in that household. Back then George (Benham) could even threaten to send her away to the asylum. But he needs her to stay married to him. It's a marriage of keeping up appearances because it would shame both of them if they parted.

"There is probably regret on both sides about their marriage. In a different situation they might have found common ground. But they are so stuck in their position in society. They are both very intelligent people but the way they are trapped within that society makes it impossible to bridge that gap. He will always choose to see her as his intellectual inferior because it suits his purpose.

"There is something bubbling underneath with both of them. Whenever you see them together there should be this question of what is going to happen between them now? Stephen (Campbell Moore) is so brilliant at bringing such subtlety and nuance to a character that would be easy to paint as almost the villain of the piece. But it's much more complex and layered than that."

How would you describe Madame and Laddie Lightning's (Patrick Martins) relationship?
"It's complicated! This story is the result of years of research by Sara Collins. I love how she is giving a voice to characters who would otherwise not have been heard. Definitely captive slaves and most likely former slaves did not have the luxury of being able to give their testimony about what happened to them. Sara has wonderfully brought to life these silenced, almost erased characters whom we need desperately need to hear and pay attention to."

What about Madame's relationship with her husband's cousin Hephzibah 'Hep' Elliot (Jodhi May)?
"The question of what has happened in the past between Madame and 'Hep' was a big topic of conversation on set. We never get the answer. It's up to the audience to make up their own minds. But I know what I think.

INTERVIEW WITH SOPHIE COOKSON CONTINUED:

Madame is an incredibly charismatic, magnetic person so she ends up having these intense alliances with various people. She is bored, craves excitement and is constantly searching for something new. But that, sadly, means people are often left in her wake. I don't think it's out of malice. Madame is just hungry for more.

"It's so exciting as an actress to play a character like Madame. Everyone in the story has a different version of who she is. I do see Madame as some kind of shapeshifter. It depends on her mood, on how much laudanum she has taken and where she is in terms of her addiction.

"She experiences these incredible highs. They are brilliant moments to play of recklessness and wild behaviour. But then there's the other part of her that is cold and reserved and might seem withdrawn and almost calculated at times. Working out where to pitch that and who she is to each character is a brilliant Tetris-like game to play. I think that is relatable. We portray different versions of ourselves to different people."

Until relatively recently history was as written and told by men. Women's history has often been lost because it was never written down and recorded?
It's shocking. That's why it's so brilliant to have Sara writing this book and script. It's a different angle of history which we've sadly not heard or seen enough of.

INTERVIEW WITH SOPHIE COOKSON CONTINUED:

At the heart of the story is what it means to be human and what happens when society decides to dehumanise those seen as inferior, be that due to race or sex or both. This story is a kaleidoscope of human existence and at times it is deeply painful to see what we as sentient beings are capable of doing to each other.

What does Madame look like?
"When I first met the costume designer Nigel Egerton I had such a clear idea about what I wanted Madame to look like. She can't be a wallflower in any way. You have to see her and know she is different. The first time you meet her in the book, Madame is wearing a very outlandish outfit.

"We went for these really dark, rich colours as opposed to the Georgian style of wearing pale colours. You see her and instantly think, 'What's going on with her?' So it was a lot of fun to wear these sumptuous materials and be someone like no-one else on the street."

What was it like working with Karla-Simone Spence as Frannie?
"Karla-Simone has such a joyous, infectious energy which is very helpful when you're filming bleak scenes. There needed to be a real rapport between Madame and Frannie and we had the ultimate privilege as an actor of rehearsing before we shot anything.

We did lots of dance rehearsals and there's a moment at the end of episode one where they waltz around the kitchen and generally experimented. So it wasn't just turning up on set on day one and saying, 'Hi, nice to meet you.' We were very lucky that we got to explore lots of avenues before then.

"When you're doing a period piece there's a tendency for it all to be quite held and rigid with a lack of movement, but it needs to feel embodied and lived in, particularly for Madame. I didn't want her to seem like any other high-class woman. I wanted her to have more of an unexpected energy and the same goes for Frannie. She is not from that place so she needed to have a physicality. It also helped when we did come to film those more intimate scenes that we had done so many exercises with each other. We just wanted to have that familiarity.

"It was a great cast. Such a variety of people to play startlingly different characters. I adored working with Patrick Martins as Laddie. He's relatively fresh out of drama school and has so much presence and weight to him. We actually had very few scenes together so it was important that they really meant something."

INTERVIEW WITH SOPHIE COOKSON CONTINUED:

What did director Andrea Harkin bring to the production?
"Andrea is not afraid of anything. She is willing to mine the moments that are dark and uncomfortable. In a script like this you cannot shy away from anything. It touches on so many things and she has a real sensitivity. Andrea is a brilliant storyteller and very trusting. She lets you experiment and play. She doesn't turn up on set with a fully formed idea of what she wants it to be. She allows you to explore. It's almost like a child-like curiosity. She wants to know what's going to happen."

How do you reflect back on working on The Confessions of Frannie Langton'?
"It was great fun to be around such talented, creative people. But it was definitely a very challenging job. To bring Madame to life with all of the contradictions she has within her. I find it hard to separate myself from the work that is going on at the time. We actually started off with a lot of the very dark scenes when what Madame is going through and the state of mind she is in is just so terrible and finding light within the darkness.

"It's hard not to wear them quite heavily so you do have to put a line under that day and not take it home. You can't do your best work if you're constantly looking at what happened to you the scene or day before."

INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN MACKINTOSH

Steven Mackintosh, *John Langton*

Had you read the original book by Sara Collins?
"When they offered me the role, I was having to travel a lot for another job. So I listened to the audio book version of *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*, read by the author Sara Collins, over a period of a few days while on my travels. I was completely enthralled. Totally drawn into the story.

"It was then really interesting to read the scripts. Because a screen adaptation is a very different beast to a book. And they found a very clever way to tell this story on screen."

How would you describe *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*?
"*The Confessions of Frannie Langton* is so many different things told in such a brilliant way. Sara Collins has taken the classic period drama and created an incredibly fresh perspective on it. At the same time it is a murder mystery, a story of passion and sensuality, a story with its origins in slavery and oppression. It manages to do so many different things in a very exciting, fresh and powerful way.

"There are no obvious directions in this drama. That's what great writing does. You are never quite sure which way the story is going to turn or how characters are going to develop. Frannie keeps you guessing. It's always intriguing. A fascinating mix of so many things."

INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN MACKINTOSH CONTINUED:

Who is John Langton?
"John Langton is a plantation and slave owner in Jamaica. He has been running this plantation in the West Indies for many years and also working on an academic paper about race. We see him on his way to London with Frannie, because he has lost much of his property in a fire.

"He essentially owned Frannie in Jamaica and still sees her as his property. Once back in England she is a free person, but the reality is that Frannie is far from being free in London. His control has been persuasive and powerful and that makes things very complicated for her. When someone else has been making decisions for you for many years. Frannie may not be a slave in the sense that she was in the plantation but she is still very much so within the realms of these households in Georgian London. She is a million miles from being an equal to anyone and is painfully aware of that.

"So John Langton returns to Georgian London for the first time in many years. He has very few connections there now and needs George Benham's (Stephen Campbell Moore) help. There is a tension between the two men and their relationship is in a state of flux with their respective attitudes changing.

"This is a time of transition in terms of the end of slavery and George Benham wants to ensure he is on the right side of history. While John Langton clings on to his old ideas and beliefs which he absolutely believes are correct.

That he will be vindicated and proved right all along. He needs to prove he is right in order to survive and validate everything he has lived and worked for over the years. He is convinced and certain of his beliefs about race. That people of different races to white people are inferior."

How does this society look on men like George Benham compared to black women like Frannie?
"The status of women at the time was not on equal terms with men. So to be black and female meant you were at the bottom of the pile in all respects. This was a white male society where men ruled and women were expected to keep within the confines of what was feminine and becoming of a woman. Not to be forthright, strong or outspoken in any way. And as we know, there are people who still hang on to some of those beliefs even today."

Until relatively recently history was as written and told by men. Women's history has often been lost because it was never written down and recorded?
"It's a fascinating thing about history in general. I once worked with the film maker Peter Greenaway who said, 'There is no such thing as history. Only historians.' Which is a brilliant line, because history is defined by the people that write it, and if those people are male and white, what kind of history are you really getting? That is something we are only beginning to address and think about now. About how to reassess and challenge that."

INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN MACKINTOSH CONTINUED:

What does John Langton look like and where did you film?

"When you see John Langton in the 'present day' aspect of the story in London he is not in great physical shape. Sara doesn't specifically say what it is but his hand is shaking, his legs are weak - I actually thought of it as the onset of Parkinson's. That's how I played it, so he has a cane with a slight hunch to him. His walk is a little stiff.

"His clothes have elements of urban London but they also have these strange colonial elements thrown in as well which were very carefully chosen. There is something slightly 'other' about John Langton. In many ways he's a misfit. A character of London but he has spent so many years in this outpost in Jamaica and has become a strange outsider. He is painfully aware of that, so it was interesting to reflect that in the costume. A slightly worn, tired look in London.

"And then there are flashbacks to Jamaica where he is looking younger, stronger and fitter. That was an interesting thing to play. We filmed the Jamaican scenes in Bramham Park, near Wetherby of all places, but it looked extraordinary. The design work on the set was sublime. It looked fantastic. Subtle touches to the architecture of the house. Shutters were put on and railings added to staircases. With palm trees outside in a dusty terrain. It worked remarkably well and felt completely convincing. The lighting and design work on set was just breath-taking.

INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN MACKINTOSH CONTINUED:

What was it like working with Karla-Simone Spence (Frannie Langton) and Stephen Campbell Moore (George Benham)?
"There is probably hardly a frame that Karla-Simone is not in. It was an enormous role for her, but she just took it all in her stride. She has such self-assurance and confidence, strength in her performance, but is also capable of amazing vulnerability as well, so she has got these wonderful qualities with a real light touch to her on the set.

"I spent most of my time working with Karla-Simone. In this very self-contained, intense relationship between the two characters. She enjoys the process of the work and is brilliant at being able to switch off in between some of the incredibly intense and powerful work. That's so important. It doesn't have to be intense all of the time. In fact it's probably better if it's not. She was formidable.

"And it was a thrill to work with Stephen Campbell Moore. He is so smart and insightful. Brilliant casting for George Benham."

You had worked with director Andrea Harkin before?
"Andrea is an incredibly detailed and yet collaborative director. This was my second time working with her and I felt very fortunate. I was thrilled that she had me in mind for this role. It's a challenging role to get your head round but she is an amazingly thoughtful director with some wonderful ideas. But also to open to other ideas."

How do you reflect back on working on *The Confessions of Frannie Langton?*
"When you're on the set you are incredibly invested. You are living and breathing it. But once you finish filming an actor's job is to leave it behind and let it go. And then this wonderful process of editing and post-production happens and it becomes something else. I'm always really interested in that. In seeing what it is that it becomes.

"Then it's a question of how the audience perceive it. We live with this piece of work, invest in it and have our very definite thoughts and ideas about what the story is, and then the audience receive it and they have another whole set of perspectives and ideas about the story. For a while, before it's transmitted, it's our creation, our baby. Then you pass it over to the audience and it becomes everybody's, which is a fascinating thing. Some people have very strong opinions and thoughts about what their take on it is.

"The good thing about the digital age and streaming today is that television has a longer life. In the days of just terrestrial television, a wonderful programme would be made and then it was gone. Now television lives on longer. That's great. In the past it was always feature films that had the staying power because they were repeated or had a life on DVD or video before that, but now television has that staying power."

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK MARTINS

Patrick Martins, *Laddie Lightning*

What were your initial thoughts when you first read the scripts?
“I had read the book and was really impressed with it. As I was with the scripts for this. I felt Sara Collins had done a very good job in creating such real and truthful characters. So when this screen adaptation came along I felt privileged, knowing that I was going to be a part of this special project. The fact that Sara had written the novel and also adapted it for the screen made me feel safe in terms of asking for insight into my character. She knew what she was talking about.”

How did you learn you had got the role?
“I was on my last day of filming in Dublin for ITV - my first decent role in a TV drama. I got back to my trailer and my agent called me to say I had the job. I remember being so excited and happy. I was just finishing one job and wondering what would happen next. This came at a perfect time. I remember feeling just pure happiness because Laddie is a character I never thought I’d have the chance to play in my career especially being Irish. I never expected that and so I was thrilled.”

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK MARTINS CONTINUED:

How would you describe *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*?
"The whole thing is a murder mystery but there is so much more to it than that. It's a story of a woman and her love. And a story of love in general. There are so many underlying themes running through the entire story. Including race, oppression and many more. They were exciting to tackle, discuss and figure out."

Was there anything in this story that particularly struck home or shocked you?
"A number of things in this story struck a chord with me. We are all aware of the history of slavery and oppression. This is something that actually happened and people went through these experiences. I look at today and think about how as a black man I can walk out on the street and have my voice heard as a human being, but back then black people could not do that.

"Women at that time also had no voice. Power was in the hands of white men. So even a white woman, a wife of an aristocrat, had no say. That is how their lives were."

Who is Laddie Lightning and how would you describe him as a character?
"We first see a painting of him as a young boy but we don't know it's Laddie at first. Then we meet him when he has grown into what is described in the book as this tall, imposing, handsome man. He was taken away from his mother in Jamaica and brought to England at the age of four to be given to Madame (Sophie Cookson). Almost as a pet.

"He has many emotions that he doesn't necessarily know how to express. At least at the beginning. He also has some issues with certain characters in the story. He is a well spoken, articulate man who commands any space when he walks into it. That would have been very rare for a black man at this time in the 1820s. He is someone who is aware of his reputation and plays up to that at times. That is what is so fascinating about him and also fun to play.

"I believe Laddie is loosely inspired by the real story of Julius Soubise who was pageboy to the Duchess of Queensberry. With Sara then creating his own story from that."

How does he view Frannie Langton and do they have things in common?
"Laddie and Frannie have a lot in common. They were both taken away from their families in Jamaica and brought to London. They also have to navigate their circumstances in order to get by. They are both very intelligent, articulate human beings with a mutual respect between them. Even though there is some friction there, I feel there is underlying respect, understanding, sympathy and compassion between the two of them. It is so well written, that shared history."

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK MARTINS CONTINUED:

How does Laddie view Madame Benham?
“Madame is the only mother figure Laddie has in his life, having been taken away from his real mother at the age of four and brought to London. Regardless of what happens, there will always be that connection.”

And her husband George Benham?
“Laddie is aware of how society looks up to George Benham as a kind, benevolent man. But Laddie knows the truth and can see who he really is. He wants to reveal the real George Benham to society. A man who is not as kind- hearted and benevolent as he portrays himself to be. That is one of Laddie’s main motives in the story - to expose this man.”

Do the costumes help you get into character?
“It was a thrill to work with every single member of the hair, make up and costume departments. The detail in their work was amazing to see. I had one green coat that I really enjoyed wearing. The costumes and shoes help me feel like the character is there and help me get into the zone. I was also given a lot more hair than I normally have. Everyone put so much thought and care into their work.”

Can you tell us about some of the scenes you filmed?
“Laddie talks at a dinner in a huge grand room. While we were filming it there were moments where I had to check in with myself, thinking, ‘Wow, I’m actually filming a scene like this.’ I grew up watching scenes like this one on TV, wondering what it would be like to be a part of something like that.

INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK MARTINS CONTINUED:

Being there at this long dinner table, seeing how it all worked with all of the guests, the food, the candles and the costumes, it really made me feel I was present in 1826, telling people this story. It was mesmerising what they did to create all of that. It was very special.

"Laddie also attends Frannie's trial at the Old Bailey. Those scenes were filmed at Dewsbury Town Hall. Again, there was so much attention to detail."

What was it like working with Karla-Simone Spence (Frannie Langton) and Sophie Cookson (Madame Benham)?
"Karla-Simone is fantastic as Frannie. Sometimes I would forget I was acting in a scene with her because of how compelling she is as an actor. I remember watching Sophie in a Kingsman movie. When I found out she was cast in this and then when I met her I was a bit starstruck, because I'm such a fan of her work. She was the nicest, sweetest soul to meet. It was a real pleasure to share scenes with her. I feel very lucky and privileged to be a part of this production."

What was it like working with director Andrea Harkin?
"Andrea is very detailed in her process. She knows exactly what she wants but is also very collaborative. I felt like I had a say in how I wanted things to go with the character. She was great to work with."

How do you reflect back on working on *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*?
"I learned a lot from working on *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*. I will look back on it as a pivotal moment in my career. I'm incredibly grateful to have been able to work with such a talented crew and cast and tackle a story as important as this one."

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA HARKIN

Andrea Harkin, *Director*

What drew you to *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*?
“I read the scripts when I joined the production in late 2020 and then I read the book. Which was useful because I didn’t have any preconceptions about it. I felt a sense of burning anger and injustice in the scripts. It had a feverish page turner quality to it. I was really drawn to Frannie (Karla-Simone Spence) as a character. She felt unique.

“I was also drawn to the contrast between the toxic nature of the love between Frannie and Madame (Sophie Cookson) and the real tenderness between them. Along with the themes of what it means to be innocent or guilty. Frannie was on trial in the outside world for murder. But inside she was going through an inner trial - grappling with the things she felt guilty about from her past and whether or not she was deserving of love. Frannie says, ‘Anger and want, equal as butter and sugar in a pound cake.’ That felt like a powerful reflection of her state of mind.

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA HARKIN CONTINUED:

“Frannie’s need for love and validation, set against a world of servitude, is a big driving force in the story. She is trying to reconcile her present-day desires with the guilt and shame of her past. It was a very personal story to author Sara Collins and she was absolutely the best person for the job of adapting her book. She adjusted to screenwriting very naturally. Even though this was her first screen adaptation, Sara did a great job. I connected very deeply to Frannie’s character because she was written by Sara with such intelligent passion and empathy.”

Who are Frannie Langton and Madame Marguerite Benham?

“Frannie is a young woman who was raised as a house slave on a Jamaican slave plantation. She is brought to England in 1826 thinking she’ll be set free, but instead she is given into servitude in another household, Levenhall, the Mayfair household of George Benham (Stephen Campbell Moore), a man she hates. While growing up in Jamaica, Frannie was given a ‘public schoolboy’s education' as part of an experiment to see if black people could be educated to the standard of whites.

“Frannie is a free woman on English soil but has nowhere to go. So she finds herself following her master John Langton (Steven Mackintosh). There’s something Stockholm Syndrome-ish about it as well.

“She doesn’t know anything else. The familiarity of that is something she is struggling with.

“When Frannie meets George’s wife Madame Marguerite Benham, the mistress of her new household, they connect over their love of literature and their intelligence, as well as a deeper attraction and fascination with each other. They are both oppressed by the era - Madame is a woman entirely under the control of her husband and is not encouraged to think and express herself freely.

“Madame Benham is a classic example of someone in a gilded cage. She is surrounded by beautiful things, has got comfort and is provided for. Yet she is completely trapped and not allowed to express herself. Madame wants to be a writer but is not allowed to publish. She doesn’t have her own income and is entirely dependent on her husband and under his control. She is not in love with her husband. It was a marriage of convenience and necessity for her.

“In Madame, Frannie finds a kindred spirit who is also struggling with feelings of ‘anger and want’. Frannie and Madame have a love affair and Frannie is later accused of murdering George Benham and Marguerite Benham - which she strongly denies.

“In Madame she finds a freedom because Frannie and Madame accept each other for who they are completely. When they are alone together they are in this love bubble. They connect intellectually and through their bodies, emotions and minds.

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA HARKIN CONTINUED:

It's a very full experience of love and being accepted. But then just outside that bubble is everything that is waiting for Frannie. All of her own memories that she is pushing away."

What is at the heart of this story?
"Frannie's burning need for love and validation, set against this world of servitude and oppression, is a big driving force in the story. Frannie tries to reconcile her present-day desires with the guilt and shame of her past. Madame provides a feeling of acceptance, fleeting as it might be, as well as a release from the toxic, haunting memories of her past. Frannie moves towards being able to own her anger, as well as owning her wants. She deserves to feel love, she deserves to express anger.

"Frannie experiences what it feels like to be truly accepted through her relationship with Madame as this is something she was robbed of as a small child, having been separated from her mother. Frannie reckons with her own actions and takes responsibility for her part, as well as eventually being able to release the burden of responsibility for things that were not under her control."

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA HARKIN CONTINUED:

What were the main challenges you faced?
“I wanted Frannie to feel like a real person and so we talked about her as if she was a real person from history. While there was a bit of marketing material associated with the book around the ‘gothic romance’ genre, we didn’t want to push too far into gothic genre territory, stylistically speaking, because we wanted Frannie to feel real and for her experiences to feel grounded and relatable. Not seen though the filter of over-stylised lighting or costume or performance.

“So, we took a stylistic decision early on to always use a handheld camera, to create soft and filmic light, and to allow the blocking and staging of a scene to be actor led, rather than camera led. Where possible, I also like to encourage movement and flow and not to lock my actors down and - while this creates a time pressure as it takes longer to shoot scenes with movement - it lends the show a reality that creates a nice contrast to, for example, the interview scenes at Newgate Prison.

“At times we leaned into the gothic, when things were getting tense inside Levenhall with Hep Elliot’s (Jodhi May) arrival for example, we pushed the reliance on candlelight to create atmosphere. But overall, the aesthetic was to feel filmic, beautiful, real and grounded.”

Can you tell us about the casting?
“Karla-Simone Spence is incredible. She had such immense range and captured Frannie’s complexity, intelligence, anger and desire with what seemed to be a bottomless reserve of emotion. Whether the emotion was being upset or angry. Frannie is witty as well so Karla-Simone was able to do all of that.

“We had already seen a lot of people and came across Karla-Simone later in the process. We met her three times because it’s such an important role. Online at first and then when I met her face to face it was a bit of hands down decision. We were so lucky. I don’t think anyone else could have played Frannie like that. I think it helps that she won’t be known to most of the ITV audience. People won’t have any preconceptions of her as an actor. It’s a fresh and exciting new face and talent for people to see.

“I had worked with Sophie Cookson before on *The Trial of Christine Keeler*. I knew her well and she is such an intelligent actor. She inherently felt all of Madame’s complexities including the addiction and the slight depression that Madame suffers through her oppression and then finding love in Frannie.

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA HARKIN CONTINUED:

We saw Sophie and Karla together and the chemistry and connection between them was brilliant.

“Patrick Martins, who plays Laddie Lightning, is another amazing young actor. He doesn’t have a huge amount of screen time but you feel his presence as an actor with gravitas. He’s a Dubliner so he rocked up with his Dublin accent and then started to inhabit this very posh English gentleman’s persona so naturally. He also captured the subtle damage of a child taken from his homeland and given into a household as a page boy, only to be later turned out of the household with little regard. He is immensely talented.

“I had worked with Steven Mackintosh (John Langton) before on a show called *Soulmates*. We loved working together on that so I was really happy that he came on board. A strong supporting presence to the two women at the front. Steven is a generous, gifted actor who embraced playing this nasty character and adding dimensionality, but never sympathy to this role playing Frannie’s former owner, master and biological father.”

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA HARKIN CONTINUED:

You worked with intimacy coordinator, Adelaide Waldrop, for the love scenes involving Frannie and Madame. How does that process work?

"The Producer and I were very keen to hire an intimacy coordinator because the intimacy was such an integral part of the story. We wanted that to feel real and believable and tender. And for the two actors to feel completely safe and able to convey that love authentically. Directors don't really get this training specifically. It's a gap in the industry which has, thankfully, been picked up by this new role. Adelaide had a wonderful understanding of the characters.

"The process starts with a fair bit of talking. Adelaide talked to me about how I wanted the intimacy to feel. Along with ideas about the choreography of that. Then she talked to each of the actors individually to find out what they were comfortable with and not comfortable with. And their sense of the characters' intimacy experience. Then all of us talked together about the intimate journey of Frannie and Madame and those scenes.

"When it comes to the scene on the day, that's more like choreographing an action scene, except it's intimate. But it's all very choreographed and a collaboration between all of us. So that the actors and everyone else know exactly what they are doing. That choreography lets it feel more spontaneous and real. Because the actors know what they are doing and that nothing is going to surprise them.

"It's similar to dance choreography. While Adelaide said it was almost like action choreography where you map out exactly what's going to happen. It was my first time working with an intimacy coordinator as well and it was very liberating and good for all of us."

Where did you film?

"The big challenge was the sets and location, because of the period. We were filming in Yorkshire which is a huge county. So there was a lot of driving around looking for the right locations. Levenhall, the Mayfair home of Madame and George Benham, was split across four different locations plus a set for the drawing room and Madame's bedroom.

"The opening scene, for example, was filmed at four different locations months apart, but it will look like it's all in one house. That was all a huge challenge in terms of scheduling, but you can achieve it with a good team.

"We were filming during the pandemic so travelling to Jamaica to film would have been difficult. In any event, the old period houses wouldn't necessarily exist there today in the same form. So we used Bramham Park in Yorkshire and brought in palm trees and greenery."

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA HARKIN CONTINUED:

Women's history has often been lost because it was never written down and recorded?
"It's crucial that these stories are told. That the viewpoint of these women, and a black woman, is represented. Sara Collins is a black woman who has researched that history, feels it very deeply and expressed it so authentically. A revision of the history you read in the history books and why Frannie is so important. We all connected to Frannie so deeply because she was written by Sara with such intelligent passion and empathy."

How do you reflect back on working on *The Confessions of Frannie Langton?*
"I'm very proud of *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*. Before I did this, I was looking for something contemporary, because the last thing I'd done was in the sixties, but once I read *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* I couldn't let it go, I couldn't forget about it. It was so vivid and real.

"It also spoke to my politics about wanting to make a piece that mattered, said something and represented a character we had never seen before. Also to support young new talent like Karla-Simone. Finding a bigger audience for actors like that. It was very exciting.

"I'm drawn to these kinds of really emotional stories about women and all of the complexities of being a woman. All of that spoke to me."

INTERVIEW WITH CAROL HARDING:

Carol Harding, *Producer*

When did you become involved with the production?
"I was producing another adaptation - Kit de Waal's 'My Name Is Leon' - for the BBC when I was first contacted about *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*. I later joined the production at the end of April 2021, just in time to go off on the location recces.

"The director Andrea Harkin and I had not worked together before but I knew of her work. Fortunately we quickly realised we had very similar tastes. Our views were very similar. She's a very strong visual, creative director."

Sara Collins' novel was published in April 2019 and she also wrote the screenplay?
"It's not unheard of for the author of a novel to also write the screenplay. And in this case a first-time author adapting for the first time. Drama Republic were really keen on that because of the nature of the story. Sara Collins had lived with the book for about five years at that point. So it made sense that she should adapt it for television. Sara's scripts are so good."

INTERVIEW WITH CAROL HARDING CONTINUED:

What were the main challenges you faced as the producer?

"I knew the book having read it previously. My family are from Barbados and I live in London. I was thinking about the locations, including Mayfair and Jamaica. We ended up filming in Yorkshire. So the biggest challenge for me as a producer, and a black producer, was how we would do justice to Frannie's Jamaican back story. That, for me, was the biggest editorial challenge.

In terms of Georgian London, we all know that England is full of Georgian houses. National Trust properties are large and well used for TV dramas, so I wasn't worried so much about that, but even though I'm originally from nearby, Middlesbrough, I hadn't quite recognised how vast Yorkshire was. When we went location scouting for a Georgian property we found so many we could use that matched what we were looking for.

"One of our main locations was Duncombe Park near Helmsley in North Yorkshire. It has such a beautiful interior that has been so elegantly restored. It not just suited the period in our drama but the tone of Frannie Langton. It suited what Sara Collins had written and what Andrea Harkin was trying to achieve in terms of the Gothic story. Being a stunning, beautiful Georgian property yet also enabling us to create the look and the feel of the scenes.

"We also used York Mansion House for the kitchens and somewhere else for the library. We used a Georgian square in Wakefield for the exterior of Levenhall in Mayfair. And Sledmere House near Driffield in East Yorkshire for Longreach.

"We tasked a production office runner with finding a location with Elephant Grass that could double for a field of sugar cane in Jamaica. We used Bramham Park near Wetherby as the main Jamaican house, including the main reception room. They have these wrought iron stairs that is very much in the Caribbean style of the plantation houses. Same period. And it had an outer building that we used as The Coach House. That worked really well, along with some clever visual special effects.

"We had our sets at Versa Leeds Studios. The biggest set was Madame's bedroom in the house. We needed to be able to control that set both in terms of Covid and the sensitive nature of some of the scenes involving our two lead actresses.

"We also had Frannie's cell at Newgate Prison there. While Dewsbury Town Hall in West Yorkshire doubled for the Old Bailey. We filmed a boat on water for the colonial cargo ship which Frannie travels on from Jamaica to England and we went to Hull for West India Docks in London."

INTERVIEW WITH CAROL HARDING CONTINUED:

How would you describe *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* and Frannie as a character?

“I would definitely describe it as a Gothic tragedy. The ghost of Frannie’s history as an enslaved person weaves itself through the murders, the trial and everything else. The story poses the questions: Did Frannie murder Madame and her husband George Benham? Could she have murdered someone she loved? Is she capable of murder?

“When she stands in court at the Old Bailey and gives her testimony she is also putting herself on trial. In terms of what happened to her back in Jamaica as a former enslaved person. And what responsibilities does she have? It’s lightly and subtly weaved into the story. Telling the back story of Frannie’s history. Sara’s writing is very clever in that respect. On the surface you are following the story of whether Frannie is guilty or innocent, but underneath it we’re following what Frannie is thinking emotionally about her back story as a formerly enslaved person.

“There’s also the theme about the power of words, education and intellect. That is the subtext of the whole thing and what makes Sara’s writing of this story very different to things we would normally see in the period of this subject.

INTERVIEW WITH CAROL HARDING CONTINUED:

"This story explores, in part, the ability of women at this time to use their intelligence, to be educated and being allowed to write their own histories. Frannie's back story in Jamaica is important. Sara is not really writing about what we know about slavery and people being enslaved on plantations, working the land, violence, rape and misery. The story that's never told is people who have had their minds enslaved and the psychological damage that does to you.

"It's also about the relationship between two intelligent and defiant women, determined to love each other. The fact they were brave enough to do that. It brings Wuthering Heights to mind for me and we filmed it in Yorkshire. Sara tackles quite a few themes and issues, including the emancipation of women, feminism and the power of education.

"I studied history and so I am familiar with the background to this, but one of the things I thought about while making it was about intellect and how education is empowering, and how that reflects back to today. Those who are educated are able to have agency in their own lives and futures. Frannie has been given that education and yet that is used against her.

"Also the importance of knowing your family ancestry. As a child, Frannie did not know who her biological parents were and then to be taken away from the people you see as family and sent abroad or just to another plantation, as people were. It's a really difficult thing to accept that it happened then.

"While Madame is a woman who, on the outside, is aristocratic, and yet she and Frannie have many things in common. They both have a love of words and books which brings them together and they are both trapped, not having agency or control of their own lives when, at this time, men did."

What was it like working with Karla-Simone Spence and the rest of the cast?
"The ITV audience won't know Karla-Simone Spence, who plays Frannie. That means she can be that character without any baggage. She is Frannie Langton and is in almost every scene. So she carries the show. It was a pleasure working with Karla . She was so good, not least in her emotional performance as she takes us through that narrative. It was a big challenge for her but she was excellent.

"Karla and Sophie Cookson, who plays Madame, created an on-screen truth in their performances together in the relationship their characters went on."

INTERVIEW WITH CAROL HARDING CONTINUED:

Our director Andrea Harkin had worked with Sophie before on *The Trial of Christine Keeler* so that really helped. Sophie and Karla just had a chemistry together and it worked really well. I think everybody was moved by Patrick Martins as Laddie Lightning when he read the speech his character makes at a dinner. He was just so good. Patrick really holds your attention. While both Stephen Campbell Moore (George Benham) and Steven Mackintosh (John Langton) were brilliant. Stephen's venom is so of the period and landed that role of being quietly charismatic, self assured and controlling."

How does Sara Collins depict the women at the heart of this story and what unites them?

"They are all intelligent women who don't have agency to use their intelligence in their own lives. They were born in a time where men wrote the history. They are all damaged in some way through love and by love. Sal (Amarah-Jae St. Aubyn) is the character who has most agency in this, in her own life. We don't learn of her back story but she is an independent black woman living in the early 19th century who runs her own life, is in charge of her own life and is vocal about it."

INTERVIEW WITH CAROL HARDING CONTINUED:

Frannie says "you build statues for men who build themselves on the back of other men". Sara's novel was written before the Bristol statue of slave trader Edward Colston was pulled down in June 2020?
"Edward Colston would not have had his statue if they had listened to Frannie in 1826. Sara wrote the book before his statue was thrown into the river in Bristol. It wasn't long after this period that compensation was given to slave owners when abolition came in the 1830s.

That compensation should have gone to the former enslaved people rather than the people who had already made their money from it. That's what Frannie would have been thinking."

How do you reflect back on working on *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*?
"I loved the book and I'm really proud to have produced the adaptation. To be part of the team that brings Sara's book to television, to a wider audience. Producing *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* brought to mind how many other black female writers there are, who have been writing since the 18th century, who haven't had their stories told.

"We know the Zadie Smiths, the Malorie Blackmans and they are fantastic. As is Sara Collins and Bernardine Evaristo. But there are many more. So many stories from contemporary times going back to the 18th century that have been written down. When ITV's Head of Drama Polly Hill commissioned Drama Republic to adapt *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* it was the start of a change in television in terms of the stories they want to tell.

"I produced one of ITV's *Unsaid Stories, Look At Me*, written by Lynette Linton. And so following up with this, for me, is a movement of the dial to bring different stories from different people to air for a very wide commercial audience. You can only celebrate that."

INTERVIEW WITH REBECCA DE SOUZA

Rebecca De Souza, *Executive producer*

How did this production originate?
“Lots of producers read the book and wanted the screen rights. I was the one that won the pitch and that was a very happy day! Drama Republic is very writer-led. So when the author Sara Collins said she wanted to adapt her book for the screen we were very encouraging about that. We love working with writers of all experiences.

“Although she was a first-time novelist and screenwriter, Sara was also clearly *brilliant*. There is a lot of dialogue in the novel and the characters are beautifully realised. I could not imagine anyone else writing the dialogue and characters for the screen adaptation as well as Sara.

“Sara read lots of scripts and learned how they were put together for the screen. She is really clever, very hard-working and just learned how to do it. Sara was astonishingly good, astonishingly fast. So it was the right choice. She is so intimately connected with Frannie that there was no thought of getting anyone else to adapt the book.”

INTERVIEW WITH REBECCA DE SOUZA CONTINUED:

How would you describe *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*?
“In the early days we talked about it being a murder mystery, a Gothic love story and so on. All of those things are true. But as we got deeper into it, Sara realised the complexity and the depth of the novel couldn’t be explored sufficiently if we kept within those tight tramlines. So we loosened them a bit. To make the adaptation as meaningful and far-reaching as it could be.

“I hope nobody is going to ask me to describe this drama in three words because that is difficult to do. But in terms of the themes the story explores, they include love, passion, race, class, oppression, slavery, anger, assumptions, the power of books and education and the double standards of Georgian Britain.

“One of my favourite themes is the connection between parents and children. In exploring slavery, Sara avoided exploring it in ways that have been seen many times before. We all know about the physical violence, the beatings and so on. Sara was interested in exploring what was done to minds, hearts and the psyche of enslaved people. For example, the fact there was this practice of ripping children from their mothers and giving them away...that has an emotional impact. Sara was really keen to explore what that would do to Frannie.”

Who is Frannie Langton?
“When we first see Frannie we understand her as somebody who has been brought to London from a life of enslavement in Jamaica. The story is set between the abolition of the trading of slaves and the actual abolition of slavery. So you could still be a slave in Jamaica, owned by John Langton (Steven Mackintosh), but once in England you were meant to be a free person.

“When Frannie arrives at the West India Docks in London she could run away. She is now a free woman. But she doesn’t run. It’s rather like when women are with controlling, coercive husbands. People on the outside ask, ‘Why didn’t you just go?’ And it’s hard to understand. But John Langton had so much control over her. Rather like Stockholm syndrome, where you become connected to your captor. She could run. But where would she go? Frannie has never been anywhere other than somewhere she has been told to go. That would be an extraordinary experience for her. So Frannie stays with John Langton.

This story is also partly about history traditionally being written by white men as opposed to the women and the black participants in that history. In '*The Confessions of Frannie Langton*', Frannie tells her own story - because, as she says, it is *hers* to tell.

INTERVIEW WITH REBECCA DE SOUZA CONTINUED:

Can you tell us about the cast?
“We saw lots of fantastic women for the role of Frannie Langton. Karla-Simone Spence was just wonderful. Frannie is a complex and layered character to play who draws you in. Karla-Simone is in almost every scene so it was a huge responsibility for a young actress.

“Our director Andrea Harkin had worked with Sophie Cookson, who plays Madame Benham, before on *The Trial of Christine Keeler*. Karla-Simone and Sophie obviously had to go together very well. And they did. Sophie is a wonderful actress. One of the things she can portray is that slightly out of reach quality for Madame, who as a character is a little bit precious and can turn on a sixpence. She can be hot water one minute and cold the next. But equally, when we get to know Madame, have an immense vulnerability. Sophie could do all of that.

“Stephen Campbell Moore plays George Benham, the character with the most power. Benham is a very charismatic, charming, accomplished and brilliant man. But there are things people don’t know about him.

“One of the things that was important for Sara was to look back at the men who were considered to be the brilliant scientists and enlightened thinkers of the time. Some of these men were the same people who were bending themselves out of shape to ensure the continuation of slavery because, often, their livelihoods depended on it. These so called 'enlightened' men aimed to prove that Black people were not fully human; that they were a sub-species.

INTERVIEW WITH REBECCA DE SOUZA CONTINUED:

"There's been such a lot of talk about the taking down of statues. Sara actually wrote and published her novel before the Bristol statue of slave trader Edward Colston was pulled down in June 2020. In this story, a statue would have been erected to George Benham and maybe taken down today. He is a living, breathing statue in this story that hasn't yet been taken down."

What did director Andrea Harkin bring to 'Frannie Langton'?
"I had never worked with her before but Andrea is terrific. She works so hard. She is serious about how serious it is. Serious about how much it matters. Never gives up. Never wavers in her attention. 100 per cent committed. We wanted a director who was prepared to embody the murder mystery and whodunit element of the story but who could also elevate it above that. There is much more to this story than that. So we hope the drama is broadly appealing to an audience who will enjoy it, love it and ask all the usual questions plus enjoy the beauty of it. But also go, 'Did we actually do that? Is that our history?' Maybe to also learn something.

"When we first met her Andrea said, 'It needs to be not so Gothic that we can't believe it. We have to be able to believe this kind of thing happened.' And I thought that was a really sensible, intelligent, helpful thing to say."

You filmed in Yorkshire?
"There are some excellent locations in Yorkshire. Hull can double up for a number of places and there are lots of Georgian houses in Yorkshire. We did a lot of mixing and matching. Our director Andrea Harkin is a real perfectionist so she had a corridor in one place, a room in another. It was hard work to achieve it all but well worth doing for the end result. Our designer also had such a beautiful eye. So the two of them created a fantastic look and feel for it."

How do you reflect back on working on *The Confessions of Frannie Langton?*
"I'm genuinely honoured that we were given the opportunity to do this. I do think it is an important story. But what I love is that it is entertaining at the same time. An exciting, enthralling, horrifying, romantic, beautiful TV drama with twists and turns. And then at the end you may turn to the person next to you and say, 'Did you realise that? I didn't know that.' That's what I love about *The Confessions of Frannie Langton*."

itvX

Episodes

The Confessions of Frannie Langton is a dark and gripping forbidden love story. When Jamaican maid, Frannie Langton is found in bed with her murdered white mistress she must prove to the world that she did not kill the woman she loved.

Episode 1 – London, 1826: When prominent society couple Mr. and Mrs Benham are found stabbed to death, their maid Frannie Langton is accused of murder.

Episode 2 – Frannie and Madame's illicit relationship develops. Meanwhile, we learn about the horrific experiments conducted at the Paradise plantation.

Episode 3 – Frannie and Madame's secret affair comes under threat as jealousies flare in the Benham house. Madame's dangerous addiction worsens.

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Character and Cast Credits – Episode 1

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

FRANNIE LANGTON.....KARLA SIMONE-SPENCE
MADAME BENHAM .....SOPHIE COOKSON
GEORGE BENHAM.....STEPHEN CAMPBELL MOORE
JOHN LANGTON.....STEVEN MACKINTOSH
LADDIE LIGHTNING.....PATRICK MARTINS
HEP ELLIOT.....JODHI MAY
LINUX.....POOKY QUESNELL
SAL.....AMARAH-JAE ST AUBYN
WILLIAM PETTIGREW.....HENRY PETTIGREW
PHIBBAH.....MINA ANDALA
PRU.....LYDIA PAGE
LORD PERCY.....MARTIN FISHER
JUDGE.....DAVID BARK-JONES
CONSTABLE MEEK .....JAMES ALEXANDROU
MR JESSOP..... MACE RICHARDS
DR WILKES .....ROBERT WILFORT
DR JOHN PEARS .....JAKE CURRAN
MISS BELLA LANGTON .....LOU BROADBENT
TURNKEY.....BENNY AINSWORTH
MR CASTERWICK .....ANTHONY CABLE
CHARLES .....GARETH BENNETT-RYAN

Production Credits

PRODUCTION

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS.....GREG BRENMAN, REBECCA DE SOUZA, SARA COLLINS
WRITER .....SARA COLLINS
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY.....JULIAN HOHNDORF
DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION.....SUSY LIDDELL
PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE.....JONATHAN LEATHER
HEAD OF LEGAL.....BELLA WRIGHT
PRODUCER.....CAROL HARDING
STORY PRODUCER.....MAY ANDERSON
DIRECTOR.....ANDREA HARKIN
LINE PRODUCER.....MEDYR LLEWELYN
SCRIPT SUPERVISOR.....KAREN EVERSON
CASTING DIRECTOR.....KHARMEL COCHRANE CDG
PRODUCTION MANAGER.....JENNY SIMMONDS
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR .....CHARLOTTE MANIFOLD
PRODUCTION SECRETARY .....CIARA DUNFORD
PRODUCTION ACCOUNTANT .....WILL MARWOOD
EDITOR.....DANIELLE PALMER
COMPOSER.....DOMINIK SCHERRER
PRODUCTION DESIGNER.....MARKÉTA KORINKOVA
PROPS MASTER.....ROD WHITING
1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR .....NICKI BALLANTYNE
2ND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR.....CHRIS MARSHALL

Production Credits

COSTUME DESIGNER.....NIGEL EGERTON
ASSISTANT COSTUME DESIGNER.....HOLLY PIGOTT
COSTUME SUPERVISOR.....ANNA DIXON
COVID COORDINATOR.....GRAEME BROWN
MAKE UP DESIGNER .....MARC PILCHER
MAKE UP SUPERVISOR .....LAYLA HAMOOD

About Drama Republic

Drama Republic is a leading independent television production company specialising in high quality TV drama, established in 2013 by Greg Brenman, Roanna Benn and Jude Liknaitzky. The company hit the ground running with multi award winning *Doctor Foster, The Honourable Woman* and *My Mad Fat Diary* S2.

Through 2017 to 2020 Drama Republic went on to produce *Wanderlust* (BBC One), *Black Earth Rising*, (BBC 2 / Netflix), series two of *Doctor Foster*, *Pure* (Channel 4), Mike Bartlett's *Life* (BBC One) and the adaptation of David Nicholls' bestselling novel *Us* (BBC One).

2021 saw the release of the Netflix Original series *The Irregulars* by Tom Bidwell.

Future shows include Sara Collins' adaptation of her own award-winning novel *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* (ITV), Nicole Taylor's adaptation of David Nicholls novel, *One Day*, David Ireland's *The Lovers* (Sky) and *The English* starring Emily Blunt and Chaske Spencer for BBC/Amazon.

In July 2021, Drama Republic joined Mediawan, a leading European studio producing premium content in all genres.