

The weekend's TV

Sam Wollaston How do you write a hit pop song? A riff, a melody and a lot of knob-twiddling



I'm thinking of writing a hit pop song, and calling it Industrial Action, or possibly New Balls Please. That's how you begin - you listen to the news on the radio in the morning, and that gives you your title. It's what songwriter Guy Chambers does anyway, in **Secrets of the Pop Song** (BBC2, Saturday). The news that day was about sabre-rattling between South and North Korea so he called his song World War Three. His title is better than mine, because World War Three could also be about a big fight within a relationship which is more normal pop ballad fodder than strikes or tennis tournaments.

Chambers - best known for writing songs for Robbie Williams - is doing one with velvety Canadian songsmith Rufus Wainwright. Wainwright has his own ideas, like maybe doing a rap. Chambers says he sees what he means about that being a good idea, but clearly thinks it's a very bad idea. Rapping doesn't really fit in with a ballad, which is what they're supposed to be writing.

Wainwright is like a puppy on one of those extendable leashes: he careers off in several directions (all of which lead to Planet Rufus); Chambers lets him go, then reels him in again, so gently he hardly notices, towards the accessible and the mainstream. That's what Chambers is about - writing big hits loved by the compilers of radio playlists.

They pick a piano riff, Rufus sings a melody on top, seasoning with pain and anguish and trademark swoopy bits - the song just kind of fills itself in. Later in a studio, Chambers will add other instruments, and do clever things with knobs and buttons. It's absolutely fascinating to witness the whole process from seed to fruition,

like watching over the shoulder of a brilliant artist at work, sketching an outline, adding colour, and layers, turning it into something beautiful. Actually I didn't love the song, but that doesn't really matter. I'm already looking forward to next week's film, when Chambers will be working with Mark Ronson to produce a breakthrough single for someone.

Interspersed with all the wizardry you've got other people talking about songs and songwriting. They're a cut above the usual TV pundit. So not So-and-So from the Guardian or comedian and broadcaster Who-the-Frig, but Neil Tennant, Boy George, Jessie J and Sting himself (ridiculous man, still calling himself that at nearly 60). And narrating? Stephen Mangan of course. I do like Mangan, but he is a little ubiquitous right now, Mr Voiceover. Anyway, an excellent programme.

Also very good was **Stolen** (BBC1, Sunday), Stephen Butchard's gritty thriller about child trafficking, with a strong performance by Damian Lewis as the well-meaning but ineffective DI Carter trying to stand up alone against a tide of international slavery. The child actors were excellent too - the young girl who plays Rosemary, a

picture of shyness and terror, and the boy who is Georgie, the sweet lad from eastern Europe.

Did it need the three intertwining stories though - Rosemary, Georgie and Kim Pak from Vietnam? Not really intertwining actually, all that connects them is the fact that they involve trafficking and that Carter is on the case. Poor Kim Pak hardly gets a look in - we don't get to know him in any meaningful way. I did become involved

