

= Joking Apart =

Joking Apart is a BBC television sitcom written by Steven Moffat about the rise and fall of a relationship . It juxtaposes a couple , Mark (Robert Bathurst) and Becky (Fiona Gillies) , who fall in love and marry , before getting separated and finally divorced . The twelve episodes , broadcast between 1993 and 1995 , were directed by Bob Spiers and produced by Andre Ptaszynski for independent production company Pola Jones .

The show is semi @-@ autobiographical ; it was inspired by the then @-@ recent separation of Moffat and his first wife . Some of the episodes in the first series followed a non @-@ linear parallel structure , contrasting the rise of the relationship with the fall . Other episodes were ensemble farces , predominantly including the couple 's friends Robert (Paul Raffield) and Tracy (Tracie Bennett) . Paul Mark Elliott also appeared as Trevor , Becky 's lover .

Scheduling problems meant that the show attracted low viewing figures . However , it scored highly on the Appreciation Index and accrued a loyal fanbase . One fan acquired the home video rights from the BBC and released both series on his own DVD label .

= = Production = =

= = = Inception = = =

By 1990 , Moffat had written two series of Press Gang , but the programme 's high cost along with organisational changes at Central cast its future in doubt . As Moffat wondered what to do next and worried about his future employment , Bob Spiers , Press Gang 's primary director , suggested that he meet with producer Andre Ptaszynski to discuss writing a sitcom . Moffat 's father had been a headteacher and Moffat himself had taught English before writing Press Gang , so his initial proposal was a programme similar to what would become Chalk , a series that eventually aired in 1997 .

As he was separating from his wife , Moffat was going through a difficult period and aspects of it coloured his creative output . He introduced a proxy of his wife 's new partner into the Press Gang episode " The Big Finish ? " , the character Brian Magboy (Simon Schatzberger) . Moffat scripted unfortunate situations for the Magboy character , such as having a typewriter drop on his foot . Moffat says that the character 's name was inspired by his wife 's : " Magboy : Maggie 's boy " .

During the pitch meeting at the Groucho Club , Ptaszynski realised that Moffat was talking passionately about his impending divorce and suggested that he write about that instead of his initial proposal , a school sitcom . Taking Ptaszynski 's advice , Moffat 's new idea was about " a sitcom writer whose wife leaves him " . Speaking about the autobiographical elements of the show , the writer jokes that he has to remember that his wife didn 't leave him for an estate agent ; his wife was an estate agent . In 2003 , Moffat told The New York Times that his " ex @-@ wife wasn 't terribly pleased about her failed marriage being presented as a sitcom on BBC2 on Monday nights " . In an interview with Richard Herring , Moffat says that " the sit @-@ com actually lasted slightly longer than my marriage " . Conversely , his later sitcom Coupling was based on his relationship with his second wife , TV producer Sue Vertue . Moffat reused the surname ' Taylor ' , which is Mark 's surname in Joking Apart , for Jack Davenport 's character Steve in Coupling .

= = = Recording = = =

The pilot , directed by John Kilby , was filmed at Pebble Mill in Birmingham on 9 ? 10 August 1990 . It is practically identical to the first episode of the series proper ; some scenes are even reused , notably the scene with Mark and Becky meeting when he accidentally turns up at a funeral . The reused footage gave rise to the first episode 's shared director credit between Spiers and Kilby . The stand @-@ up sequences were shot against a black background . Although this made it clearer that they were not " real " , Moffat thought that it looked odd . The pilot was transmitted on BBC2 as part

of its Comic Asides series of pilot shows on 12 July 1991 .

Moffat had written all six episodes of the first series before recording commenced . Never again would he be so far in advance of production . With series two , he had written only the first four episodes by the time recording had commenced , only delivering the final episode by the first day of rehearsals .

All of the location shots were filmed at the beginning of the production block . Recording for the first series of six episodes began on location in the first half of April 1992 and were mainly filmed in Chelsea within a short distance from the director 's home . The stand @-@ up sequences were filmed in the Café Des Artistes on London 's Fulham Road , now known as the Valmont Club , and were shot for the benefit of the studio audience , with the intention of reshooting them later for the broadcast version . Robert Bathurst has complained that , in order to save £ 5 @,@ 000 , this promised reshoot never materialised . The close ups of Bathurst were filmed in the studio for the second series , with stock footage of the club 's audience reused .

After the exterior shots had been filmed , the episodes were recorded at BBC Television Centre in April and May 1992 for the first series , and 12 November until 18 December 1993 for the second . Studio recording sessions were normally completed quickly ; Gillies recalls " an hour and a half , tops " . To a large extent , the editing occurred live during the studio recording with only tightening later . At the end of the recording on Sunday evenings Spiers would review the show before retiring to the bar , with the bulk of the work complete . Moffat compares this to the editing of modern sitcoms , which , he says , are edited more like film .

= = = Structure = = =

Many of the first six episodes of Joking Apart were constructed non @-@ sequentially , with scenes from the beginning of the relationship juxtaposed with those from the end . Moffat describes this non @-@ linear technique as a " romantic comedy , but a romantic comedy backwards because it ends with the couple unhappy " . Moffat had experimented with non @-@ linear narrative in Press Gang , notably the episode " Monday @-@ Tuesday " . Various episodes of Coupling played with structure , such as the fourth series episode " 9 ½ Minutes " which showed the same events from three perspectives .

All of the episodes open with Bathurst portraying Mark Taylor , a sitcom writer , apparently performing stand @-@ up in a small comedy club . These performances are fantasy sequences , playing out in the character 's mind and portraying his internal creative processes as comedic monologues ; these monologues mainly employ material from the character 's failing marriage and are intended to show that " he thinks in punchlines , in comedy " . Episodes regularly cut back to these fantasy performances , which usually open with the signature line : " My wife left me ... " . Moffat felt that audiences needed to know from the start that the relationship would not survive . However , it was unclear to some viewers that the fantasy sequences were set in the writer 's mind ; many journalists reported that the character Mark was a stand @-@ up comic , not a sitcom writer .

In the fantasy sequences for the pilot , Bathurst was filmed against a completely black backdrop , which Moffat describes as " hell to look at " . For the series , the sequences were filmed in a real club . Moffat describes this as the " wrong direction " as it became unclear that the fantasy sequences were " not real " . Moffat observes that , like Seinfeld , an American sitcom that used a similar device , Joking Apart would use less of the stand @-@ up as the series progressed . In retrospect , Moffat regrets including the stand @-@ up sequences . Bathurst , however , has considered refilming them as a video diary . Now with older features , he can portray a Mark Taylor reflecting on his earlier life . Both are very critical of the sequences in the DVD audio commentaries . The sequences have also drawn the sharpest criticisms from reviewers . The second series followed a more linear structure , although it retained the stand @-@ up sequences .

= = = Music and titles = = =

" Fool (If You Think It 's Over) " , written by Chris Rea , was used for both the opening and closing

credit sequences . The original Rea version was used for the pilot 's closing credits , but for the series it was performed by Kenny Craddock , who arranged the incidental music with Colin Gibson . Beginning with a saxophone , only the chorus of the theme song accompanied the opening titles . These ran over legal imagery and a sequence of images of famous separated couples , including Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe ; Winnie and Nelson Mandela ; The Princess Anne and Mark Phillips , and culminating in Mark and Becky . The closing credits featured a verse and chorus . The first part of the closing credits was usually over a still of the final frame , and faded to black with the line " All dressed in black . "

= = Characters = =

Mark Taylor (Robert Bathurst) is a television sitcom writer . Other than episode one , where he is shown working on a script and references to a show of his that had aired during a dinner with Robert and Tracy the night before , his work is hardly mentioned . Mark is quick @-@ witted , and the stand @-@ up sequences indicate that he thinks in one @-@ liners . However , this proves to be the downfall of his marriage with Becky , who says that she didn 't sign on to become his " lawfully wedded straight man " . In one episode , Mark jokes about worrying if his virginity will heal back ; Becky articulates her frustration by responding " What page is that on ? " Identifying his insecurities , she points out that the " thing about someone who uses humour as a weapon , is not the sense of humour , but the fact that they need a weapon " . In interviews , Bathurst has compared Steven Moffat to his character : Mark is " a man whose wife leaves him because he talks in one @-@ liners . And Steven Moffat 's wife had just left him , because he talks in one @-@ liners . "

Robert Bathurst , a former Footlights president , was cast as Mark Taylor . He was performing on a live topical programme on BSB called Up Yer News . A fellow performer on that show also auditioned for the part at what is now the Soho Theatre , then the old Soho Synagogue in Dean Street , and claimed that he would break Bathurst 's legs if the latter got the job . In a 2005 interview , Bathurst recalls that the threat seemed not to be entirely jocular . Bathurst speaks very highly of Joking Apart , identifying it as a " career highlight " and the most enjoyable job he has ever done . Retrospectively , he wishes that he had " roughened up " Mark , as he was " too designery " .

Becky Johnson / Taylor (Fiona Gillies) meets Mark at a funeral and they eventually marry . Although irritated at being his comic foil , she is capable of her own quick @-@ witted put @-@ downs . In episode 3 , for example , she wins an impromptu one @-@ liner contest over Mark , whose put @-@ downs fall flat . Becky is shown as an independent woman , meeting Mark on her terms . The first series revolves around her leaving Mark for estate agent Trevor , whom she subsequently cheats in series two . This was Fiona Gillies ' first major television role , having appeared in " The Hound of the Baskervilles " , a 1988 episode of The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes , and the mini @-@ series Mother Love . She was aware that some of her dialogue was based on what had been said to Moffat during his own separation .

Robert and Tracy Glazebrook (Paul Raffield and Tracie Bennett) are their " increasingly bizarre and totally dim friends " . They are initially Becky 's friends , but soon befriend Mark , comforting him on the night Becky leaves him . Tracy , as Tracie Bennett identifies , is a stereotypical Tracy ? normally a dysphemism for an intellectually inadequate , usually blonde , female . However , " she 's not a bimbo : she 's quite clever in her own logic " . Bennett jokes that she was quite offended that such a character was named Tracy . Tracy 's catchphrase of " you 're a silly " was originally Moffat 's typographical error , which Bennett faithfully reproduced in her performance . They decided that the amended version worked well for the character .

They are both naive about sex and technology . Tracy , for example , attempts to telephone Robert to inform him that he 's lost his mobile phone , and believes that she is a lesbian when she discovers her husband in women 's clothing . They have a baby , who is seen or referred to occasionally . This reflects , as the writer observes , Moffat 's inexperience of looking after children at the time .

Trevor (Paul Mark Elliott) is Becky 's lover . His job as an estate agent regularly provokes derision from Mark . (Moffat 's ex @-@ wife was an estate agent .) He is himself cheated on in the second series , as Becky dates her solicitor Michael (Tony Gardner) . His debut appearance is in the third

episode where he and Becky go to Robert and Tracy 's house for dinner , but generally features less regularly than the main ensemble .

= = Episodes = =

= = = Series one = = =

The first episode showed the couple meeting at a funeral , marrying , and going through the honeymoon phase . The last section of the episode features a confrontation between Becky and Mark , in which the former admits that she is an adulteress before realising that all of her friends were hiding around her living room in preparation for a surprise party for her . The story continues directly into episode two , when Robert and Tracy return to the flat to check on Mark after his wife 's departure . The three recall the circumstances in which they had first met . After their first date , the couple go back to Becky 's flat . While she is in the bathroom , he strips down to his boxer shorts and handcuffs himself to the bedpost . Unable to free himself , Robert and Tracy walk in on him . Moffat used a similar scenario for the Coupling episode " The Freckle , the Key , and the Couple who Weren 't " and reveals in its audio commentary that it is based on a situation with one of his ex @-@ girlfriends .

In the third episode , Mark arrives at Robert and Tracy 's house on the wrong night for a dinner party . The couple are entertaining that night , but are instead expecting Becky and her new boyfriend Trevor . Hopeful of a reconciliation , Mark assumes that his friends are trying to smooth things over between them . They spend the evening trying to keep Mark and Trevor apart , each not knowing that the other is also there . Episode five makes extensive use of what Moffat labels " techno @-@ farce " , which uses technology , predominantly telephones , to facilitate the farcical situations . Moffat considers this episode the best of the show . Discussing the series as a whole , he feels that the story ends after this episode . It begins when Mark attempts to return Robert 's " portable telephone " and ends with Robert threatening to shoot Mark after the latter has slept with Tracy . The series ends with Becky and Trevor , and Robert and Tracy reconciling their relationships and Mark being left alone .

= = = Series two = = =

The format was changed for this series , with the dual timelines and much of the flashbacks dropped for a more linear narrative . Moffat felt that the relationship had already been sufficiently established in the first series so there was little point going back to the start . Set two months after the end of series one , Mark meets Becky in a newsagent , where he is purchasing pornographic magazines . He discovers the location of Becky and Trevor 's house and breaks in using Tracy 's keys . However , he is forced to hide under the bed when Becky and Trevor return home . Listening to them having sex , he becomes optimistic when he thinks that Becky begins to shout his name (" M ... ") . The name turns out to be Michael (Tony Gardner) , Becky 's solicitor with whom she is now cheating on Trevor .

Robert and Tracy are given more stories than in the first series . Their main story arc begins in the third episode when Robert is caught by all of the main characters and his parents in a maid 's outfit being spanked by a prostitute . The couple temporarily separate while Robert experiments with cross @-@ dressing , but they are reunited by the end of the series .

The fourth episode features a scene where Mark jams his dressing gown in the door and is forced to hide naked in his new neighbour 's flat . This sequence was Moffat 's revenge for Bathurst 's late arrival at the series one press launch at the Café Royal in Regent Street , London . Moffat threatened that if they ever did a second series he would write a whole episode in which Bathurst was naked . After being mistaken for a flasher , Mark is punched by his neighbour 's brother . When he awakens he is confronted by a man (Kerry Shale) in a red polo neck jumper who claims to be " his very best friend " . In the fifth episode it transpires that the man , who identifies himself as Dick ,

is the personification of Mark 's penis .

The final episode begins after Becky and Michael had slept together while house sitting for Tracy and Robert , and Michael hides in the bathroom when the latter couple return . Tracy phones a morning television phone @-@ in show (hosted by Michael Thomas and Helen Atkinson @-@ Wood , with appearances by Rachael Fielding and Jonathan Barlow) , and when she realises that the show 's divorce expert is hiding in her bathroom she takes on his role (with a heavy Northern accent , actually a slightly exaggerated version of Bennett 's own voice) to give herself advice on the other line . Bennett says this was the hardest thing she has had to do in her career .

= = Scheduling = =

After the pilot was transmitted on 12 July 1991 , the BBC were interested in a series . However , Moffat had signed on to write the third and fourth series of Press Gang as one twelve @-@ episode block so it was not until 1992 that they produced the series . After being postponed from the autumn schedules , the first series was transmitted on Thursday evenings on BBC2 from 7 January until 11 February 1993 .

The second series was filmed in late 1993 . However , the controller of BBC2 , Michael Jackson , had little faith in the project at the time , which , according to the writer , he now admits was wrong . Jackson felt that it was too mainstream for BBC2 and not mainstream enough for BBC1 . The second series was scheduled to air from 11 June 1994 , but was delayed many times . Bathurst articulates the group 's frustration at the delay :

Every so often , I ? d get a call from the producer saying , it ? s going out at this time . The publicity people would be alerted , then we ? d get a call saying no , it ? s not , it ? s been put back . That happened six times , I think , altogether ? seven reschedules in a year or so ... It was extraordinary and inexplicable , and just one of these things that happen . I mean , a lot of shows are left on people ? s desks and they hardly get seen , and Joking Apart was certainly one of those . Meanwhile , they were making about four series of The Brittas Empire , and you thought , " Bloody Hell ! Come on , surely ? . ? " To my mind , our show was a very superior product , and it upset me that other shows , which I , personally , felt were broader and less interesting , were getting precedence .

The first series was repeated in preparation for the six episodes of the second series , which began transmission on Tuesday evenings from 3 January until 7 February 1995 . The second series was only transmitted once even though the BBC had paid to show it twice . Moffat feels that the delay damaged the series because such bad scheduling hinders returning audiences and that the two @-@ year gap meant that it seemed as if Mark " had been banging on about this sodding divorce for an awfully long time ! "

After winning the Montreux award it seemed inevitable that the show would get a third series . At a Christmas party , a BBC executive had plans for the ratings of a third series " to go like Everest " , indicating a steep slope with his hands . Bathurst replied , " But , Everest goes down the other side ... " The show was not recommissioned . Moffat says that he had no idea for a third series anyway , as it would have been difficult to contrive how a group of people who did not particularly like each other would get together so regularly .

= = Reception = =

The scheduling problems meant that the show did not get the momentum to achieve high viewing figures . Moffat jokes that " the eight people who saw it were very happy indeed " . However , as Bathurst observes , " there 's an underground of people who like it " . The show rated highly on the Appreciation Index , meaning that viewers thought very highly of the programme . Bathurst says that drunks on the London Underground tell him in detail the plot of their favourite episode . The cast claim that the programme has a timeless , universal appeal as there are no time @-@ specific references apart from the typewriter and the size of the mobile telephones . Gillies says that her accountant watches it to cheer himself up , while Bathurst recalls that a friend cheered so loudly

when Mark pushes avocado into Trevor 's face in the third episode that he woke his son .

Critical reception was generally positive . In his overview of Moffat 's celebrated Press Gang , Paul Cornell said that the writer " continues to impress " with Joking Apart . The Daily Express said that it was " flavoured with a delicious bitterness about the perfidy of women and the conscious @-@ less nature of the male orgasm , it was plotted with the intricacy of a French farce " . Another reviewer for the Express commented that " it 's quite funny and an acute analysis " of the modern divorce , and that the first episode was " distinctly promising " . Similarly DVD Review comments that " Moffat 's distillation of his marriage melting down is as precise a piece of comic writing as you 're likely to find . "

Not all reviews were completely positive . Criticising Bathurst for being too handsome to convey the frustrations of a writer , the Daily Telegraph said that the show had " its problems but possesses a dark , mordant wit " . William Gallagher comments that " Press Gang was pretty flawless , but Joking Apart would veer from brilliance to schoolboy humour from week to week . "

While the transmission of series two was being delayed by BBC 2 controller Michael Jackson , the show won the Bronze Rose of Montreux and was entered for the Emmys . The show was remade in Portugal but used a linear structure rather than the flashbacks . Moffat reflects that although the remake is " not as dark or ground @-@ breaking " as the original , it is " probably more fun " because it ends happily .

= = DVD release = =

Both series have been released on DVD . The DVD is notable because a fan of the show , Craig Robins , bought the rights from 2Entertain , BBC Worldwide 's DVD interest , and released it on his own independent label , Replay DVD . Robins put up £ 30 @,@ 000 of his own money to buy the rights and produced the series one disc . As a professional videotape editor , Robins was able to restore the video , and author the disc himself , using a piece of freeware to transcribe the dialogue for the subtitles .

The first series was released on DVD on 29 May 2006 . It contains audio commentaries on four of the episodes from Moffat , Bathurst , Gillies and Bennett . It also contains a featurette , " Fool If You Think It 's Over " , with retrospective interviews . The second series was released on 17 March 2008 as a two @-@ disc set . It contains audio commentaries on all episodes : five featuring a mix of Moffat , Bathurst , Gillies , Bennett , Raffield and Ptaszynski , with episode two featuring Spiers , and production manager Stacey Adair that concentrates on the behind @-@ the @-@ scenes production . The pilot from Comic Asides is also included on Disc 2 , along with a complete set of Series Two scripts in Portable Document Format (PDF) and a PDF article entitled " Joking Apart In The Studio " . The release includes a companion booklet .

Replay DVD was commended in reviews for the quality of the disc . DVD Times reports that " Joking Apart looks much sharper than the average television show on DVD . The colours are also much richer and have obviously been fixed throughout to present a more uniform image while the picture is bright and clear . " The featurette on the series 1 set is labelled " a great little feature " , with Moffat particularly praised for his contribution . DVD Times identifies " a real sense of friendship and of a real liking for this show " within the commentaries , highlighting that Moffat " sounds really happy ... for Joking Apart to have finally gotten some recognition " .