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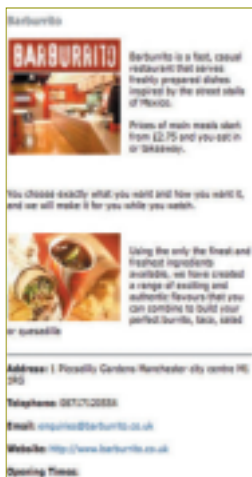
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IN THE FRAME Steve Frost tells Steph Elmore the decision to drop several cast members was made before he joined Coronation Street. He has gone on to produce many award-winning storylines, including Tracy's murder of the bullying Charlie Stubbs, below

Warming to the Iceman

Corrie producer Steve Frost chats over lunch about 'that' reputation, why he doesn't like watching his work, and the soap's new villains

CORONATION Street producer Steve Frost was labelled the Iceman when several cast members were axed on his arrival 18 months ago, but he has helped the show secure a clutch of prizes at this year's British Soap Awards.

Corrie won best soap and six other awards, including best storyline for the explosive plot which saw Tracy take revenge on cheating Charlie.

Steve was also the producer at Emmerdale, where he transformed the once sleepy Yorkshire village by introducing the likes of Patsy Kensit to the show, but he admits he is no soap fan.

"Some people are diehard fans, but I'm not," he says. "Having a dispassionate view allows me to stand back and be objective about storylines. Plus, I'll leave the room if it's on, because I'll end up seeing something that I'd wished I'd have done differently."

We meet at the Lowry Hotel's River Restaurant, one of Steve's favourites, where Steve opts for seabass and I for the fish and chips – though I did toy with the idea of 'hot pot' in deference to the Rover's famous dish.

Steve is from the East Midlands, is in his mid-thirties, and studied English Literature at Cambridge University. I ask him how he ended up as one of soap's top producers.

"I wanted to be a writer in drama but I wasn't that good at it. I started in TV as a runner on music videos, then as an assistant director and

Table Talk

WITH STEPH ELMORE

went into a drama job as a script editor and then to producer."

So are awards like the Baftas and the British Soap Awards important to Steve? He insists they aren't. "I have to admit I was surprised when Casualty won best continuing drama at the Baftas the other week. But that's not a public vote, they are voted for by Bafta members. They are an honour, but you don't do soap for critical acclaim or artistic triumph. You want to win when there is a measure of the viewers' interest."

Steve says his Iceman reputation was slightly "unfair" as the decisions to axe cast members were made before he joined, and he brought back loudmouth Janice Battersby who was part of that cull. "I think she represents the north west working class woman, and that's what Coronation Street represents. You would expect to meet Janice down your local," he says.

He believes people love strong Northern women and the 'superbitch' character: "They are the types that say the things other women wish they could have said."

So with Tracy Barlow behind bars would he like to see a return from Karen McDonald? "I would love to

have Suranne back! Whenever I see her, I always ask her when she is free! Obviously, she is very busy."

Does he think Coronation Street is a true reflection of modern Salford? "It can never be a true representation. We have to keep a regional flavour, yet not too literally. With 12 million people watching, we have got to keep a broad-based appeal," he admits.

With that in mind, does he feel a responsibility as a producer of a show that can transform the way people think, socially and morally? "I always feel a responsibility but it doesn't mean we can't do controversial, we just can't misrepresent it. We recently made a decision to change the storyline of the kidnap of Freddie Peacock, which we had already started to film as it was disturbingly close to the Madeleine McCann case."

He is also sceptical about soaps using 'non-actors', such as former Page 3 model Linda Lusardi in Emmerdale, to boost ratings.

"I hate using celebrities for celebrity sake. Sometimes agents call me and say we have a celebrity that would be good for your show. I say well we have 50 actors with the highest profile in the UK already so no one is really going to increase the profile any more."

So what about Kym Ryder, a former reality TV popstar? "Kym is a great actress, but then she had studied performing arts. She wasn't just a celebrity trying to act."

I couldn't let him finish lunch without asking who is going to be the new villain now Charlie Stubbs has been killed off?

"David Platt is one to watch out for. He will be the constant thorn in the Platt family's side as his teenage angst develops. Also, the seemingly sweet teacher, John Stape who has re-ignited Fizz's affections may not be as sweet as he makes out and may cause some havoc."

Steve says producers have a shelf life in soap and whether he's a diehard fan or not, soap would certainly be a duller place without him!

» River Restaurant, Lowry Hotel, Salford (0161 827 4041, thelowryhotel.com).

