

BITEBACK RICHARD BROOKS

● Twenty years ago, BBC TV was within days of filming an adaptation of Salman Rushdie's Booker-winning novel *Midnight's Children* in Sri Lanka when local Muslims objected, leading to its cancellation. Two decades on, Radio 4 has just recorded its own dramatisation, to be broadcast on August 15, 70 years to the day after India became independent. Spread over eight time slots, it will tell the story around Saleem Sinai, born at midnight on the day of Partition.

Rushdie now thinks his book, which tackles the 30 years before and after Partition, was too optimistic about the more immediate future of his birth country. Of Muslim heritage, he is even more pessimistic today, feeling that it is turning into a theocratic Hindu state: "Not what the founding fathers wanted." Written as only his second novel in 1981, when he was just 34, it was "colossally ambitious", he admits. "I don't know how I had the gumption to do it. I'd be too scared now."

● It's halfway through Hull's year as City of Culture, and the once unloved and unvisited Humberside is proving the naysayers wrong. New figures show that 90% of residents (in a city of about 260,000) have attended at least one cultural event since January, and seven out of 10 say the year is having a positive effect on their lives. The Ferens Art Gallery and Maritime Museum have

seen figures soar year on year, and the Hull Truck Theatre, bailed out several times not long ago by the Arts Council, has put many more bums on seats, with 40% of tickets going to first-time visitors.

Last Wednesday, an exhibition about Philip Larkin opened at the

Indian summer *Rushdie's Midnight's Children will air on Radio 4 in August*

university where he was chief librarian for many years, and later this month Hull hosts the first Prom outside London since the 1930s — a concert commemorating the 300th anniversary of Handel's *Water Music*. The Humberside port is obviously an apposite venue for the event. It's about time, too, that the Proms went outside the capital after so long.

● Hull's success has led to 11 bidders for City of Culture in 2021; the government will announce a shortlist soon. Leading the field are English cities including Coventry, Sunderland, Portsmouth and Stoke-on-Trent; there is a bid, too, from Swansea, and rather less realistic ones from St Davids, Pembrokeshire, and Paisley, near Glasgow. I expect Coventry, Stoke and Swansea to be on the shortlist, with the Welsh city standing a decent chance of winning when the culture department makes its final decision in December.

● BBC1's six-part drama *Broken*, about a priest, Father Michael, and his community,

ended on Tuesday. It was magnificent and confirmed Jimmy McGovern as our finest TV dramatist. It was inspired casting, too, to choose Sean Bean as the priest — he has been known primarily for playing heavies or buccaneers in series such as *Sharpe* and *Game of Thrones*. With its open-ended denouement, might *Broken* return? I hope so.



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