

## So What Do You Do, Hamish Hamilton, Director of Some of the World's Biggest Televised Events?

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Like me, you probably tuned in to the Olympic ceremonies, wondering how mortals could pull off such an awe-inspiring spectacle. Or perhaps on New Year's Eve, clad in pajamas, you've rocked out to the music and dizzying aerial views of shivering crowds in Times Square. Maybe you clear your schedule annually to catch the Super Bowl Halftime shows or the exuberant Victoria's Secret fashion shows.

Regardless of your propensity for live television events, there's a good chance you've tuned in to one (or many) of Hamish Hamilton's ambitious productions at some point in your life. You have seen the end results, now here's a peek at the hectic pre-production world of these events -- from the perspective of this award-winning live television director and producer.

Name: Hamish Hamilton

Position: Live event director and producer, Done and Dusted

Resume: His directing career began at the BBC in Scotland, and he has most recently directed the 2013 Victoria's Secret Fashion Show, 2013 MTV Music Awards and Super Bowl XLVII Halftime Show. Next up for him is the 2014 Super Bowl Halftime Show. Hamish is also a Grammy, Emmy and 2013 BAFTA award winner.

Birthdate: April 8, 1966

Hometown: London

Marital status: Married

Media mentor(s): David Mallet, Julia Knowles

Best career advice received: Enjoy the way up, as the way down sucks.

Last book read: Tired of Being Tired, by Jesse Lynn Hanley

Website: [DoneAndDusted.com](http://DoneAndDusted.com)

### **How did you become the go-to guy for these huge productions?**

I came into the entertainment world as a director at the BBC and became a live event director, which means doing an awful lot of music. As I've traveled through my career I've stepped sideways, from music to things far from music like the London Olympic and Paralympic opening and closing ceremonies. I've also done theater pieces. But my work usually involves an event that is live in front of a group of people, and sometimes also live on television.

### **What do your days and weeks typically look like leading up to an event?**

I would say the minimum planning period is between six and nine months, but it can be multiple years. The first few months are lots of discussion. It's so varied; there is no such thing as a kind of a standard show that I do, really, but six months prior we'll talk about what the show will be, the design, the visuals, the narrative. If you have those down, you can get into more intricate production details like locations,

talent, storyline and sets. For example, the Super Bowl took about a year to plan, while the Olympics took about three years.

In the few weeks before a big show it's almost a 24-hour-a-day thing. So many things have to get decided, discussed, analyzed and executed. I know a lot of people who work in film; their timelines are a lot longer than ours. Sort of like a war of attrition, they go for weeks and weeks, weeks and weeks.

But if you take the timeline of a film and literally turn it on its end -- that's what we do because we have to make a huge number of decisions in a very small space of time, more so on rehearsal days, and even more so on event days especially if you're live. The rehearsal days are intense, long, demanding, physically exhausting, mentally exhausting. You have to make very big decisions quite quickly. I try to get a lot of sleep. It's crucial to be mentally fit on show day. That said, I normally put in between 14- and 16-hour work days.

Having done so many diverse projects, I've learned how to control my energy so that I've got enough left for the live shows -- the last thing you want is to show up to direct a live show being completely and utterly exhausted. That's really where you need to make lighting-shot decisions. Genuinely, it sounds ridiculous, but I get B12, I exercise and I relax because I have to; otherwise, I would just be anxious or have negative energy. I try to flip it on its head; I try to be the one on the production who's smiling and happy and confident.

I think it's really important to remember I'm blessed to work in this incredible field. I made a conscious decision on the Olympics [that] however unbelievably dark it might get, I wasn't going to go dark; I was going to remain positive. I was blessed to be directing in my hometown, working for the Oscar winner Danny Boyle, who is a creative genius. He's unbelievably talented and a wonderful gentleman, but he had some creatively and technically crazy requests.

### **What happens when something on the production side goes wrong during a show?**

We were doing a U2 show in Milan many years ago, and the generators broke down and we lost everything. In that kind of situation, you've just got to laugh. What can you do, you know? So we had to get a new generator and hook it up. We lost about 20 minutes and went back to work, fortunately. But what are you going to do?

Then, at the 2013 VMAs we had the most disastrous, monumental technical breakdown 30 minutes before we went on air. The entire stage, which was supposed to rotate 360 degrees, became jammed. We were faced with the very real possibility there would be no show. It was one of those moments that's kind of a nightmare; something you think isn't ever going to happen. I just went cold. But you just deal with it. You know, when you have a lot of really great people thinking calmly, out of the box, and working as a team to do something difficult, that's very important. It's actually bizarre because a lot of people don't even notice, the program isn't usually affected -- and we had Miley Cyrus and the twerking incident, which kind of overshadowed everything!

It's very easy for anyone who works with these live shows to go to a place where you're snapping at people or you're being curt or rude. If you're the best at what you do, you really have to be able to deal with it and hope to just rise to the occasion. A few times on live television I wasn't smiling, but I don't think I ever lost my temper. I hope that people would say that I'm reasonably relaxed and controlled in my approach to people.

### **How do you deal with celebrities behaving badly?**

Celebrities always behave badly. People watching modern television insist they want to see celebrities, so we have celebrities, and actually when they misbehave, those are some great television moments. Kanye West standing up on stage [at the VMAs] was like, "What the f\*ck's happening here?" But then you think, "This is f\*cking great for the ratings." And it's the same with Miley, you go, this is gonna kick off! So, you know, I don't think you'll find a live director who would want to do shows where celebrities behave themselves all the time.

### **What are some of your most memorable directing experiences?**

I was directing U2 at their lifetime achievement performance, and I had a tear in my eyes. I'm like, "I can't believe this is happening." I had another U2 experience when I went live with this amazing tracking shot, and you can actually see me going, "I f\*cking love my job!" screaming like a lunatic. As a young boy I queued to buy U2 records. To be working with them was an unbelievable joy!

I've also loved directing Robbie Williams... Peter Gabriel or the Super Bowl -- [at first] I didn't really get it because I'm a Brit, but then I'm thinking, "Wow, this is really f\*cking enormous." The Madonna show [I did] was great, and Beyonce['s], that was special -- they both taught me a lot, and their excellence propelled me to try to be as good as them. As the director of a live show, you have an enormous weight of responsibility on your shoulders to do justice to these amazing performers, which is really important to me.