

TV producer Charlie Hanson faces sex predator allegations

Sophie Wilkinson, Lucy Bannerman

Saturday May 29 2021, 12.01am, The Times



Charlie Hanson in Los Angeles in 2018 with Amma Asante, left, and Abbie Cornish, who are not among his accusers

KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/BAFTA LA/GETTY IMAGES

An award-winning producer has been removed from the Netflix series *After Life* and had his Bafta membership revoked after a group of women accused him of being a sexual predator.

Charlie Hanson, 68, is a well-known figure in television who has produced sitcoms such as *Extras*, *Desmond's* and *Birds of a Feather* in a 40-year career. He had been working on *After Life*, starring Ricky Gervais, until this week.

The Golden Globe-winning producer has been vocal in his support for the MeToo movement, criticising Bafta — of which he was a member — for not doing more

when it was first made aware of the [allegations of sexual misconduct](#) against the actor and director, Noel Clarke.

The Times has learnt that Hanson himself is now the subject of complaints from 11 women, who have written to Bafta and Netflix, outlining allegations including incidents of serious sexual assault between 2008 and 2015.

They claim he preyed on them as young women “promising them a starry career under his wing” before making unwanted sexual advances and then leaving them fearful their careers would suffer if they rebuffed him or reported his behaviour.

One woman claims she met Hanson in 2008 to discuss a script. She claims they had sex to which she did not consent and that the incident left her traumatised.

A second woman alleges that Hanson had “acted as a mentor”, producing showreels and introducing her to industry contacts. She claims he sexually assaulted her at her home in 2015 when she was too inebriated to consent.

Hanson has denied all wrongdoing alleged by the women, who remain anonymous. He said he would co-operate fully with any formal investigation and was appalled by these “historical and false allegations”.

In a 5,000-word email to Netflix and Bafta, the women alleged: “Charlie Hanson is a predator who uses his reputation, connections and standing in order to groom far younger, impressionable and sometimes vulnerable women into trusting him. At times he will promise them a starry career under his wing, and then exploits that trust in creepy and illegal ways. He then tries to diminish the seriousness of what he’s done by telling these young women — us — that it wasn’t as bad as it seemed, that it was somehow blameless. He does his best to convince himself — and others — that this method of operating is fine. But we know it is not fine.”

The women urged senior executives to consider whether it was appropriate for Hanson to continue in his roles.

“Please tell us what you are doing to ensure Charlie Hanson will no longer be able to use his standing with both Netflix and Bafta in order to launder his reputation and continue to hurt women,” she said.

Bafta confirmed it had suspended Hanson’s membership. Netflix confirmed that Hanson has been removed from the *After Life* production. *The Times* understands he has not returned to its set since Netflix received the allegations on Monday.

When asked about the Clarke controversy this month, Hanson told *Variety* magazine that abuse of power in the entertainment industry is “learnt behaviour that is not confronted enough”.

Hanson told *The Times* he would fight the allegations “because I know that’s not what I’m like”.

His agent confirmed that he was no longer represented by United Agents.

Hanson said he had not been sent the full email from Bafta or Netflix, but when approached for comment his solicitor said in a statement: “Our client is shocked and appalled by these historical and false allegations of improper conduct towards women. He maintains that he has never acted inappropriately on any production, or at all, and has never had any complaints made about his conduct over the course of many decades in the media industry. Our client has worked with and supported hundreds of individuals, including countless women, and has never before heard any such allegations. For the avoidance of doubt, our client denies any wrongdoing and will do whatever is required in order to restore any damage to his hard-earned professional and personal reputation. He is prepared to co-operate fully with any formal investigation.”

Bafta said: “Bafta is an arts charity and does not have the power to investigate historical claims of abuse therefore we have referred the matter to the police. The behaviour that these accounts allege is abhorrent, in complete opposition to Bafta values and has no place in our industry.” Netflix said: “Whilst the allegations are

unrelated to his time on the show, we immediately removed him from the production and referred the matter to the police.”

Charlie Hanson began his career in showbusiness as a teenage stagehand and electrician at the London Palladium before going on to produce the work of comedians such as Lenny Henry, Harry Hill, Lee Evans and Ricky Gervais (Sophie Wilkinson and Lucy Bannerman write).

He championed new talent and spoke of helping working-class, black, female and disabled comedians reach primetime audiences.

It is his role as a “mentor” to young women, decades his junior, that is central to the allegations sent to Netflix and Bafta.

His accusers claim that the man they once thought of as an “uncle” figure, when pitching scripts and chasing auditions in their early twenties, was “grooming” them for sexual exploitation. One woman, who first met Hanson at an open mic night as a 22-year-old student, claimed her excitement turned to dread when she met the veteran producer for a drink at a Soho bar in 2008 to discuss a script he’d promised to pitch to the BBC and Channel 4.

She claimed Hanson told her: “You know I like you, don’t you...”

She added: “My heart just sank straight down to my toes. I felt so horrible and awkward because it clearly meant that my talent wasn’t relevant to his interest in me.”

The woman claims her next memory was Hanson having sex with her without her consent in a house she did not recognise. She said: “I was so distraught I missed one of my final exams. In the longer term, I suffered from insomnia, nightmares and panic attacks.”

Another woman said she met Hanson in 2008 at the age of 22, when she was performing at the Edinburgh Fringe. She claims that Hanson became an unofficial manager, inviting talent scouts to her gigs and even lending her money to take a new show to the festival. “We never had any reason to suspect he was anything but a mentor to us. He was more like an uncle.”

She claims they stopped at a bar after he offered to walk her home in 2015. Her last memory was accepting a drink — “an elderflower sour with egg white and a cherry on top”.

“The next thing I remember is him being on top of me, in my bed,” said the woman, who claims Hanson “persisted in sexual contact” despite her state of semi-consciousness.

She claimed that she later became depressed and withdrawn and was left feeling “sick, confused, embarrassed, ashamed and disgusted. I have never stopped feeling sick whenever his name is mentioned.”

Hanson, 68, denies the allegations. In a statement, his solicitor, Moritz Schirmeister said. “Our client is shocked and appalled by these historic and false allegations of improper conduct towards women.”

He denied all wrongdoing and said he would co-operate fully with any formal investigation.