

Steve Coogan (Alan Partridge)

Steve Coogan is fresh from a tour of the United States launching his second feature film *24 Hour Party People* and in a few hours he will be flying off to a sunny Mediterranean destination to continue filming his new series for BBC TWO called *The Cruise* alongside Rob Brydon. He's wearing a Paul Smith suit and his hair is long and wavy, its hard to recognise he's Norwich's most famous failed chat show host and Radio Norwich DJ, Alan Partridge.

So five years on since the last series of *I'm Alan Partridge*, why did Steve choose to bring back the Bafta Award winning series? Steve explains " We never didn't choose to bring him back, we always knew we were going to do another one, so it wasn't if - it was when. We were all going off and doing other things and we (co-writers, Peter Baynham, Armando Iannucci) had to get the three of us together in one room for long enough to write a series - it was a question of logistics. Steve continues "we also decided we'd only ever come back and do another series when we were missing Alan. The last series was 1997 and we spent a year writing him and we all got sick of Alan so we had to wait until we started missing him again"

Was it difficult to write the new series after the long break? Steve replies "you need to have fresh ideas, you can't sit in a room and force Alan so we thought hang on lets get ideas cos when you are writing a comedy that people expect great things from, you can't really force it".

So how has Alan has changed since we last saw him? Steve pauses and replies thoughtfully "He's come through a midlife crisis, he's a lot more confident in himself - on the surface. He's got more of a spring in his step, things are going reasonably well for him, he's not at rock bottom anymore, he's making a living and he's getting by".

Let's hope we won't have to wait another five years for a new series, but what does Steve think Alan might be doing by then? Steve smiles "He'll either have gone mad and moved to a hut in the Scottish Highlands or he'll be a kind of Norfolk mini mogul".

Felicity Montagu (Lynn)

Felicity Montagu is wearing an all-black outfit with a smart jacket and looks perfectly sophisticated. Within moments, it becomes clear that this feisty, chatty and friendly actress has almost nothing obvious in common with Lynn, the slightly downtrodden, long-suffering secretary she portrays on *I'm Alan Partridge*.

If anything, she may even be her complete opposite. Claiming to be “bored” by school, Felicity - who comes from an army family - first made her acting debut in a school production of *Pride And Prejudice* at 15, where she was cast, rather strangely considering her sex, as roguish Wickham. (“I had one line, turned to the audience and said the line and the house came down.”) But her big break came at 23 when she starred in Terry Johnson’s *Unsuitable Brothers*, playing “a stand-up comedienne called Kate, who was very angry with the world”. Apparently, her Australian mother was more interested in her daughter’s shaved head than her first-night performance.

But about 20 years and a *Bridget Jones* film later, Felicity is generating interest which has nothing to do with her reddish-coloured hair. Returning to BBC Two after five years as Lynn on *I'm Alan Partridge*, Felicity feels “privileged” to again be working with Steve Coogan and writers Armando Iannucci and Peter Baynham. “These guys really know the business,” Felicity says appreciatively. In fact, she claims working with Steve is “like going around in a Rolls Royce”. Looking perfectly serious, she says, “You can just fly with him, which is just terribly, terribly exciting.”

Lynn’s rather drab existence is probably not quite as exciting as Felicity’s, but there are some new developments in Lynn’s life, though Felicity claims “it’s not going to be terribly dramatic”. With a bit of a smile on her face, Felicity says, “Lynn has a new friend. What certain people are saying is that he’s her boyfriend, but I don’t think Lynn thinks he’s a boyfriend, he’s a friend. Alan thinks he’s a boyfriend, and I don’t think he is particularly happy about that. But then Alan wouldn’t be happy anyway, would he?” Chuckling to herself, Lynn says, “He wants to boss Lynn around, but Lynn’s quite content - for certain reasons, Lynn’s moved on.”

It seems that viewers will also see a more rebellious side to Lynn in the upcoming series. Alan, who’s also moved on to slightly bigger and better things, has acquired a Ukrainian girlfriend named Sonja, who initially makes things difficult for Lynn. “Alan wants Lynn to learn Ukrainian, to speak and communicate with her well ... and Lynn said yes, and he still doesn’t know that she hasn’t even attempted it. It’s a difficult language to learn,” Felicity says laughing. Recovering composure, she says, “So that’s the new bravery coming out of Lynn - that she’ll say yes and actually not do it ... She’s quite a feisty character, the new character Sonja, and it’s all about managing. It’s all about managing Sonja, because she can be quite explosive. I think she grows on Lynn during the series.”

Although Lynn is clearly still being subjected to Alan’s eccentricity, Felicity is aghast at the mention of taking revenge. “Oh no!” she proclaims. “Why would she want revenge on Alan?”

think what people forget is that Alan brings great wealth to Lynn's life. Lynn's not terribly used to men. She had a father who never used to come down the staircase as he got older. You know, he was very difficult. She put make-up on and he'd throw water all over her face. So Alan is great for Lynn - he's fun, he can go on a little too much sometimes and moan at her, but generally speaking, Lynne feels she can handle this man very well. In fact, she feels responsible for him, really."

It's hard, however, to feel compassionate for Alan, which is partly what makes his character so brilliant. Trying to pin down the reason behind the show's previous success, Felicity doesn't hesitate to mention the team of Armando, Steve and Peter. "They all have different facets that complement each other," Felicity says, "and I think Steve takes things into a different league with his character of Alan Partridge. As you've seen, Alan Partridge stands on his own in a West End show in front of a 1,000 [people], making them laugh. It's his genius really ... I've always thought it was a bit like Peter Sellers, because he has this innate ability to just get there, whereas the rest of us are just struggling behind him."

Felicity rates *I'm Alan Partridge* as one of the highlights of her career, but she also speaks very fondly of her experience making *Bridget Jones's Diary*, in which she played Perpetua, Bridget Jones's rather Sloaney, obnoxious colleague. "I thought it was going to be absolutely terrifying and it was so fantastic," Felicity recalls. Felicity was even allowed to improvise some scenes, which, with obvious disappointment, Felicity says didn't make the final cut.

But Felicity's disappointment was tempered by working with some pretty high-profile stars. "It was fantastic, just being near and watching Renée Zellweger work, who was charm personified, and Hugh [Grant] - they were both great. I'm not just saying it, but they were just great. They were very professional, very positive, very encouraging and so good on camera, and that's why they get paid so much."

Looking a bit conspiratorial, she explains that during the launch party for *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Jeffrey Archer - who was standing next to her - told her that he might have to barge her out of the way for a photo shot, to which Felicity replied: "This may come back to haunt you Jeffrey."

Speaking to Felicity, it's not hard to imagine her taking a stand. It's therefore a bit surprising that Felicity's dream role is to play a humble maid opposite her favourite actress. "I'd love to play a maid to Barbara Hershey," she says breathlessly. And the way things are going for Felicity at the moment, there's no reason to believe she won't be able to do that and maybe even learn Ukrainian on the side.

Felicity Montagu Biography

Best known for playing Bridget Jones's ostentatious colleague in the award winning movie *Bridget Jones's Diary* and taking care of Alan Partridge's affairs as the shy and down trodden assistant Lynn in *I'm Alan Partridge*, Felicity Montagu has become one of this country's leading character actresses.

Felicity returns to our screens mid November with *I'm Alan Partridge*, the second in this highly successful series featuring Steve Coogan. Lynn joined Alan's small empire seven years ago and has become a crucial part of his life and career. This series, filmed after a five-year break, will see Lynn Benfield in a whole new light having gained a new friend.

Felicity is a versatile actress who has had a varied and successful career to date, which includes theatre, TV and film. Her career began after studying at the Loughborough University before moving into the Webber Douglas Academy. One of her first acting jobs was alongside Richard Griffiths in the highly acclaimed ITV series *FFIZZ*.

She has worked with some of the greats of British comedy including Harry Enfield, Paul Merton, Josie Laurence, Steve Coogan, Gary Olsen, Stephen Fry, Alexi Sayle and Victoria Wood.

Past TV credits include: *Trust, Coming Through, This is David Lander, Wish Me Luck, Tumbledown, Harry Enfield Television Show, Josie, Adoption – The Mother, Paul Merton The Series, 2.4 Children, A Touch of Frost, Coogan's Run, Knowing Me Knowing You..with Alan Partridge*, amongst many others.

Past theatre includes: *Unsuitable for Adults, Macbeth, Susan's Breasts, Are You Sitting Comfortably, Up On The Roof, The Shaughraun, Angles in America and The Knocky*.

Amelia Bullmore (Sonja)

She spent four years touring around in a transit van for a cabaret company, took a turn down Coronation Street, hid her pregnancy in front of a producer and most recently plays an eccentric Ukrainian, who finds herself smack in the middle of none other than Norwich, in a whirlwind career that doesn't show signs of slowing down - at least not if Alan Partridge has anything to do with it.

Amelia Bullmore is delicate and petite, with a soft-spoken, affable nature. Wearing a short denim skirt, fishnet stockings and a dainty burgundy cardigan, she doesn't look like the kind of woman who could tame Steve Coogan's Alan Partridge, but her fiery character of Sonja has snagged the sweater-loving, cheesy chat-show host, who returns to BBC Two after a five-year hiatus.

After a long pause, the brown-haired, London-born actress describes the character of Sonja as "childlike". Sonja, who is new to *I'm Alan Partridge*, hails from none other than, well, Ukraine, and finds Alan Partridge irresistible in a way that no English woman probably would. "She is eccentric," Amelia continues, which seems to be a bit of an understatement, "but she does slightly live in her own world."

Alan was last seen having a run of bad luck. He was living in a nondescript hotel off a motorway half way between Norwich and London; he worked the graveyard shift on a local radio station; and a BBC boss popped his clogs just as Alan was about to sign a five-year contract worth a considerable amount of money. But it seems that the tide has shifted and Alan couldn't be happier to proudly parade Sonja around town. And it appears that Sonja wouldn't like anything better either.

"She thinks that he is a very powerful man," Amelia says seriously. "He has a radio show; she thinks he's a gentleman; and he has a big house and it's a good life ... but she's also indiscreet. She likes sex very much and that's great, he loves that too, but she's more outspoken. Her English isn't brilliant but that doesn't stop her having opinions ... And he wishes she dressed more conservatively." After a brief pause to choose her words carefully, Amelia says, "She's quite flamboyant," and then lets out a bit of a laugh.

To get into this rather unique character's frame of mind, Amelia even travelled all the way to Kiev for a weekend and met a young woman named Tatiana, a native to Ukraine, who took her on the buses and let her record her voice to listen to the accent. "I just wanted to see it. I thought, 'Wouldn't it be terrible if I completely imagined this place wrong and I think it might be all fur hats and a lot of cars?' ... And there were fur hats and there were a lot of cars but, of course, there were a million other things going on as well."

Amelia animatedly says that she visited ordinary places such as shops, stations and streets. "It's like putting photos in your head that might be in the head of the character you are going to play," she explains. Amelia also visited a department store, which she realised was "a million miles away from the kind of carpeted, homogenous department store that we think of

when we think department store". Armed with that information, Amelia discovered that it's likely Sonja would think Norwich is ultra-hip. "Well, she's just going to adore it," Amelia says of Sonja's love affair with the capital of East Anglia but probably not the culture capital of the world. "She's going to think that Whittards and Thorntons are the epitome of cool and prettiness and glamour and everything."

Amelia, who was thrilled to get the part of Sonja, said that after her initial research there was months of input, then rehearsals and finally frantic recording, which she describes as "very, very last minute, scripts last minute, real seat-of-your-pants stuff". In fact, Amelia says that part of the excitement on *I'm Alan Partridge* is the improvisation that the actors are all allowed to do. "They [the production team] lock it at the last possible moment to allow for improvements, that something even better may come along. And that's great and that's scary, particularly the first week of rehearsal.

"In the rehearsal week that runs up to the recording day, the script gets fatter; it's like a bad dream." Laughing, Amelia says that she was terrified of getting a script that was 70 pages long which had to be whittled down to about 28 pages, but it gives the dream team of producer and writer Armando Iannucci, and writers Peter Baynham and Steve Coogan - who Amelia cumulatively refers to as the "man with three brains" - the flexibility to play around with it to find the magic formula.

And she has incredible respect for what Steve Coogan does. "He's great, he's pretty pressured on a Friday, when you record ... He has a million lines in his head and he's got to remember it all, and he only got his script the day before, so he's a big concentrating machine on a Friday. But, when you see what he pulls out of the bag on a recording night, you can see why."

Amelia herself is no stranger to being the brains behind a production. After beginning her career with a travelling cabaret company called Red Stockings, she swapped a life on the move for a 10-year stint in Manchester, getting her big break as Steph Barnes on *Coronation Street*. It was while she was pregnant with her first daughter that Amelia turned her creative head to writing. After fooling a producer into thinking she wasn't actually a pregnant actress, she was eventually offered the opportunity to write two episodes for *This Life*. "That was a really good experience," recalls the 38-year-old actress, "and I just kept on writing since then, and I think I'll always do both."

She was also the brainchild behind *Black Cab* for BBC Two, a well-received series of vignettes that occur inside the small space of a black cab. Even though Amelia confesses that she enjoys both acting and writing, she doesn't like to mix both. "They're impossible to juggle. I think you just have to see what life chucks up. At the moment, I'm really enjoying a patch of acting and before that I had a patch of writing and I think it will probably, touch wood, keep going like that." With a performance in Paul Abbott's upcoming political thriller *State Of Play*, it would appear that Amelia is probably right.

Amelia Bullmore

Biography

Amelia is an actress and writer with broad experience in film, TV and stage. She became a familiar face to the British public, playing Des Barnes' feisty wife Steph in *Coronation Street* and has starred and written on several award winning television series.

Amelia began her varied career while still at Manchester University, where she teamed up with a group of friends travelling around in a transit van, to form *Red Stockings*, a women's cabaret group that performed for four years. She decided to look for work in the theatre and stayed on in Manchester. She recalls "I was performing at the Contact Theatre around the time they were casting the Barnes' so it was a real stroke of luck. Steph Barnes was mouthy, feisty, people either thought she was great and spirited or that she was a dreadful old bitch. A good laugh or a terrible old slapper depending on your position. She was great fun to play."

Since *Coronation Street*, Amelia's other television work has included appearances in *Hetty Wainthropp Investigates* and *Insiders* (BBC), *Cracker* (Granada), *Faith, Stuck On You* (Central), *Frontiers* (Carlton) and *The Bill* (Thames). Her many theatre credits include *Inadmissible Evidence* (Royal National Theatre) and *The Queen and I, Road* and *The Thickness of Skin* (Royal Court Theatre) *Romeo and Juliet* and *A View From The Bridge* (Manchester Royal Exchange), *All My Sons* (Everyman, Cheltenham)

Amelia wrote two episodes of the hit series *This Life*, she has also written on *Attachments*, and devised and wrote several episodes of the acclaimed series *Black Cab*. As well as being behind the camera, Amelia played Lynne in *Attachments*, appeared in *Big Train* and recently played Lucy in the BBC ONE drama *Linda Green*.

Amelia also starred opposite Rupert Graves in the film, *Mrs Dalloway*. Having completed filming for the second series of *I'm Alan Partridge*, Amelia is currently filming a new Paul Abbott drama, called *State of Play* for the BBC.

Simon Greenall (Michael)

Biography

Simon Greenall is probably best known for his role as Michael in *I'm Alan Partridge* series one and two for BBC TWO, but Simon is also one of this country's most established comedy writers as well as being a successful and respected radio actor.

Returning in mid-November for a new series of *I'm Alan Partridge*, Simon rejoins the team after a five-year break. He will also be appearing in *Think The Unthinkable* and *The Sunday Format* on BBC Radio 4.

Simon's career started as a child actor alongside Matthew Kelly and Bernard Hill in *Macbeth* at the Edinburgh Festival. He studied acting at Manchester Polytechnic, alongside Steve Coogan, before heading south to London to begin his career as a writer and actor.

Success came in the form of writing *You Bet* for ITV and appearing in *Newman & Baddiel In Pieces*. Simon then teamed up with writer Kay Stonham and between them they have written and appeared in numerous radio comedies including *Robin & Wendy's Wet Weekends* (Radio 4), which is now in its second series and being developed for television.

Other past TV credits include: *Time Gentlemen Please*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Mel & Griff*, *The People's Harry Enfield*, *Yes Sir I Can Boogie*, *Lucy Sullivan is Getting Married*, *The 11 O'Clock Show*, *Smith & Jones*, *Armstrong & Miller*, *Harry Enfield and Chums* amongst many more.

Past radio credits include: *Do Go On*, *Didn't You Use To Be*, *Crème De La Crime*, *Smelling of Roses and Frank Sutton*. Theatre credits include: *Seven Stories*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Woundings*, *Hannah Smith Casket*, *Gods Country*, *Epsom Downs* and *Unsuitable For Adults*.

Simon is also a member of The Real Fight Club and has won two super-middleweight fights to date.

Armando Iannucci (Writer/Producer/Director)

Armando Iannucci, one of the most respected names in comedy writing, appears like his co-writers on the new series of *I'm Alan Partridge* - Steve Coogan and Peter Baynham, seem not to enjoy taking a break. Currently in post production for the new series of *I'm Alan Partridge* which he also directed and produced, he will go straight from there to work on a new series for Channel 4 working both behind and in front of camera.

So did Armando ever have ambitions to act alongside Norwich's finest failed chat show host. He responds "It's never something I've felt an inclination to, maybe because it's because I know Alan too well, maybe I'm nervous of ever meeting the guy!"

It's hard to imagine how a character which has gained cult status, like Alan is created, Armando explains "When we were doing *On The Hour* on radio I wanted a sports reporter so I asked Steve to come out with a voice that didn't sound like it was an impression of a specific sports reporter but a generic sport reporter and instantly he came out with this voice and quick as a flash someone said 'he's an Alan' and someone else said 'yes and a partridge' and it just all happened within seconds and as soon as all that happened we instantly knew what his background was like, we knew what his ambitions were and it just started taking on a life of its own"

Was there any hesitation to make the decision to bring Alan back, after the huge success of the last series? Armando admits "There's always the slight trepidation, when you do something for the first time you are blissfully unaware of what it might be like and how it might be received and because the first series was received so well, I suppose the second time around it feels a lot harder because there is expectation that you know you've got to try and meet - if not better so it just means you're much more rigorous and much more aware of everything you're doing - it feels a lot more grown up the second time around"

Armando explains the writing process "we cast very early on so that we can then get the cast in and improvise scenarios with them. They have rough outlines of the plot, we improvise those and then that generates even more material and then we go away and boil that down and eventually we come up with scripts, but given all that time in the end the scripts are only really pinned down in the final week of recording"

So what can we expect from Alan in the new series, Armando pauses "there's a spring in his step to everything he does but it's a slightly hysterical spring in his step. He's had a little bit of a make-over, there's more of an attempt to make himself look a bit younger, his hair is a touch longer and his clothes - he thinks are a little bit more streetwise"

Armando Iannucci

Biography

Armando Iannucci is the co-writer and the director and producer of *I'm Alan Partridge* - the BAFTA nominated and critically acclaimed comedy show which returns for its second series this Autumn.

Armando is well-known for his widely acclaimed series *The Day Today*, which he co-wrote with Chris Morris and produced for BBC. He followed this with co-writing and producing the hugely successful *Knowing Me, Knowing You ...with Alan Partridge*. Armando also devised, co-wrote and performed in *The Friday Night Armistice* (which won the Bronze Rose award at the 1997 Montreux Festival with David Schneider and Peter Baynham for the BBC) as well as the live three hour comedy spectacular *Election Night Armistice*. He followed this up with *Clinton: His struggle with Dirt*, a mock-documentary on the Clinton / Lewinsky scandal. Recently he directed and appeared in *The Armando Iannucci Shows* for Channel Four.

He began his career in Glasgow, working for BBC Radio Scotland. Armando then moved to London to become a writer and producer for BBC Radio Light Entertainment. Also for radio, Armando and Chris Morris won a Writer's Guild Award for *On The Hour*, the radio precursor to *The Day Today*. He is a regular columnist with The Daily Telegraph and recently directed a short film called *Mouth* in which Daniella Nardini vomits all over the passengers of a Tube train.

He is the winner of two Sony Radio Awards and three British Comedy Awards, one of which was a Special Award for his contribution to Television Comedy.

Peter Baynham (Writer)

Peter is a writer and actor, fresh from co-writing the new series of *I'm Alan Partridge*, he is currently working on a new animation series for BBC TWO.

When asked whether Alan has any sense of self awareness, Peter chuckles, "Oh God no! I'm sure he has the odd glimpse or the odd moment where he might wonder what affect he's having on the world!"

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Award winning series, is the intriguing relationship between Lynn and Alan, does Peter think it changes in the new series? "Its as solid as ever, Alan and Lynn are a unit. He continues "in this series what we're very excited about is that Lynn and Michael are much more to the fore than they were last time, his (Alan's) relationship with Lynn is key and she's moved on as much as she's had a new haircut"

In the new series, Alan has finally got himself a girlfriend, how did the three writers come up with the new character Sonja? "We did think a lot about what kind of woman in her right mind would be in a relationship with Alan Partridge and so we came up with the solution that Sonja is not necessarily always in her right mind!"

When asked if he gains inspiration for his characters in people he knows, Peter exclaims "Thank God there aren't many people in my life who are like the people Alan Partridge! He continues " but rather than basing things on behaviour on people who are around you, the thing with Alan is that he's says things that other people are thinking a lot of the time - a lot of people think he is completely unsympathetic but I think he's strangely sympathetic in a way, I just think he doesn't have a stop button on his mouth so he will just come out with the crap that some of us might just be thinking but he is unable to keep it inside"