

Amanda Holden plays Mia Bevan



No husband, no home, no friends and no salon – Mia Bevan proves you can't keep a good woman down, so Allie Henshall had better watch out!

It's scissors at dawn, as the conniving Mia Bevan, abandoned by her husband Finn in favour of rival salon-owner Allie Henshall, sets her sights on winning the "war on love".

"The last series was about two rival salon owners, but this time I think it's about love, emotion, friendship and a web of relationships," explains Amanda Holden. "Mia's up to mischief again. She starts off humble and quiet, but rapidly gains her strength, plotting, planning and lying in an attempt to get her husband back from rival Allie Henshall."

Dubbed the manipulative hairdresser from hell in the first series, Mia's under-hand behaviour was a

façade to cover her own emotional turmoil. "The reaction to my character turned out to be nicer than I thought," says the Mountview Theatre school graduate. "People felt so sorry for her in the end. I so enjoyed playing someone who was on the surface a real cow, but underneath was lonely, unhappy and just plain desperate."

Joining the cast is glamorous actress Cherie Lunghi as Zinnia Raggitt, Mia's mother. "Zinnia turns up out of the blue – she's a pain in the neck and an embarrassment," says Holden. "Mia doesn't want to be seen dead with her because she's an ex-porn star from LA. Mia's quite a snob and doesn't want anyone to know, either, so we've got all that tension with a bit of comedy thrown in, which is great."

The popular actress, whose own marriage to comedian Les Dennis ended last December after seven years, talks with affection about her friendship with on-screen rival Sarah Parish. "Sarah and I have fun every day," says Holden with fondness. "I think we're very similar to each other. We both enjoy our lives and are strikingly confident women. We've also got a lot of front, yet we're both quite vulnerable. She gets me into trouble all the time, particularly on set when she grasses me up and blames me for talking or laughing."

"We've also had some great nights out and a couple of fantastic holidays together. The best holiday has to be when we spent time together with some friends in Tuscany a couple of years ago," says Holden, who recently spent a week in sun-kissed Barbados with Parish. "The best night out has got to be on my birthday in February," she smiles.

Notorious last year for their fun nights out on the town in Manchester, this year the female members of the cast opted for girlie nights in instead. Amanda reveals some of the lighter moments both on and off set: "We all get on really, really well," says the Hampshire-born actress. "We're all very energetic, like a laugh and are always making up singing and dance routines on set. In fact, we were saying the other day that if one of us was quiet and didn't want to join in, that person would feel really



Amanda Holden

left out – it would be awful for them. But luckily, we all pretty much have the same kind of personalities.

“Our *Sex And The City girls*’ nights-in were great, we all wore really sexy underwear,” she reveals. “Angela would go off to Selfridges to buy some nice dips and I would make the *Cosmopolitans*, and then we all sat in our best lingerie watching the show before we compared underwear and cellulite!” laughs the sexy actress who will be seen later this year making her stage debut in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, which transfers from Broadway to the West End. Amanda also stars alongside Jamie Theakston in the new BBC comedy, *Eternal Rectangle*.

With a great zest for life, Holden appears to be facing the future with renewed confidence: “I have a good sense of who I am, I feel very strong and have lots of support. But I’ll feel a lot happier when I have a semblance of a private life and I’m left alone,” she says with a tinge of frustration following the extensive media coverage of her personal life. “Apart from that, I’m getting on with my life, I’m not going to hide away any more. I don’t care who or what judges me, nothing’s going to stop me from living my life how I choose.”

Sarah Parish plays Allie Henshall



“I was hit over the head with a handbag by some woman in Hampstead who said: ‘How could you do that to poor Gavin!’”

Allie Henshall sent shockwaves up and down the country when she walked out on husband Gavin Ferraday for serial womaniser Finn Bevan at the end of the first series last year. “Allie had to take a leap of faith,” explains the popular actress.

Sarah Parish received some criticism for her character’s behaviour, but one viewer with a passion for the series made an unforgettable impression. “I was hit over the head with a handbag by some woman in Hampstead who said: ‘How could you do that to poor Gavin!’” laughs Parish.

“It’s horrible to break someone’s heart, especially someone as nice as Gavin,” says Somerset-born Parish. “But Allie just had to know whether it would work out with Finn. Gavin might be fantastic,

but Finn was her first love, he was the one who got her pregnant, and is the father of her daughter, Ruby. I think when you have a child with someone it bonds you together whether you like it or not. You might even hate that person, but you have this common bond. Allie has never gotten over that.”

Following recent roles as a mother in both *Cutting It* and the legal drama *Trust*, is Sarah feeling a tiny bit maternal? “No way!” she laughs with mock defiance. “I think before I started to play mums I felt quite broody, but I’m not any more. I go through stages, and I think a lot of women do when they’re in their thirties. One day I think I’d love to have a kid, then another day I’d be sat in a restaurant with a screaming kid behind me and thank my lucky stars that I haven’t got one.

“I’m single and enjoying it,” she continues. “I’ve never really been single before, it’s funny getting used to it. I saw a few people last year but nothing serious. At times, it’s quite difficult trying to get used to enjoying my own company. I feel at a loose end a lot of the time. I feel that I should be doing something, but when you’re relaxed about it, it’s a great feeling of freedom – very liberating. I’m reluctant to get back into a relationship at the moment because I’m having a really nice time.”

Enjoying life and having a good time includes partying until late with close friend and co-star Amanda Holden, who plays on-screen rival Mia Bevan. The pair have been supportive of each other following the break-up of their high-profile relationships. Sarah split with actor Hugo Speer last year and Amanda’s marriage to comedian Les Dennis ended last December. “We’ve both been through some tough times together and I know that I can ring Amanda and she’ll be there. I’ve been in trouble before and she’s been there and I would do the same for her.

“I think Amanda and I will be friends for a very long time,” says Parish, who has recently returned from a week in Barbados with best pal Amanda. “I have lots of best friends, and Amanda is definitely my best friend at work. I feel quite safe when she’s there.



Sarah Parish

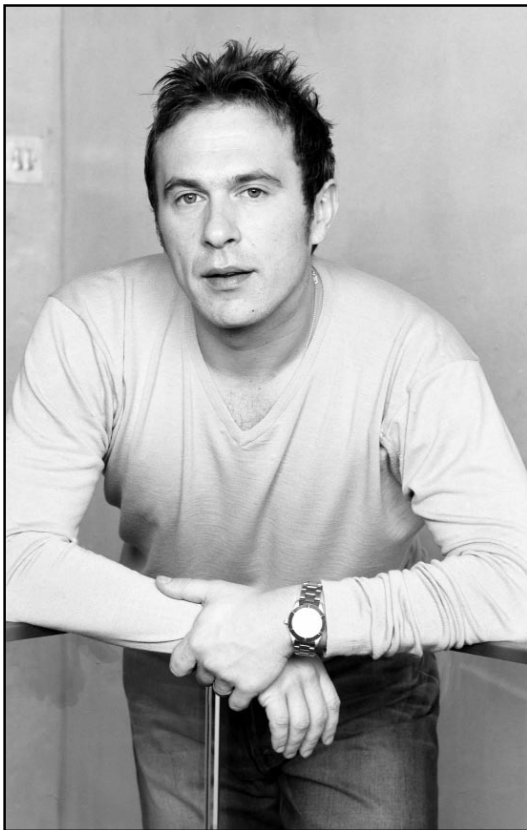
“We had the most fantastic time in Tuscany a couple of years ago. It was my birthday while we were out there and Amanda sent me off for a few hours. When I came back, the friends we were staying with were dancing around in the garden singing the Steve Wonder song *Happy Birthday To You*. Amanda had put lanterns in the trees, rose petals all over a table and candles in the swimming pool. There was a big birthday cake and I cried.”

The RTS award-winning actress, who first found fame as the face of Boddingtons, claims filming the first series went past in a bit of a blur. “I sometimes wonder how we got any work done on the first series. We all got together before filming started on the second series and agreed that we wouldn’t party as hard as we did last year,” she laughs. “We get on fantastically well to the point that we went away at Christmas together.”

Sarah reveals why one member of the *Cutting It* family was the luckiest man in the country: “Wednesday nights started off as a polite night round at my flat with a few crisps, a couple of olives and a glass of Frascati. They ended up as these huge *Sex And The City* nights where we’d turn up wearing sexy lingerie and high-heeled shoes! Ben Daniels, who plays Finn, was an honorary member of our girlie nights-in. He was one of the most privileged men on the planet,” she roars.

One of the busiest actresses on British television, with starring roles in *Unconditional Love*, *Trust*, *Sirens*, *Impact* and *Cutting It* under her belt in the past year, Parish is facing her biggest challenge to date. “I’m playing a man in *Reversals* alongside Marc Warren!” says the sexy TV star. “So I’ll be swapping my hair extensions for a short male wig,” she giggles.

Jason Merrells plays Gavin Ferraday



Broken hearted, Gavin uses sex as a substitute for love.

Unceremoniously dumped by his wife Allie Henshall in front of 7.7m viewers, Gavin Ferraday is back with a vengeance. “I think Gavin uses sex as a substitute for love because he’s desperate to rid himself of a broken heart,” says Jason Merrells. “Gavin’s never played the field before. He met Allie when he was 19, and although he had women all over him, he was never unfaithful to her.

“In the first episode he starts off with a threesome and later there are several other encounters! I think it gets under Allie’s skin that Gavin immediately becomes a player. Most people are pretty basic in their need to get back after a break-up,” explains the former *Casualty* and *Fat Friends* star.

“I don’t think men in general wear their heart on their sleeves, they are conditioned to hide their emotions. It’s part of being male – you don’t cry, don’t moan – you just get on with things.”

An all too familiar story, Gavin’s fate at the end of the first series confirmed the suspicion that nice guys do come last. “Gavin’s almost too perfect, really. He cooks, does DIY and wants to have a baby! I think Allie feels he is too good to be true. I also think Gavin was a bit unresponsive to Allie’s deeper needs. Of course, he would have her back like a shot, she’s his passion, the love of his life. He tries to be hard, but under the surface he is still desperately in love with her,” says the 34-year-old actor.

Gavin’s feelings of animosity toward his rival in love, Finn Bevan, come as no surprise to Jason: “I think he hates Finn. Gavin is jealous of the love that Allie has for Finn and the power he has over her.

“[Writer] Debbie Horsfield masks her intentions, so you don’t see what’s coming next. I hope what the audience see is that Gavin has a dark side and Finn has a side that isn’t so terrible after all. So the dilemma is – which guy is really best for Allie?”

Merrells is quick to confirm that the ill feeling between the two leading men does not reflect their relationship off screen. “Ben and I really get on great. He’s an incredible actor and incredibly funny. Sarah and Ben should have their own comedy show! We have a laugh on set; we really do have a ball. We know what we’re doing with these characters now and our friendship off screen certainly helps. We really partied in the first year; it was like being a fresher in the first year of university. But we calmed down this year; we went out a few times, but nothing like last year,” he reveals.

Often found with pencil in hand during breaks between scenes, the arts graduate says he likes to use every opportunity to indulge in his favourite pastime: “I have my sketchbooks with me all the time. I enjoy doing portraits and still put brush to canvas whenever I can.”



Jason Merrells

At the interview, Merrells looks lean and fit in an open-neck shirt and brown leather jacket, and was in training for the recent London Marathon. "I've never done anything like this before. I was always a natural sprinter, but because of my big build I'm finding this really, really hard. But I'm determined to do it. I do at least an hour's running every day which is about eight miles for me, then once or twice a week I work up to a two-hour run." He was running the Marathon for the National Leukaemia Trust with his brother, Simon, and four friends: Tony Curran (*Gladiator*), Jason Flemyng (*Lock, Stock And Two Smoking Barrels*), Jason Barry (*Titanic*) and Dean Lennox Kelly (*Deathwatch*).

However, Merrells wasn't sure if his legs would be sufficiently recovered to enable him to attend the Bafta Awards the same evening, which saw *Cutting It* nominated for its fourth award in two weeks. "It's unlikely that I will be able to attend because it's going to take me a day to recover. I'll have to see how I feel on the day."

The charismatic actor with an army of female fans will set pulses racing in his next TV role: "I play a posh doctor in ITV's *Sweet Medicine*, alongside Patricia Hodge," he smiles.

Ben Daniels plays Finn Bevan



"Why should Allie be with a serial shagger? I guess it's because she believes he will mend his wicked ways."

A leopard can change its spots, and *Cutting It's* serial lothario, Finn Bevan, is out to prove he is a reformed character when the series returns. "Finn did get more than his fair share of sex," says Ben Daniels with a grin. "But this time he is very faithful, he's seen the error of his ways and is trying to make a go of it with Allie."

Viewers were left stunned when the womanising Finn almost bedded his estranged daughter, Ruby: "I know Finn tried to sleep with his daughter in the last series, but he didn't know at the time that's who she was, and what everyone has conveniently forgotten is that she was trying to blackmail him."

Also, he didn't sleep with her in the end because it was at the point when Finn realised that he had to change."

Daniels reveals that Finn is not without his own insecurities: "Of course, he fears that Allie might still be in love with Gavin. He even thinks that she might have picked the wrong guy because of how wonderful they were together. But I think Finn has taken on board everything that has been said to him and is really trying to change, which I think is really commendable." But will he succeed? "You will have to wait and see!" he replies.

"Finn is a fantastic character to play," says the 38-year-old actor. "I've always really loved Debbie Horsfield's writing. She's changed our characters a lot this year, they're still essentially the same people, but it's really clever the way she's moved everyone on."

The Nuneaton-born actor says he was pleasantly surprised by the response he received from viewers: "People loved it, and even though I was playing a villain, I didn't get people giving me hateful vibes, they took it in a light, humorous way," he says, relieved. "I had women giving me their phone numbers, one even chased me round a supermarket!"

Referring to last year's late-night drinking sessions with other members of the cast, Daniels was eager not to be drawn into a repeat performance: "This year we've stayed in a lot more. We didn't pace ourselves very much last year. In certain scenes in the first series I could tell when we had major hangovers and had been up all night! Before this series started we met up and agreed that we should stay in more."

"Wednesdays was *Footballers' Wives* and *Sex And The City* nights. I was the envy of most men up and down the country because I had an invitation to the girls' *Sex And The City* nights. It turned out to be more like a pyjama party. I would go along in my jeans and the girls sometimes wore very little at all!" He smiles. "The things I heard, it was like when a lot of men get together and talk about women. Not for the faint-hearted!"



Ben Daniels

The Lamda graduate, awarded Best Supporting Actor at the prestigious Olivier Awards for *All My Sons* in 2001, has twice turned down the opportunity to work in Hollywood. "I landed two Hollywood movie roles, one alongside Mel Gibson in *The Patriot* and the other with Chris O'Donnell in *Vertical Limit*. The money was good, but it wasn't for me."

With a lifetime ambition to work on stage in New York, the amateur painter and Ashtanga yoga devotee has just landed a part in the Chekhov play *The Three Sisters* at the Royal National Theatre. "It's been a while since I've done anything on stage and I've missed it," he says with a happy grin.

Angela Griffin plays Darcey Henshall



Calculating and manipulative, Darcey turns into the beautician from hell.

With her roving eye fixed on one man this year, Darcey Henshall pulls every trick in the book to snare her man, regardless of whom she tramples on along the way. "Darcey's a lot more calculating and manipulative now, she's a bit of a bunny boiler!" says Angela Griffin. "On the surface she appears to be a terrible person but, deep down, she doesn't know how to play a straight game," adds the popular, 26-year-old actress.

"In episode two you see my first 'proper' sex scene. I did have one in *Babyfather*, but you didn't really get to see that much," she continues. "The guy I'm doing the scene with made me feel really comfortable, because he'd done stuff like that before and I hadn't really," says the Leeds-born actress. Although the scenes were shot "artistically, without a boob in sight", Angela appears anxious about the reaction she will receive from mum,

Sheila, and boyfriend, Jason (Milligan). "I really don't want my boyfriend or my mum watching it," she says with a look of horror on her face. "In fact, I don't want anyone who knows me to watch me reaching a climax on television! Jason will have to leave the room and I will call him back in when the scene is over!" she says, embarrassed.

Angela has been filming practically non-stop for the past 12 months and was desperate for a break away. "I've got six weeks off now, then I will be working for about another year without another break!" says the National Television Award-winning actress. "I've never had to work so hard as I have in the past year. *Corrie* was much easier.

"Last year, I formed a production company – Baby Voice Productions – with Lisa Faulkner and Nicola Stephenson. The three of us really want to work together again and this is an opportunity for us to do that, and to exert some control over what we do. The thing is, being an actor, you're a pawn. One minute you're flavour of the month, the next you're not."

The three actresses, who have been close friends since their appearance in *Holby*, have just been on holiday together to Tobago. "It was really brilliant; the restaurant, food, people, everything was great, one week just wasn't long enough."

Griffin says she was bowled over by the success of the first series of *Cutting It*. "People genuinely loved it and are still talking about it now, even though it was on nearly a year ago for only six weeks. I'm so proud! I've never been in a series like it before. When I was in *Corrie* and *Holby*, people automatically seemed to like it. But *Cutting It* was fresh, it had never been seen on the telly before and the response to it was amazing.

"The press attention on *Cutting It* was also huge, partly to do with Amanda, but also partly to do with the popularity of the first series. Last year we could go out in Manchester and nobody really knew who we were as such because there wasn't a passion for the programme. But we lost a lot of our privacy this year so we stayed in."