

A Diary of a C-List Celeb

Paul Hendy

1 JAN

If my career were a horse, they would have shot it by now.

Yes, I know New Year's Day is traditionally a time for looking forward, being positive and having an open mind about the future, but at the moment I can't. This is mainly because:

a) I've got the mother of all hangovers from last night's party.

b) I'm in panto.

c) The panto is in Grimsby.

'Oh no it's not.'

'Oh yes it bloody well is!'

It's not that I hate panto and it's not that I hate Grimsby. I just feel, at this stage in my career, I should be somewhere else, somewhere different, somewhere . . . BETTER THAN THIS.

Now, you might think I'm being hard on myself, after all I have had my own prime-time game show on network television in the last year. I use the term 'prime-time' as an abbreviation for the new TV-exec-speak, 'prime-time-day-time' (thanks to Dale, the two-thirty in the afternoon slot is now a very popular one). My show, Simon Says - 'The game show where you do as I say, not as I do!' did very well in the ratings and on two occasions we actually beat the BBC's re-runs of Murder She Wrote. The problem is that the big cheeses over at ITV Network Centre are undecided as to whether the series should 'go again'.

Quote: 'We're not sure if Simon Peters is big enough to fill Dale's slot.'

That's what they said. I kid you not.

So, at the moment I'm in TV limbo-land, not cancelled but not re-commissioned either. Which is why I'm in pantomime . . .

'This is your five minute call, Mr Peters.'

. . . In Grimsby . . .

'You have five minutes until the custard-pie routine.'

Oh bugger.

2 JAN

I have to admit I was in a bit of a bad mood yesterday, but that's what happens when you mix together a hangover, career disillusionment and 200 screaming kids throwing half-sucked Opal Fruits at you. I refuse to call them Starbursts in the same way that Marathons will never be Snickers and Jif will never be Cif. God, it's so depressing, I'm starting to sound just like my Dad.

Did I mention I was in pantomime?

I'm fourth on the bill (I should be second). I'm appearing with Mimi Lawson (yes, the Mimi Lawson), Ricardo Mancini (what a twonk) and Vince Envy (don't laugh). We're performing at a brand-new theatre. If you look up the word 'theatre' in the dictionary, it says, 'theatre n. a place where people go to be entertained.'

Not in Grimsby they don't.

Apparently, when it was opened late last year, they held a competition in the local paper to name this new theatre in the middle of Grimsby. Guess what the winning name was? You're ahead of me on this one, aren't you? Yes, it was The Grimsby Theatre. What a stroke of genius. It does exactly what it says on the can. It's a theatre in Grimsby; let's call it The Grimsby Theatre. So simple it's beautiful. Unlike the place itself, which is a dump.

I'm playing the part of Simple Simon (the producer's idea of a joke) in Snow White and the Seven Drunken Dwarfs. It's not actually called that; it's just that the dwarfs who are playing the dwarfs always seem to be drunk. They pick fights with each other, chat up the dancers and wave their willies in the air, often all at the same time. I think I should point out their willies are normal size, and a normal-sized willy on a

little man's body can be a very impressive sight. Not that I've been looking, of course, one of the dancers told me.

The dancer's name is Jason.

Disney copyright prevents the producers from using the dwarfs' names from the film - Sleepy, Bashful, Doc etc., - so in our show they're called Sniffy, Dozy, Prof, Blusher, Grumbly, Snoozy and Smiler. Off stage we call them Flasher, Farter, Shitter, Shagger, Pisser, Groper and Smiler (he really does just smile all the time). Two of them, Pisser and Shitter, appeared in the movie The Sleeping Princess, and another two, Farter and Shagger, played small furry things in Starfighter IV, which you have to admit is pretty impressive. Occasionally they perform in a club act, which is a mickey-take of The Chippendales. They do a strip routine and call themselves The Chipolatas. After tonight's panto they're doing a show in a local nightclub and have asked me if I want to go along and watch them. I'm not sure that I do.

I think I'll let Jason go in my place.

6 JAN

We've only got one show today, and as I have some spare time on my hands, I thought I'd give you an idea of who's who in the show.

Here are the biographies as taken from the programme:

MIMI LAWSON as Snow White

Mimi stole the nation's heart at the age of five when she won the televised talent show Tomorrow's Stars Today (ATV). She had her own TV show, Here's Mimi!, by the time she was six and was playing Annie on Broadway by the time she was seven. The following year she starred in her first Hollywood movie, the now cult classic Mimi and Mo ('Two gangsters terrorize America . . . and they're only eight!'). Mimi's hit song 'I'm Daddy's Little Girl' (RCA) knocked The Bay City Rollers off the number one spot and stayed there for a record eighteen consecutive weeks. At the age of sixteen, Mimi was asked to star in the West End production of Flares playing the part of Sugar alongside Vince Envy. Soon after that she decided to retire from life in the public eye to spend more time with her dear mother. Now, at the age of thirty, MIMI'S BACK! She recently appeared in The Bill (Thames), playing the part of an ex-child star who has fallen on hard times, and her new album 'Daddy's Big Girl' (Telstar) is currently on sale in the foyer. Mimi is delighted to be making her theatrical comeback in Grimsby.

I feel I should have warned you that biographies in theatrical programmes are often great works of fiction. Here is a rough translation of what it all means:

Mimi Lawson is barking mad.

She went from child star to has-been as soon as she hit puberty. She had a TV show at six, a Hollywood film at eight and a Class-A drug addiction by the time she was fifteen. Her descent into drug abuse and alcoholism has been well documented, as have her three failed marriages, including one to a fake sheikh (the tabloids had a field day with that one).

All of this is strangely absent from her biography, as is her ill-advised attempt in 1986 to host the late-night Channel 4 youth show *Bad!* (it was).

My favourite line in the biog is, 'Now, at the age of thirty . . .'

THIRTY? That would have made her a foetus when she won that talent competition. Now that's what I call a child prodigy.

Her mother, by all accounts, was a bit of a tyrant. If she and Joan Crawford were the only two mothers left in the world and Mothercare decided to hold a 'Best Mum in the World' competition, Joan would win it hands down. Mrs Lawson managed young Mimi's career from the age of five to fifteen. They fell out when Mimi started working on *Flares* and haven't spoken since. In a candid moment she told me she misses her mother and hopes one day they'll be reunited. Having lost my mother at the age of thirteen, and because I haven't spoken to my dad for three years, I can empathise with her in this respect.

Mimi's supposed to be 'clean' now, and if she weren't the showbiz-super-bitch-from-hell I'd almost feel sorry for her.

And now ladies and gentlemen, fanfare please . . . it's the one you've all been waiting for. I give you the biography, as it appears in the programme, of Mr Ricardo Mancini (bear in mind he wrote all this himself):

RICARDO MANCINI as Prince Ricardo

How does one describe Ricardo Mancini? An actor? A singer? A dancer? A comedian? A magician? (that one goes without saying). The truth is Ricardo is all of these things and so much more. He is an all-round entertainer, but even that description doesn't really do him justice. His brooding good looks and sparkling personality have won him legions of female fans. He started his career working as a

magician and first came to prominence when he won the live televised grand final of Your Big Moment (YTV). Hailed as Britain's Answer to David Copperfield, he went on to host his own one-hour special Mancini's Magic! (Granada) and one series of The Magic of Ricardo Mancini (BBC). Despite all this early success, Ricardo always wanted to be, in his own words, 'more than just another good looking magician'. His first love has always been acting and he recently made a guest appearance in The Bill (Thames), playing the role of Nino, a sexy magician with an attitude problem. Ricardo is delighted to be reviving the role of Prince Ricardo in this, his fifth consecutive pantomime for Johnny Goldberg Productions.

I HATE HIM, I HATE HIM, I HATE HIM, but then again Ricardo Mancini's one of those people you can't help but hate.

Ricardo likes to pretend he's from Sicily, but he was actually born in Halifax and his real name's Richard Manky. After winning Your Big Moment on Yorkshire TV, Manky was given his own network show on ITV, but totally blew it due to his serious attitude problem. The BBC snapped him up and signed him to an exclusive three-year golden-handcuffs deal. Halfway through filming the first series he head-butted the Head of Light Entertainment and, with that, the Beeb refused to use him again. Because of his massive ego and a reputed drug problem, his career took a nosedive and his life seemed to spiral out of control. He quickly became tabloid fodder, always in the gossip columns for dating some pretty pop star, soap actress, or in one case a lap dancer from Stringfellow's. Nowadays, he's convinced he's a bigger star than he is and he hates it when people don't recognize him (which is often). Mimi Lawson might be the super-bitch-from-hell, but at least she once had genuine talent. Ricardo Mancini is a thirty-five-year-old nobody who could have been a big star but threw his chance away. He's hardly worked over the last three years, apart from the odd summer season in Weymouth and, of course, panto. The fact that he's done five consecutive pantomimes for Johnny Goldberg explains why he's second on the bill and not me.

You will stop me if I start to sound bitter, won't you?

VINCE ENVY as Oddjob

Vince first shot to fame in the early 1960s with his band, Vince Envy and the Jealous Guys. He had a string of hit records, including 'Just a Rebel (With a Heart Of Gold)', 'Tears of Pain (In the Rain)', and his all-time-classic number-one double-A side 'Cream Sweater, Blue Jeans' / 'Jessica'. He was also a resident singer on TV's favourite pop show Go Go Go! (ATV). Throughout the Seventies Vince was instantly recognizable as The Man with the Tan in the famous Golden aftershave commercials. The 1980s saw Vince move into musical theatre, and he was the first British star to play the role of Mr Love in Flares opposite Mimi Lawson. He also appeared as Benny in Oh Romeo, Slick in Swingbeat and created the role of Carter in King Tut: The Rock 'n' Roll Mummy. More recently Vince appeared in The Bill (Thames), playing the role of Jed, an aging rock 'n' roll star with a drink problem. This is his fifteenth

consecutive pantomime for Johnny Goldberg Productions and Vince is happy to be reviving the role of Oddjob in Snow White.