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Tanya gets Frank

By **Kerry Ann Eustice**

THIS is not the first time actress Tanya Franks has appeared in News Shopper. In an interview with Leisure this week, she confessed a picture of her aged three was once printed.

But for the readers who don't remember the snap, you may recognise her from playing Tania Branning's junkie sister Rainey in EastEnders and Karen in BBC Three sit-com, Pulling.

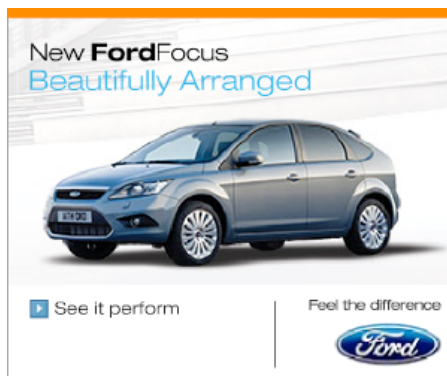
The former Family Affairs star from Plumstead, who now lives in Forest Hill, talked to us about working with Paul Kaye (Dennis Pennis), avoiding typecasting and her aims to play Queen Victoria.

You must be enjoying working on Pulling. It looks like a lot of fun.

I love it. It's smashing.

You're a local girl aren't you? Did you train or do any theatre work in the area?

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Initiative.

It's been doing festivals since last year. We did Cambridge, went to LA, and it did one in Italy. And the East End Film Festival.

We're hoping to get it in cinemas supporting a feature film, that's what I'm looking into at the moment to get it into independent cinemas as a pre-runner to main features.

We certainly can't get into the multiplexes any more because they're so advertising orientated. You used to always have a short film before a feature. If I can get it into independent cinemas throughout the country, I'll do my best to get that going.

It's a shame that convention has been lost. I think it's criminal, now all we're left with is advertising. It's just way too much and I don't like the fact you're going to the cinema for commercial reasons and not just the art form anymore. So that really disappoints me. These films are not getting seen.

Tell me a bit more about Stock Pot. What were your reasons for starting the company up?

I started it in early 90s, producing theatre with it. I put on some theatre productions and the last play I co-produced was a play at Theatre503 in Battersea. Which had good critical acclaim.

And then I moved into film with it in 2003. I made two other short films with other people and One Day came about because I was encouraged to write alone.

The director of One Day, James Barriscale, said you should write a script in your voice'. I didn't know what he was talking about, but I mulled that over for about five weeks and then sat down and wrote One Day.

Now I'm writing a feature film, I've just completed the script and I'm putting it out to people at the moment. It's a comedy drama about a compulsive liar.

Are you enjoying the writing side?

I am. I love it actually, was something I've always wanted to do. I've always created shows. But that gave me confidence to write.

Since I first came out of drama school at 18, I started writing out my own shows.



Comment

I grew up in Plumstead and live in Forest Hill.

I went to drama school in Wandsworth but when I was a young teenager I used to go to the Eltham Little Theatre, which is now the Bob Hope Theatre.

I was there for three years. I was in the chorus in the Dracula Spectacular and the Purple, White and Green which I always saw as my big break because I played one of the leading suffragettes, Annie Kenny.

Years and years ago I toured a show we put on at The Broadway theatre, Catford.

Another local connection I have is One Day, a short feature from my production company Stock Pot Productions. That was supported by the Lewisham Film



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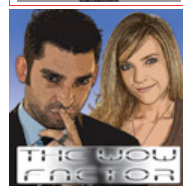
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Since I first came out of drama school at 18, I started putting out my own snows straight away. I started producing theatre but I didn't have a name for a company yet.

So I've always had an inclination to create my own work and I think Stock Pot came from that.

I wanted to do a big Bernard Shaw project, that I did with the Theatre Museum in the early 90s, to raise funds for charity and that was when I came up with Stock Pot Productions but I didn't actually make it a limited company until 2004.

Do you get much chance to offer your input in Pulling?

In some moments, but it's so brilliantly written not much comes up where you think it doesn't feel right; the character. Even if you have anything like that, by the time you've talked it through you tend to stick to how it's written.

There have been the odd couple of moments where we might have suggested something and it's gone in.

"With Pulling, from the outset, I was laughing out loud when I first read the script. That's quite rare." - Tanya Franks

When I first got the script for this I just thought it's so brilliantly written'. When you're told you're going up for a comedy, you want to laugh at it essentially, and you do read some things where you just don't laugh.

Where you just go actually I don't find this funny. Perhaps it is, but I don't find this funny.' And with Pulling, from the outset, I was laughing out loud when I first read the script. That's quite rare, but luckily it happens occasionally.

The minute I was seen for it, I just thought blimey to play Karen would just be fantastic'. She's a real challenge for me, she's just so different from me as a person. I thought crumbs if I can do this that'll be fantastic'.

Is this what you look for when choosing roles; a challenge?

Yeah. I like playing characters that are very different for me. I would presume most actors do really because you want to be stretched. I sometimes wonder the reason actors want to become actors is we want to explore the human race in some way.

It just gives me an insight into other human existences I probably wouldn't have if it wasn't for acting. That's what I love about it.

What about the costumes you have to wear as Karen? They're quite interesting aren't they?

(She laughs) I just thought they were so brilliant for her. It was really as I saw her. You just know she's out there. I don't dress like that at all, it's quite fun, my chance to dress up.

I saw a sneaky peek of Season Two and your scenes with Billy played by Paul Kaye are hilarious. Was he fun to work with?

Oh, it's brilliant isn't it. He's just lovely, we really got on well. We had a really fantastic time. We respected each other as actors and people and built a nice friendship. He's just a fabulous, lovely, down to earth guy. And such a great talent.

"We have laughed a lot doing this series, you can't help it. You just have to get over it and make sure you don't laugh on the take."

When you see those scenes, with Karen and Billy they're just a match made in heaven but really it's hell. So, yeah brilliant, I loved working with Paul.

Is it hard to keep a straight face on set?

We do laugh a lot. We have laughed a lot doing this series, you can't help it. Obviously series one and this series, there's moments where you just can't help but laugh. You just have to get over it and make sure you don't laugh on the take.

Can we look forward to a series three?

I don't know at the moment. I haven't heard. We'd love to do a series three, that would be fantastic but who knows. It all rests on the success of series one and two.

What do you think is the key to Pulling's success? I see it as quite a mature comedy even if it gets very silly at times.

Yeah I think it is, but my attraction to it is the innocence of it. There's not a cunning behind the characters. They come from a place of just trying to find their way through life, rather than being manipulators of some kind.

"Most people can tap into a dark side and I think Pulling reflects the darker side of everyday living."

They're just getting on with their everyday and the ruts they fall into. Most people can tap into a dark side if they want and I think this kind of show reflects the darker side of everyday living.

We find ourselves in all kinds of situations, and the embarrassing situations can be our funniest and because it reflects a lot of that it appeals to a lot of people.

What else are you working on at the moment? Any more EastEnders?

Yeah. I'm doing another BBC comedy show called the Cup another BBC2 show, where I'm the chairman of an under 11s football team. We embark on filming that just after Easter.

I really like the mix. I love doing comedy though. I do also really enjoy a good drama. I can't really equate it, if I've got a good role to play. It's more about the character, That keeps me interested, not necessarily a genre.

Fortunately, I get a variety of roles, I don't seem to get too typecast. If I can keep that going it'll be brilliant.

Was there an actor, film or show that made you think right I want to be an actor'?

When I was a child, as an actress looking at other actresses, I really liked Meryl Streep. She had versatility and I used to get really attracted to actors who were versatile. My big icon, my big role model is Peter Sellers. He always has been, ever since I was a child. I still have a real passion about his work. Sometimes I think I've never moved on

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or grown up, I have the same passions I had as when I was about 12.

So I was always really attracted to actors who were versatile. The fact people like Meryl Streep, are still around being versatile really inspires me.

I just knew as a child I really wanted to do it. My dad was in the industry as well. As a lighting camera man, he was of that world. Although he never had anything to do with my career, I was brought up on film. Everything was very film orientated in his environment.

At school like lots of people did and just found acting was something where I felt at home. So when I joined the Eltham Little Theatre, I really wanted to be part of a theatre group and wanted to be on stage.

I never wanted to go to stage school, I knew that somehow. But did want to be part of a theatre and I thought the way to do it was stay at school, but I wanted a school with a really good drama department.

Fortunately I went to school in Greenwich and I had that. Then I joined the theatre.

How important do you think it is to have a stage school background? Do you ever notice any differences between performances who have and haven't taken that route?

I don't know, I think there's a real call in this business for not training actually. I went to theatre school at 16 but I see a lot of good actors who have never trained who are brilliant. There's something about a raw talent. It's about honing that talent rather than trying to find a talent.

The best actors have a raw talent and some actors don't need the training. The reason I did the training was I wanted to know more about the history of theatre and playwrights and different styles. I wanted to be opened up my knowledge of theatre more.

"There's something about a raw talent. It's about honing that talent rather than trying to find a talent."

I learned a lot and I'm still learning all the time. I've worked with some fantastic playwrights, and directors that at the time, at the age of 16, I didn't know of.

They come in your pathway because they're having their career alongside you. You're learning all the time from the new talents.

You said you felt at home with acting straight away. I take it you still feel this way.

I don't regret a moment of going into this profession. The early days were tough for me, I didn't just walk out and straight into work, which is why I've always put on my own shows.

I had to start my own career off because I didn't have any contact in the business. So I had to put on my own shows to be seen.

It hasn't been easy, I've done my fair share of temp jobs in the first 10 years of my career. Temp jobs I could go back to in between acting contracts and it's only been since I've been in television for the past eight years it's really taken it off.

I don't know where it's going go next. I don't think my career has gone in any of the pathways I thought it would.

I thought I'd walk out of drama school, as every young actor does, and I'd be swept off my feet. I think you do think that but it doesn't happen. I've always grafted at it.

"When I first went into television I had a fear I'd be typecast that I'd always be playing rough London characters. Fortunately I haven't been."

When I first went into television I had a fear I'd be typecast, fortunately I haven't been.

My first role in television was playing a London character, in Family Affairs, for nearly three years. I assumed because that was my break, I'd always be playing rough London characters.

Straight after that I did a semi-regular role in The Bill, which took it on a completely different journey for me, which was great.

Playing a professional person, I thought oh people do see me in a different light, that's great'.

Is it hard to balance the need to earn money with the aspirations you have for your career?

Yes, I think so. Sometimes you go through the thing do you just want the work?' and sometimes I think I don't want to do that because I've done that before.

When Pulling came along and I was told I was being seen for it, I just jumped at it because it was so completely different for me, so I was so excited.

Over the last few years, in EastEnders playing a drug addict for example, I've been playing the darker side of life which has been quite interesting. There was a time when I thought I'd like to play a role like Queen Victoria, something very austere.

I'd like to play a character who is quite regal, again completely different to me. I'd like to do something like that. If someone said to me I could play Queen Victoria, I'd be quite happy. Or a nun, that would be a good think to play.

Well, that's quite different to Karen, that's for sure.

Ha, ha, Yes

Anything you want to add?

I was saying to my friend, there was a photograph of me in the News Shopper. I was laughing about it yesterday when I was remembering who you were writing for.



My dad did it for the lifeboat or something. I just remember being photographed in the supermarket about three for the News Shopper.

The DVD is coming out on Monday, for Pulling Series One. And the Second series starts Easter Sunday, completely opposing the ethos of Easter but there we go.

The new series of Pulling starts on BBC Three on Easter Sunday. Series One is

out on DVD now.

11:26am today

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