**YOU & ME**

**PRESS PACK**

**Brand new 3x60’ drama, starring Harry Lawtey, Sophia Brown, Jessica Barden and Julie Hesmondhalgh arrives as a boxset on ITVX on 23rd February.**

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**Series Overview**

A quintessentially modern relationship drama *You & Me* explores what it means to find love, what it means to lose love, and what it takes to try and love once again. Written and Created by Jamie Davis, in his screenwriting debut, the series stars **Harry Lawtey** (*Industry, The Pale Blue Eye*), **Jessica Barden** (*The End of the F\*\*\*ing World, Pieces of Her, Far From The Madding Crowd*) and **Sophia Brown** (*The Witcher: Blood Origin, Giri/Haji and Borderland*) alongside Julie Hesmondhalgh (Coronation Street, Broadchurch, The A Word).

Warm, lyrical, engaging and enchanting, but also profoundly moving and unabashed in confronting the very real struggles that can be faced in the modern world, You & Me is Davis’ unique and uncompromising vision of modern love and relationships. More than just a love story, it is also a story *about* love…about finding love when you least expect it, about losing it, about parental and sibling love, about sex and friendship, about the difficult decisions we must all make in the name of love, and the often searingly painful cost of love.

**Harry Lawtey** plays Ben, a young northerner in London who finds his life changed forever when catastrophe strikes on the happiest day of his life. **Jessica Barden** plays Emma, a rising theatre star who hides tragedy behind her success. And **Sophia Brown** plays Jess, a young woman whose life takes an unexpected turn when she’s running for a bus…

Told over two separate timelines across the three episodes, *You & Me* reveals, chapter by chapter, the tragedies that have shaped Ben, Emma and Jess. As the “Then” gives way to the “Now”, a chance encounter leads their lives (and their loved ones) to collide but when they find themselves offered a second chance at love, will they take it or will the past hold them back?

Also featured in the cast are **Andi Osho** (*Stay Close, The Sandman, Breeders*) as Jess’s mum Pam, award-winning stage star **Janie Dee** (*Crashing, Me and Orson Welles*) as Emma’s mum Hannah, with **Lily Newmark** (*Sex Education, Temple*) playing Joey, Emma’s sister.

Produced by Happy Prince, part of ITV Studios, and executive produced by **Dominic Treadwell-Collins** (*A Very English Scandal, Holding, Eastenders*) and **Alexander Lamb** (*We Hunt Together, The Bay, Ackley Bridge*), with **Russell T Davies** (*It’s A Sin, Doctor Who, Years and Years, Queer As Folk, A Very English Scandal*) also serving as executive producer.

BAFTA-winning director Tom Vaughan (*Doctor Foster, Press, Screw*) directs the 3 x 60’ drama, which will be executive produced by Dominic Treadwell-Collins and Alexander Lamb for Happy Prince. Russell T Davies also serves as Executive Producer. Michael Ray is producing the series.

The series is produced in association with, and distributed by, ITV Studios and overseen by ITV’s Head of Drama Polly Hill.

Dominic Treadwell-Collins and Russell T Davies previously worked together on *A Very English Scandal*, starring Hugh Grant and Ben Whishaw, which garnered critical acclaim as well as being recognised at the Baftas, Rose D’Or, Golden Globes and Emmy Awards.

**Interview with Jamie Davis (Writer and Creator)**

**Could you introduce the show and the characters?**

You & Me is about a young guy called Ben (Harry Lawtey) who lives in London. In the first scene, he meets a young woman called Jess (Sophia Brown) and they fall in love, then an extraordinary thing happens in his life that changes everything. We see Ben's life across two timelines, the Now and the Then, and eventually the two timelines meet. We're telling a love story in a way you've never seen a love story told before.

**Where did the idea for You & Me originate?**

I wrote the show at a time in my life when things were going really well for me. I catastrophised that and thought: what's the worst thing that could happen? I thought it would be this, because then you've got a story about whether anyone can ever come back from that and find love again. This is a story about the love between a guy and a girl, a parent and a child, a child and a parent, a girl and her sister… It's about what that love costs you, even if it's the jeopardy that you might lose it. I met my wife when I was 17 and I'm aware that at any time between that point and this, it could have gone really wrong and I would have been lost.

**Was this your first screenplay?**

It was. Although I was an actor for many years, what I really wanted to do was write. I got to the point where I decided that if I didn't do it now, I wouldn't. So I wrote this script and thought, if I could send it to anybody, who would I send it to? I’d worked with Russell T Davies years earlier, so I emailed him saying, Look, I know it's highly unlikely you’ll get the opportunity to read this, but if I don't send it, it's impossible. So I'm going to choose highly unlikely over impossible and send it. Maybe two weeks later, I was on the train, kids on my lap, five to six on Friday evening and checking my emails one more time before the weekend. There was an incredible email from Russell that I will never forget – it's still saved on my phone. He said we should meet, so two days later we sat for four hours and talked about writing. At the end he said we should make it! For me, he is the cultural tastemaker and my whole life has changed from that email. To have your hero become your mentor and then your friend exec-producing your show is a gift that I don't deserve, and I'm incredibly grateful. The last two years have been a dream come true.

**Emma (Jessica Barden) and Ben both say that no one else really understands their experiences. How did you ensure you were depicting those experiences legitimately?**

I think pain is unique: no two people experience pain in the same way. There is pain I have felt and pain I've witnessed: that, combined and multiplied, is what I imagine the pain that you would have felt if you'd been through any of these things. The things that happen in this show are the two worst things that I could imagine, so I'm putting myself in their place: how would I try and cope with that? Where would I fail?

**How did you to make sure you got the right combination for the three leads?**

When I'm writing the characters, I’m not thinking about three generic, young, trendy people in London. You try and write the most interesting people you can, then cast more interesting people than that. With Ben, Polly [Hill, ITV Head of Drama] said to me: the problem is, we’re looking for somebody who is 25, not from London, charming, sexy and funny, humble and heartbreaking, but also believable as a father. You've essentially written a unicorn, because there aren't many of those people in real life. We were lucky that Harry Lawtey is all of those things. It's also not a story about young people shagging – that's important. It's about young people in love. All the things that make their lives more difficult happen because they are young and living in London.

**Did you ever consider casting yourself in any roles?**

Absolutely not! Ben is a younger, considerably more attractive, considerably more talented version of me and we found that in Harry so that's fine. You write the characters for that story, as opposed to thinking: I quite fancy doing this. Nothing was further from my mind.

**When you were describing Ben, you called him a boy rather than a man.**

Well, it's about how you grow up. When we meet him, he's 22, single and at a bus stop. Then he's very quickly in love and a father. Nothing matures you like being in love. It makes you selfless by definition, because you care more about the other person than you care about yourself. If you don't, then you're not really in love, you just fancy them a lot. Then you have a child or two and mature again because that makes you responsible. How much of that responsibility you take on is how much it will mature you. It's about seeing somebody grow up quicker than anybody else around him, because of what happens to him and what he chooses to do about it.

**It's very deliberately set in south London – why is that important?**

It was important to believe in the London we’re putting on screen, that it’s a London we recognise and live and love in every day, rather than about huge houses in Notting Hill or the roughest part you can think of. It’s the only place where you could find three people so different, from such different parts of the world, coming together

**What was your favourite place to film?**

The first cheat answer is London itself, because it’s not a given that you'll get to film there. The second cheat answer is that the weather was extraordinary, whether it was for the park or Brockwell Lido or closing down Deptford High Street for a day. It's a show that makes you want to go out after you finish watching it, to see friends and be in your favourite places.

**What do you hope viewers get out of the series?**

I would hope people watch it who might need it, because of what they might have been through in their lives. The big question Ben and Emma have to answer is: do you want to live in the Now or the Then? It's not even about what happened to them, it's more: what are they going to do about it? That's how you move on and find happiness and love again. It’s a hopelessly romantic message from a hopeless romantic, but one that I happen to believe to be true.

**Could there be another series?**

Ben, Jess and Emma’s story is told, but we are working on another series with the same concept of love in London, going backwards and forwards in time but with new characters and a new story.

**Interview with Dominic Treadwell-Collins & Alex Lamb (Executive Producers)**

**How did you both come to be involved in You & Me?**

DTC: Russell T Davies called and said, ‘I've read this script and this writer’s got something – would you meet him?’ When Russell T Davies recommends someone, you listen.

**Did the backbone of the story change much during development?**

AL: Ben's (Harry Lawtey) story was pretty much there from gestation, but Emma's (Jessica Barden) did develop. We felt they both had to be dealing with grief: can they ever put their hearts back on the line, after these gigantic losses in their lives? We unlocked something when we realised, we needed to make Emma's journey thematically similar to Ben’s.

DTC: And as weighty. It also gave us the opportunity to lean into a few romcom tropes: Emma's story is like a more tragic Notting Hill, and Ben’s is more Truly, Madly, Deeply. In terms of the timelines, we’d look at the structure and go: should we just throw things up in the air and see what happens?

AL: I don't think I've ever had as much fun in the edit, or as much frustration because there were so many so many options with the storytelling.

**Was this unusually accomplished for a debut script?**

DTC: Everyone's first script is a work in progress, but this had sparkle, magic and a great naughty, funny, clever voice. It also fundamentally comes down to goodness: a sense of optimism that the world can be a very good place even though bad things happen.

AL: It was fun to see a script with two timelines where you're constantly guessing what happened – how is Ben like this now, when he was like that then? Being an armchair detective as you read the script was great.

**In some senses it’s a very traditional romantic drama, but in others not at all.**

DTC: That’s right. We talked a lot about classic British romcoms and wanted to pay homage to them, while creating something completely fresh and new. It was Alex’s thought to go less Notting Hill and find another bit of London.

AL: It needed to be somewhere we've not really seen on telly very much. The space between Brockwell Park and Greenwich, taking in Peckham, and Deptford and Lewisham, is a part of London that you never hear anything about, but loads of young people like Emma, Ben and Jess (Sophia Brown) live there.

**London is a notoriously tricky city to film in – how did you manage?**

AL: It was difficult. As we were developing the show, we were considering filming it in Leeds, then our director Tom Vaughan, and our locations scout Andy started coming back with places in south London that felt exciting and fresh. Greenwich gave us a slightly more posh world for Emma and her family, then Ben was in the middle and for Jess and her family, we went out to Orpington for a more suburban feel.

**Why was Tom Vaughan the right man to direct?**

DTC: He's a genuine and warm man. You can be the cleverest director in the world but if you're cold, that comes through. Tom's a big softy like all of us.

AL: Absolutely. He's sophisticated and clever, but there’s still a kid inside – that playfulness and cheekiness really comes through.

DTC: Our DOP Michael Filocamo was amazing and captured fairy magic everywhere. We talked a lot about it feeling magical in moments but also very real, which is tricky but I feel we've achieved that.

**How long did it take to cast the leads?**

DTC:It was a really long process! We wanted Ben to be a northern, working-class lad like Jamie, so we worked around him, looking at Emma and Jess in relation to him. The chemistry between the three of them off-set as well as on-set was fantastic.

AL: It was really important that they felt young. We did consider casting people with more profile, who tend to be older, but you need to think Ben is out of his depth. Harry's a man-boy and at some points he still feels like a kid. We saw so many real-life Emmas to play for Emma: middle-class actresses, great and beautiful. But Jess Barden has a clownish quality. We thought you're actually quite weird in a great way. It made Emma more idiosyncratic, especially when we paired her with Lily Newmark.

DTC: Sophia is luminous. Her star has already climbed so we were lucky to have her. It took us a long time, because we're perfectionists and everyone had to be right.

**Where are you with the second series?**

AL: We're deep in the weeds on characterisation. We're going to take the DNA and the timelines of the show and make a totally new love story. The summer in South London thing will stay, but with totally new characters and love story to tell.

**What else is coming up for Happy Prince?**

DTC: We start filming Jilly Cooper's Rivals for Disney+ in March – that’s a gargantuan, filthy beast of a show. Then we're making a few shows for a few different streamers, some more stuff for ITV and have some stuff in development. We're still a baby company, but we're growing.

**Interview with Executive Producer Russell T Davies**

**In your own words, what is You and Me? And can you sum up what it means to you to be involved in this project?**

Oh, I think it’s a beautiful drama, the likes of which we don't get enough of. It's lovely. It’s more serious than a rom com, it’s a classic story of romance. It's a man and a woman. It's that simple and it’s delicate. The day we stop telling stories like that, is the day the world stops turning.

**You must get sent hundreds of scripts by new writers every day. What was it about You and Me that stood out to you?**

Well, it leapt out because it made sense. I was lucky, because I work in Cardiff on Dr. Who and Jamie Davis worked on Casualty so we would walk past each other and say hello. Then came a terrible day when he emailed and asked if I would like to read his script, my heart sank, in case it was rubbish. And to my absolute delight, it was wonderful! It was clear, it knew what it wanted to be. It was a proper script, by which I mean, I often get sent scripts that are just scraps of ideas, they haven't got a clue how to structure it all together. But he knew his stuff. He worked with so many scripts as an actor. He knew how to do it. Like I said, I thought there was a gap in the market. I thought ‘My God who’s writing romances now? When did I last see a story of a man and a woman falling in love with each other?’ So, then I gave him some notes on it, and he was brilliant to work with in terms of notes. He fought his corner, but he rewrote, and he made it even better. So, I loved it, I thought this is a script that I really want to champion.

**What was it like taking on this role, working with Dom, and Alex, and Jamie and bringing it to life?**

Yes, I helped to get it made by passing it along to Dominic. We're old mates, we both made *A Very English Scandal* together. We've all stayed in touch, so I knew he'd set up Happy Prince as a new company and any new company is looking for new scripts. I knew he wanted to champion new writers, so I literally dropped him a line and said ‘Well, if you’re as good as your word, this is a lovely script…’ And it worked. He liked it and pitched it to ITV. So, I sent this on its journey, I wanted to stay looking after just to help. It’s all Jamie's work. There's nothing of mine in there. Sometimes people think I have a heavy hand with scripts, but I was there to protect Jamie's vision and to help him discover the path of being a writer in production, which can become tricky at times. So, I was just there for advice. I was the writer’s friend.

**Most people know you as a writer and creator of shows, is this a very different experience, Executive Producing versus writing?**

It is different, it was partly a lockdown project. I was also working on Sir Lenny Henry's project, Three Little Birds and a project with Quay Street called Men Up. They’re all projects that came along during lockdown when none of us were shooting and all of us were sending each other scripts. Once you help set something in motion, it's good to keep an eye on it just to make sure it doesn't go wrong!

**This series is an ensemble piece with three brilliant young actors at the heart of it. What do you think they bring to the show?**

I think they're beautifully cast. I was a big champion of Harry (Lawtey) in the casting because I was quite obsessed with *Industry*. I had watched that, and I thought he was the most amazing talent and I really love ITV for recognising that. Everyone in the industry knows his name. He might not be known at home but he’s going to be a star; he's becoming one right now. I love ITV for kind of taking a bit of a risk there. Sophia (Brown), again, is one of those rising names who will be a huge star. Of course, everyone knew Jessica (Barden) from *End Of The Fucking World*. So, the talent was just gorgeous. Bringing those three together was the key to the whole thing because the drama is literally about those three characters, and nothing else. So, they make it work.

**You've been writing stories featuring young love and relationships throughout your career. Do you think anything has changed in terms of how we write about young people and relationships and their lives from now, versus years ago?**

I think the world changes so that's why you can always find new love stories because the world is changing around us. And yet, there's something very classic about a love story. We've been writing them for thousands of years, and we will write them for thousands more. Most pop songs are love songs. It's something absolutely fundamental in our hearts. When I watch the soap operas, and they've decided to do this week's illness or this week's addiction or this week's issue, I just sit there thinking ‘Give me a love story! Give me a doctor falling in love with a nurse, give me two school kids falling in love with each other in the yard.’ I just think it's the bread and butter of this stuff and You & Me is a lovely addition to that genre.

**And finally, what are your favourite TV love stories, romantic or otherwise?**

I would recommend a show on Britbox called *Bob and Rose*, which is a very, very fine drama about a gay man falling in love with a woman. I wrote that obviously, and I love it. I always loved *This Life* which isn't necessarily a series about love stories, but in the end, it was. We all wanted to know who Anna was going to end up with. Most series become love stories in the end.

**Interview with Harry Lawtey who plays Ben**

**Why did you want to get involved in You & Me?**

It really jumped off the page right from the first script. It was so easy to read and had a really singular arc. One of the first things I said to Jamie [Davis, creator] was: ‘there's a lot of acting isn't there?’ That sounds like a stupid thing to say, but there was so much story to cover, and that was a challenge that really excited me. I was flattered that they wanted me to give it a go.

**How would you characterise the two version of Ben, Then and Now?**

In many ways it's the same person, but someone whom things have happened to. That's the notion of the series: we all have some idea of how we think our lives are supposed to go, but reality rarely complies with that. The test of someone's character and kindness is how they respond to those challenges and surprises. Are you able to reach out and connect with people after you've been through trauma? Who would you choose for that? But Ben is a warm and hopefully witty person, a good man trying his best in extraordinary circumstances.

**Is it love at first sight with both Jess (Sophia Brown) and Emma (Jessica Barden)?**

No, I don't think so. They’re different relationships. When Ben meets Jess, they’re in their early-twenties and are almost shocked by it. Of course, they're excited. He feels he’s fallen for someone in the most organic, lovely way. But she also challenges him and questions his way of thinking – that conviction and confidence is really attractive to Ben and encourages him to grow and be better. He wants to be with someone who he is convinced is a better person than he is but with Emma, he's much less open to any of that. There's a wall to overcome because he's been so sideswiped by trauma and the idea of being a good father and a good person governs every choice in his life. But he's reached a point where he has to move on, to engage and entertain the idea that he could love again.

**Could you relate to Ben?**

In this job, I think there's always a part of me and then there's something I have to reach for, and that's the challenge. I don't feel like Ben is a million miles away from who I am, although I felt a little unqualified for some aspects of the story. I’m not a parent, and I’ve been extremely fortunate in my life in relation to grief thus far. But the experience of making this show might be really instructive to how I respond to those things in my future. There's also a lot of Jamie in Ben of course, so having him close by was really helpful. A friend of mine became an unexpected young father a year or two ago as well, and I had a fantastic, illuminating conversation with him which was genuinely so valuable to my work on the character.

**Did the relationships with Jess and Sophia come naturally?**

Jess (Barden) and Sophia are just great people. They’re so distinctive, fun and kind. They're also more experienced than I am, so I learned a great deal from working with them. If you can find that connection with people offscreen then normally that translates to the work. And that was the case for the entire production: there was a real top-down culture of generosity and comradery on the show. Given some of the issues that we were dealing with, to have that support and to feel so rooted as a team made the world of difference.

**How did you enjoy working with the kids playing Jack and Poppy?**

They were absolutely brilliant – they called me ‘Fake Dad’ - I loved working alongside them. I’m certainly guilty of getting too in my head about acting from time to time, because I'm desperate to do a good job and not let anyone down. Sometimes you can be your own worst enemy in that sense. But when you're working with kids, you have to accept a relinquishing of control. You have more of a duty and responsibility to make the experience positive and fun for them, to keep them engaged. Kids just respond to what’s around them in the most natural way and they haven't intellectualised anything that they're doing, they're just there to have a good time, which is why I started doing this thing anyway. Their parents were also on set every day too and they were a great support. They’re a really wonderful family.

**Is there a message behind the show?**

I think once you get to a certain stage in life, you realise that to love someone is a risk and there's jeopardy involved, it has stakes. Even if two people have the best will in the world and are intent on treating each other with dignity and respect and consideration, there's an overwhelming likelihood that at least one of you is going to get hurt. If you've been bruised by that in the past, then the more you learn that to be with someone is a leap of faith. So I guess the show poses the question of whether it’s better to look after your heart, to protect it. Or to follow it, and leap.

**What’s next for you?**

I’m making a film called Anna, a biopic about Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian journalist assassinated in 2006. That's been a real privilege to be a part of. It’s such a vital, necessary project with real currency to what’s going on in the world. We’re also going back for another season of Industry, which I'm really excited about. We’ve just received the first couple of scripts, so I can’t wait to get started later in the year.

**Interview with Sophia Brown (Jess)**

**Is the London of You & Me one that you recognise?**

Yes, I do. It definitely captures the energy and vibrancy of London - the markets, the, spaces and feels. We wanted to make sure we portrayed that side of London we’d experienced in our early twenties - minus the babies of course.

**Why else did you want to do the show?**

I really enjoyed the idea of just playing a normal person. Alongside wanting to be in London for the Summer post covid - the opportunity came at the right time.

**Have you ever had one of those moments on public transport?**

Not personally, but my sister met her ex-partner on the tube. It didn’t work out so I guess not everyone’s as lucky as Ben and Jess.

**Is Jess a Londoner?**

No. She grew up near Brighton and that’s where her family are still based.

I think that’s part of why Ben and Jess bond so quickly - two outsiders finding their people. London can be lonely at the best of times, particularly if you haven’t got familial roots here.

**Things move pretty quickly with Ben. How do Jess’s family and friends react to that?**

It’s a whirlwind for everyone, family and friends included. I’d say there were some heavy contrasting opinions but ultimately, once she’d made her decision she was met with support - and a sprinkle of apprehension.

**Was Harry an easy man to fall in love with?**

[Laughs] I don't know how to answer that question! Ben is a lovable person, so it was easy for Jess to fall in love with him. In terms of working with Harry, it was great. We'd worked together briefly years before so it was a nice reunion.

**How did you feel about what happens later between Ben and Emma (Jessica Barden)?**

I’m happy that Ben finds another love but I’ll be honest, I do feel sad for Jess. She never gets to see her babies grow up and that always makes me deeply sad for her.

**How would you describe the tone of the show?**

It’s hard to put it into a box. It has elements of the classic British rom com but also pure heart wrenching drama.

**Does You & Me have a message?**

The message I’ve taken from it is how important the small interactions can be.

The beauty of life is vibrating all around us so just try and look it in the eye, no matter what it is. And try not to be scared of it – embrace it.

**What’s next for you?**

I've got a film called Borderland coming out later this year and I've just started working on an exciting project that hasn't been announced yet so I can't say much more!

**Interview with Jessica Barden (Emma)**

**Emma is an up-and-coming actress in her twenties. Was her life familiar to you?**

One of the draws of this was playing a normal person. She lives with her family, she's got a life and a job, working in a theatre in London. I wasn't necessarily doing that stuff when I was her age, and my family lived in Leeds, but I related to London being the backdrop of your life when you're struggling with things. The city is very fast paced, there are always people to see and things to do, so I relate to the idea of disassociation and not dealing with things at the time.

**Was it interesting to play an actor?**

Yeah, it was – one of the lines I really loved was where Emma’s mum is saying to her that her career is dormant. I was like, Oh my God, yeah! At the beginning of your career, you do wonder what you’ve done and when you can call yourself an actress. Being an actor is just horrible in general, it’s only good when you’re between action and cut. Emma would never say something like that though – she’s not jaded, she very grateful for everything and still believes in the yellow brick road of being an actor.

**How would you describe Emma?**

All of her strength is under the surface. She's a good girl, the oldest daughter and probably the one seen as being on the conventional side. Her job within the family was to do everything that is expected, whereas her younger sister Joey (Lily Newmark) is the wildcard. Emma gave her parents a surprise by wanting to be an actress, but that's the craziest thing about her. She doesn't think she's the coolest person, she's not asking for attention and doesn't need to be this story that everybody is talking about, which is very different to characters that I usually play.

**How does her path cross with Ben (Harry Lawtey)?**

She's an up-and-coming actress who has been given a big opportunity, and she gets interviewed by Ben as a sort of “rising star”. That’s literally it!

**Is it love at first sight?**

I really believe it is, but it's not like in the big American movies. It’s more a feeling of: why does this person feel familiar? Why do I find it so easy to talk to them? I have that all the time with so many people. That's how I choose friends – why does this feel like we've met before?

**How is the Emma of Now different to the Emma of Then?**

In her previous life, everything was great. The only thing she worried about was how to get her parents to take her career seriously. In the present day, she's dealing with something way beyond her years and life experience, which was very interesting to play. Emma also accepts that Ben has a past. She wants to know about it and be a part of his life.

**How did you enjoy working with Harry?**

He's the best. I was breastfeeding a seven-month-old baby when I did this, taking a breast pump to work. He was this very cool actor in a very cool show like Industry, but he never was weird about it. On the first day of the whole shoot, the first thing he saw me do was spill my milk everywhere. Later on, we had to a sex scene, and I was like, this poor guy has to pretend to find me attractive when I’ve just been strapped to this electrical device…

**How was your relationship with Lily Newmark who plays your sister?**

I've known her for a long time because we always used to go up for the same things. I love her and really admire her career. She's so funny to work with.

**Do you recognise the London of You & Me?**

100 per cent. I lived in London for ten years, pretty much spending my twenties there. By instinct, you imagine London on screen to be like a Richard Curtis or Nancy Meyers movie. There's nothing wrong with that, but I was very taken aback when production talked about the places where we were going to film, like Greenwich and Peckham. It's a younger version of London.

**What's the biggest challenge of filming?**

I actually loved having a baby at the same time, because I found I could really compartmentalise I knew I should really enjoy my time at work. The hardest thing was remembering that I'm playing somebody that has a nice life. She’s not an angry person and that was really lovely.

**What do you hope viewers get out of the show?**

Some people are probably hiding something in their life and don’t want to burden anybody with it. It seems like a very English problem – “no one needs to hear about this”. But everybody's going through something, so you don’t have to hold back from opening up.

**What’s next for you?**

Two more American films, one in LA and one in Providence. I would love to work in England again but no one ever asks me to!

**Interview with Julie Hesmondhalgh who plays Ben’s Mum Linda**

**What was the appeal of You & Me?**

It’s such a compelling story, and to have Russell T Davies, Dominic Treadwell Collins’ and Alex Lamb’s names on it means it’s got a stamp of quality. I would class it as a relationship drama, but the first episode is like a thriller: you know something awful has happened, but you don't know what it is. I loved the conceit of the two timelines, not just starting at the end and then going “six months previously”, but continuously going backwards and forwards in time and not knowing where you are. I thought was really clever. I also loved the relationship between Ben (Harry Lawtey) and his mum. Linda’s not a portrait of motherhood you see a lot: a mum who has a life and is busy and working and is from elsewhere, but is doing her best to bridge that gap and be there for her son. She is the person that he is able to truly be himself around – when he’s really struggling or suffering or in a bad mood, she's going to be the one who gets it. I was very chuffed to be asked.

**How would you describe Linda?**

I love Linda and had a lot of fun in makeup and costume deciding who she was. Television sometimes has a slightly outdated idea of what a mum is, but if Linda’s in her early fifties then she’d have been in Manchester at the time of the Hacienda and all that. If you have a bit of rave or punk spirit or whatever, you don’t lose that as you become older and start wearing cardigans. She was a single mum who’s never really been in a long-term relationship, set up a cleaning business and she has a life away from Ben. We tried to reflect it in what she wore, like these very cool trainers that I absolutely loved. We had two pairs, a new pair for Then and a battered pair for Now that I took home for my daughter so she could go for long walks and break them in.

**Ben and Jess’s (Sophia Brown) relationship moves very quickly – what does Linda make of it?**

She made a decision to have a child as a single parent, with a low income, in Manchester. She's very open-minded and she’s never wanted to project her own hopes and dreams onto her child. She's not that kind of person. So while she may have raised an eyebrow privately, she always accepted that he makes his own choices. Later on, it comes at quite a price to her when she challenges him about not being able to move forward in his life. She's supported him through things until it’s got to the point where she feels she has to speak to him. It's unusual for her to be so front-footed.

**How did you enjoy working with Harry and the kids?**

We had a real laugh with the kids, and Harry is a dream – I always seem to get gorgeous adult children! I learnt loads from him, not just in the way he prepares for a scene or the work he puts in, but in the way he was with everybody. When you're number one on the call sheet, it's a big responsibility.

**London looks great in this show – would it tempt you to move back down?**

It does look lovely, but no – I lived in London for many years, but I’m such a Manc now that I can’t imagine ever wanting to leave! Often, you see someone like Ben who doesn’t have a lot of money, yet they somehow they live in a massive flat. That’s usually so you can fit in the crew and film around it, so it was brilliant that they built Ben’s flat from scratch in a huge warehouse: it looks cramped, a really hard place to bring up a couple of kids on your own. There's not much privacy or room for anything. London is beautiful in it, but people are living in cramped flats and going for walks on the heath or in the parks because they don’t all have a garden. It was important to me that we reflected that reality.

**What was the most challenging moment of the shoot?**

My very first scene! I'm going to the hospital and Ben's crying, I burst into tears and throw my arms around him. I’d literally just met Harry and didn’t know the crew, and I’m someone who likes to get to know people on the first day, but I couldn't because I had to find this massive emotion with no lead-up whatsoever. I had to take myself off and just be quiet and not chat, and I worried everyone would think I was really boring.

**Is there a message to the show?**

Yeah, it's a really beautiful exploration of the darkest places that a person can go to, while still having a real message of hope that things do pass, it is possible to love again after huge loss and that isn't a betrayal of the person that you've lost. Things change all the time and that's really, really important to acknowledge when people are going through so much struggle.

**What’s coming up next for you?**

I wrote a book last year about what it is to be an actor and how to live your best life as a creative person. I'm at a ripe old age now, but I'm still learning all the time. Having been in Corrie for so many years, I've got a lot of experience but I'm also a little bit fresh to it as well. It's part memoir, part manifesto, part advice book. I loved writing it and people really responded to it, so I'm thinking about what I could write next. I’ve also got performances of The Jungle coming up – it's obviously not the first production of it, but it’s such an incredible piece and I don't think I've ever wanted a job as much. There are people in the play who were refugees in Calais, so it feels like a massive honour to be part of it. We're going to New York and Washington with it, and I've never performed anywhere apart from Britain. All these new experiences all the time, which is brilliant.