

the press conference with **ULRIKA JONSSON**

Hollywood has an elite breed of superstar who inhabit the rarefied altitude known as Single Name Fame — like Clint, Tom, or Nicole. In newspaper story terms, Ulrika Jonsson is an equally rare super A-lister with her own single-name circulation bonk-busters.

First there was "Collymore", a brutal story of lust set in Paris during a football tournament in 1998. If it became a movie, it would be called "One Nil By Mouth".

In 2002, came Ulrika's breakthrough romantic comedy "Sven", a laugh-out-loud bedroom farce. This successful foreign language production saw the emergence of a bespectacled silent Swedish matinee lothario. For the screen, this would be called "Mr Bean — There, Done That".

That same year, Ulrika played a far darker cameo in "Leslie", a courtroom thriller. It broke newsagent records, even though the plot perplexed most voyeurs. A cinematic version would be titled "Presumed Guilty".

These days, Ulrika — now 38 and a mother of three — is more behind the scenes and writes a column for the News of the World. She was an inspired choice two years ago by its editor, Andy Coulson — a signing up there with getting Hugh Grant marching for better working conditions for Hollywood hookers.

I meet Ulrika days before her latest release — a straight-to-DVD, no publicity, weepy called "Mr Wrong". The location is Cliveden Hotel, the exquisite Berkshire estate made famous by John Profumo's fateful meeting with Christine Keeler. Ulrika suggested the venue simply because it is near her home, but it is inadvertently appropriate: a place of beauty with a tantalisingly hedonistic and scandalous past.

So, here I am, in a private sitting room with three liveried maids serving a mouth-watering cream tea on a three-tiered silver cake tray. On the sofa next to me is Ulrika at her most forthright and riotous best. I've had worse afternoons.

Ulrika, given your rocky love affair with the press, the News of the World is an unlikely bed fellow, if you will pardon the expression.

I never imagined I would write for the News of the World because I suppose it is like making a deal with the devil, or sleeping with the enemy. But I don't feel



"About three quarters of the stories about me are true — but much of the comment where they judge me is wrong"

going to run it regardless. Normal rules apply." I sort of respect that, but I hope I might get a bit of warning, be asked to comment, and not wake up to be totally done one Sunday. But I don't expect any special protection.

You're a TV star, with no journalistic background, how reliant are you on a sub?

Well, I did actually do a journalism course while I was at TV-am, but I make no big claims to be a journalist. Even when other papers refer to me as a "columnist", I feel I have 40 years to go before I can that title.

My sub-editor is Fran Goodman and she is just fucking unbelievable. When I was told I would be working with a woman, I thought, oh shit. Women often have a very definite opinion about me and I thought she would treat me with disdain because I am a famous person who sits in and gets a column. I thought I would have to struggle to persuade her that I am actually quite nice and willing to learn.

She is a dream and I am dependent on her guidance, but there are times when my pieces remain totally untouched, or she will put my middle bit at the beginning, or she will have a suggestion for something to add to an item. These days I understand exactly how it works. I would be very pushed to catch up with her experience in journalism, but I am paddling as fast as I can.

OK, that's enough PR for your column. Let's get down to it, News of the World style. Sven and you — it couldn't have been easy reading about that over a tea and bio yoghurt?

I did not want that story to come out — it was a fucking nightmare and was the last thing I wanted. The only three people I thought knew about it was me, him and my agent, who is my best friend. But then the boyfriend of a friend of my ex-ex-nanny sold the story. How can you prevent that?

The two most annoying things about the whole Sven saga is that it has gone down in history that he ended it, which is not the case. And that it was a publicity attempt on my part. Max Clifford even went on the record saying, "This is all great publicity for Jonsson." I was thinking, hang on a minute, you must be fucking nuts. Jesus, I am not that ambitious! I mean, please, I am not a freak show.

How do you feel when you see media coverage of Sven now, especially when he is getting a good kicking?

I don't get any relief from it. In many respects I admire his staying power. I thought he would quit and leave the country after what happened with us. It takes you to be out of a relationship to truly understand a person. He behaved appallingly, but I did not invest in that man emotionally. I was really fond of him. What we had was perfect while no-one knew about it. I had no big dreams and all I did was have an affair with a little old Swedish man. Shock horror. It was a very nice little thing while it lasted. [She snigs the unintentional pun just before me and lets out a peepily-white, mischievous laugh.]

Would you prefer to re-phrase that?

[Thinking] Emmm. No. That's fine, leave it in!

ULRIKA'S NEWS SCHEDULE

Newspapers: In the old days I used to ban newspapers from my house because I hated all the bullshit that was written about me, but when I started the column I had to make friends with my newsgang again. Each day I get *The Sun*, *Mirror*, *Mail* and *Telegraph*. At weekends I get the *Sunday Times* and, of course, the *News of the World*. I am bound to say this, but it is the best at what it does and too many people are in denial about how much they like it.

Columnists: I have had a tough time from various women columnists over the years and it would be too easy to be bitchy about them. I read Sue Carroll and Jane Moore. I look at how they have

wasted certain pieces. They are sharp writers, but that's not to say I agree with them because I bloody don't!

Magazines: The only mag I subscribe to is *Red*. Sometimes I feel compelled to read some of the gossip mags.

Television: The BBC. *Ten O'Clock News*, but I always turn to Sky if there is a breaking story.

Radio: Ninety-nine per cent of the time I have Radio 4 on through the day, which comes from years of living on my own. Radio is fantastic for making life not feel completely silent.



Portrait Phil Adams

When I first started, Andy said my writing was good, but I'm sure he was thinking, "Fucking hell, what is this rubbish?" I was trying to be too proper, as if I was writing for the *Telegraph*. I was very, very nervous. I laugh when I think of my first lead. I told Andy I was writing about the murder of the Swedish Prime Minister and he went, "Oh, right. OK." I sent the column in and he said everything was great. Then he said, "How about you do a piece about Glynis Barber not getting her tits out on stage in *The Graduate*?" And guess what? I did and that ended up being my lead! That was very much an early sign of what was required. I have to be eternally grateful to a very good and patient editor who really guided me by the hand the whole way.

Now, come on, you know that sucking up to the editor never works. Where do you lay, so to speak, when the News of the World wants to give you, erm, a good Sunday roasting?

I know they have turned me over a few times before and they may very well do that again. Andy has been very clear and said, "If I have a story on you, I am

compromised and it has been one of my better decisions.

I was first approached by Andy a good nine months before I actually started. It was an amazing offer, but I was terrified, so I had to think hard before I agreed. The key assurance was that I would not be made to write something I felt uncomfortable about.

I remember Andy saying to me, "You're gonna love it." And I was thinking, no I am bloody not. But I do now. I take it very seriously and work hard on it all week. At the beginning, I didn't think I would last six months, but now I am in my third year.

How does it feel writing for a tabloid — as opposed to starring in them?

One of the weirdest things is that I am now commenting on situations that columnists have written about with me in the past. But I feel that I am in a better position than some to comment, especially when it comes to relationships and celebrities. I am very wary not to react to stories that I am not certain are true. I know how bad that feels.



by **Rob McGibbon**

No interview would be complete without some discreet product placement. We aim to be a bit more up front, so feel free to pull The Blatant Plug...

Ulrika — The Body Plan is available on interactive DVD from Boxing Day for £17.99. Bonus Plug Cliveden House Hotel — clivedenhouse.co.uk

How do you feel about Stan Collymore and the "ruff" treatment he got from the papers?

I don't really think about him and I didn't get any satisfaction reading what was happening. I am not a vengeful person — that is a dodgy game to play and it is a waste of emotion and energy. That may sound holier than thou, but I genuinely mean it.

And what of John Leslie?

[Ulrika looks at me, lips sealed, with all emotion blanked from her eyes. It is a bravura anti-'dram' performance for sure. Enough said.]

Sum up your media image and what you consider is the real you.

I would say people see me as man-eating, highly driven, overly ambitious, unpredictable. I would say I am extremely hard working, generous, unconventional and a little bit bonkers in the nicest possible way. I have to be a bit quirky to survive, so I have not led my life conventionally. I got married the first time very young and it has all been a bit upside down. Maybe people struggle to put me in a box, which is why they have created their own character for me.

You received a gourmet Daily Mail skewering recently that said your TV career is finished, you're too thin and are basically a career-driven loon. How does it feel reading a piece like that?

I read that and thought, You mad woman, that is so desperately un-me. Stories that make me a little bit angry at first, but then I think, well, whatever. It used to get a rise out of me, but I can't be bothered now. The ambition thing is always totally over-stated. Ambition is an ugly word when it is attributed to a woman, which I find hard to understand. All I am ambitious to do is to pay the bills and bring up my children well.

My weight is not a problem to me either. The article also said I am desperate to get back on Saturday night TV, which could not be further from the truth. I found it very unsettling doing what Claudia Winkleman calls Shiny Floor TV. The last thing I did was unsatisfying and unrewarding. I want to do things that are challenging, like documentaries, something with a bit of depth. *Ant School*, for example, was fantastic. I learnt a lot about myself.

I am so content with what I am doing now and I'm in the best place I've ever been professionally. If I could make a living from writing and something artistic I would be happy. I don't feel the need to be on television but, that said, if someone offers me 30 grand to do some easy TV in a short period of time, I will do it. I have a home to run, so who wouldn't?

You have cuttings files full of sensational stories. If you could get Harry Potter to make one vanish, which would it be? Sorry, but even Harry could only manage one of yours.

Oh shit! There is a long list. [She pauses and thinks] Actually, you are almost asking me to regret something I have done. Although I have made bad judgements, I don't have regrets as such and I suppose the stories are a record of my life, so they can all stay there. I would say three-quarters are true, but much of the comment where they judge my personality and motivation is wrong.

How do you feel about the notion that you are fair game for the papers because you have sold your private life to Hello! magazine in the past?

I take that on board and I understand I am not entitled to privacy, but there should be some boundary lines — they seem so very blurred. I was 21 years old when I started doing the weather at TV-am. Back then, celebrity didn't exist the way that it does now. I was heavily encouraged — if not forced — to talk very openly about my private life by the press office. Talking about yourself and your boyfriend was always part of getting publicity. I was as green as anything, but by the time I realised I was no longer entitled to privacy, it was too late. The pictures from my first wedding were given to Hello! for free because it was simply considered good PR for the station.

What is the worst example of intrusion into your private life?

Two backs sat in the pews at the back of the church during my dad's funeral. One was from the *Mirror* and

I think the other was from an agency. I was so distraught that it didn't bother me at the time. My ex-husband told them to leave, but pictures still appeared of me mourning, which was in bad taste.

I get photographers following me all the time. It gets ridiculous at times. A few years ago I was in St Tropez and I wouldn't leave the villa I was renting. I had bloody Jason Fraser knocking on the door saying, "Look, will you come out here, I've got the Royals coming soon and I've got to get your photo." I said, "No, fuck off. I am not here for your pleasure."

I hear you are writing a novel. Can we expect something from the Naomi Campbell school of literature?

No — I am writing it myself and I am on my third chapter, but it is going very slowly. I am not doing a novel because I have a name. I see it as a way of making a living and a challenge. People will be surprised at the content. It is not a Jackie Collins-type novel, but nearer Joanna Tolliver.

With rose-tinted hindsight, would you play the press differently?

If I was to become famous tomorrow for the first time I would do a Cate Blanchett or Jodie Foster. They keep 95 per cent of their private lives private and talk about their work. I understand that there is a trade off, but I would not say the sacrifices of being exposed to a public life have been worth it. I know you have to give a bit of yourself, otherwise who is going to do an interview with me, but I hardly do any these days, even though I get asked all the time.

I will be in the public eye regardless of how much I try to hide myself away in deepest Berkshire and not do prime-time TV. If I had my time again, I would do things differently, but I live with it and I don't regret it. That does not mean I like it. These days I get less and less concerned about explaining myself. I think, Well, if you don't get me by now, you probably don't want to and never will.

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Ulrika Jonsson's FANTASY FIXERS

What would be the Fantasy Headline of the story you would most like to read?

"Press Goes On A Long, Long Holiday".

What would be the Fantasy Headline involving yourself?

"Ulrika Relaxes".

What would be the headline you most dread?

I doubt there is a headline I dread. I think I've had it all.

Who would you most like to interview and what question would you ask?

My dad, and I would ask him all the things I've been unable to ask him since he died 10 years ago.

What question would you never answer?

There is no question I wouldn't answer — but my agent would have to kill you afterwards!

What would you like the headline to be on your obituary?

It should simply read: "She was a beautiful dichotomy".