

the press conference with JAMIE THEAKSTON

by Rob McGibbon

Jamie Theakston has starred in enough tabloid stories to fill his own special edition of a gossip-laden Sunday red-top. According to the cuts, he's partied his way through the past decade, and the proof is there with countless appearances at showbiz parties, pap pictures galore and a few kiss-and-tells.

His love life has been relentlessly documented. Actress Joely Richardson, All Saints singer Natalie Appleton and model Erin O'Connor have all been wrapped around his lanky 6ft 4in frame. Apparently, he was even spinning around with Kylie Minogue. It's been pretty good going, especially for a lothario who was continuously embroiled in that great investigative story 'Tiddlergate'.

Then, of course, there was another, er, companion — better known as "Mayfair brothel madam Bella, a 6ft 4in African-born beauty", to quote the *Sunday People* from its infamous story in 2002. Jamie sought and failed to get an injunction for that, which only inflamed the story and resulted in a severe whipping from the entire pack.

Jamie's lusty diversion was all the more fascinating because it came out of a squeaky clean image honed as presenter with Zoe Ball of BBC's *Live and Kicking* and *Top of the Pops*. But despite all the lurid headlines, his career has been largely unaffected. Now 34, he still hosts various TV shows, occasionally acts in West End plays and has been doing well with his breakfast show on London's Heart FM. And he still enjoys a good party.

We meet at Heart in Notting Hill, a short drive from his home. Understandably, Jamie has been known to dread interviews, but these days he is affable, open and clearly braced for the inevitable questions. At least, I hope he is.

So, Jamie, how is the radio show going? But, actually, what I really mean by that is: What was it like reading about yourself and that hooker all over the tabloids? (Laughs heartily) Ummm. Well, at least there's none of the usual messing around I get before journalists ask me about that...

You know, it's always best to be up front. Do you mind talking me through it? It must have been horrendous...

Yeah, it was a really difficult time. The worst. And it was a real eye-opener. I think I had always been quite naive about tabloids, certainly the Sunday tabloids. I was amazed how they can write what they want and I never really imagined that what started out as a



"The judge decided I did not have a right to privacy so The People went for me. They turned it into the most depraved situation you could imagine"

pretty bog-standard kiss-and-tell would be blown up into something that was much bigger. The girl who sold the story rang me initially and asked for money or she was going to the papers. I tried to ignore it and was quite relaxed about it. People had done kiss-and-tell stories in the past and I don't care. Nobody really cares, so I let it go.

Then the paper (*The People*) rang and said, "There's this girl and we are going to run the story. If you do an interview we won't use her." Suddenly, in my naivety, I said, "Well, I can have sex with whoever I want, it is not anybody's business. No, I am not going to tell you intimate details about my sex life." That's when I made the foolish decision. What I thought would be a relatively straightforward legal issue, suddenly exploded into this big privacy matter. I was not really aware what a big issue privacy is for the newspapers, and there is this wonderful grey area for lawyers and bods on newspapers to exploit.

I genuinely believed I had a case to prove, but by making it a legal issue, *The People* then said, "If you

don't go along with us and lose, we will make it a lot worse." In a conference call with my lawyers, they made it very clear how bad they would make the story sound. The judge decided that I did not have a right to privacy and the paper rubbed their hands and went for me. They turned it into the most depraved situation you could imagine.

You seem to have come out of it OK. But how has it affected your attitude to the press?

After all that I suddenly realised that the truth is not a currency they give much importance to on a Sunday tabloid. I also learnt that the public don't care about stories like that either. I went through it a bit, but I am not too bothered, it's a long time ago. I said at the time — and I still maintain — that I have nothing to hide, but I just believed in the principle that I had a right to privacy. I learnt that I don't actually have any right, and then you just think, OK, fine. I have always been honest from the beginning. It was a tough time and I would certainly not want to have to go through it again.

These days, I have a far more relaxed attitude to newspapers than I used to have. I went through a very angry stage when I didn't like the intrigue I believed I was getting at the time. Now I just go with the flow a bit more.



Portraits Phil Adams

Any message for the protagonists in that story?

I have noticed that the girl has gone on to sell more stories about other people. I just think, Well whatever. There are two journalists I would like to set fire to for crimes against humanity! I'm joking. They know who they are, so we will leave it at that. In a way, I would like to sit down with people who have made up stories about me and find out how they feel about it. Do they think they were a bit amateurish, or they mucked up, and whether there would ever be a situation where somebody would apologise. Or it could just be a case of, "Oh well, we got it wrong in the line of work." But, Christ, do these guys know they can have a real impact on people's lives? Maybe they don't realise. Or maybe they do and don't care.

Considering the aggro you've had, have you thought about simply shutting down and not bothering with interviews? Do you consider it a deal with the devil?

A deal with the devil? I'm not so sure, maybe. I have certainly closed down in the past. I used to hate doing interviews and found the whole thing impossible. I was very protective and private, but I found that actually caused more problems than it can solve. I had this long-suffering PR, and people would say, "Urgh, interviewing Jamie is a nightmare. He is so guarded he doesn't talk about anything." It wasn't working to anyone's benefit.

I have never found it easy to talk about myself and I find the whole process of interviews slightly uncomfortable, but often you are contractually obliged to do them. I know for a fact that if I agree to do an interview that is a double pager in, say, the *Daily Mirror*, the TV or radio show or whatever will not get mentioned apart from in tiny italics at the end. Yet there will be a two-inch headline about who I am going out with.

I see the problem. Hopefully the new Rajar figures will prove your Heart FM breakfast show is dumping all over Johnny Vaughan at Capital. But what I'm really referring to is 'Tiddlergate'. Was that a big problem for you?

I have never really understood the Dominic (Mohan) thing. I don't really know him. I can't think why... erm... when I used to do my show at Radio 1, we had an item when people would come on to prove that certain stories in the papers were untrue. It was a way of setting the record straight. I never intended it to be an aggressive thing towards journalists, but I think that put a lot of people's noses out of joint.

Dominic wrote in *Bizarre* that an old girlfriend of mine had said to him that I had a small penis. She told me she had never even met Dominic Mohan. The mistake he made was that he didn't realise we still got on really well. He probably thought, they have split up and don't get on, so I can write this. I think she was more upset about it than me and she said, "I would never say that." I feel sorry for her more than anything. In every interview she kept saying, I have never spoken to Dominic Mohan and yet he

would continually do it. I bumped into Rebekah Wade some time and I said, "What is it with Dominic? You know, it's getting a bit embarrassing." All the other papers were loving it and saying that Dominic is fascinated by the penis, and that's when he stopped doing it. I don't think it was ever going to be a Pulitzer-winning strand to his career.

You are good friends with some tabloid editors, how do you balance that with the press you get?

I know a few editors and I always think I can maintain that kind of relationship because I have never tried to pull any favours with anyone. I have never rung up a friend of mine who edits a paper and said, "Can you do me a favour here." I think it is important not to cross that line.

The new TV commercials for Heart FM are great. But what about your love life! It has constantly been a feature of the papers. How do you feel about that?

Yes, there tends to be a fascination with my love life and there has been a litany of girls that I was lined up with by the newspapers, some of whom I have never even met. I have always found that slightly odd. There was even a story about me going out with Kylie Minogue. That's not so bad, but mates ring up and say, "Bloody hell, are you going out with Kylie?" And I go, "Er, no. Unfortunately not!"

It must be hard when you are in a relationship to see it all over the press. Joely, for example. Did the coverage put added pressure on you both?

(Long pause) I don't know... certainly, it doesn't make it any easier. People will wrongly report you are going out with someone when you are actually with someone else. There have been at least two occasions when that has happened and caused tension. And the physical pressure can be there when you come out of a restaurant and photographers are waiting, but that is not much of a hardship. On holiday, it's slightly more intrusive. You go all that way to enjoy yourself and then people take your picture. I find that irritating. The paparazzi say, "Well, don't go to the Caribbean." Or, "Don't eat in a restaurant in the West End. Go to your local fish and chip shop and you won't get hassled." Hang on, No! What right do you have to dictate where I eat or go on holiday? If I told a photographer what he should do, he would quite rightly say, "Fuck off!"

What is it like dealing with the paparazzi?

I used to have them all the time, but not so much now. I think I am old and they are bored. There are younger, far more exciting people to get. The last time was about eight months ago, and now I just ignore it, which I guess I always have to a degree. It's weird when they chase you in a car and it does feel like that whole hunter-quarry thing. I have had proper, stand-up shouting matches with them before. I had a pushing row with one guy in the middle of a busy junction. I was on my own in the car — it was



pathetic, there was no picture — so I got out and said, "Why can't you leave me alone?" He started saying, "I can take your fucking picture if I want." They can be really aggressive and often they want a row because it is a better story and they have another guy taking pictures of that.

I even get asked to play along. Darryn Lyons (*the Tutti Fruity haired boss of Big Pictures*) will ring and say, "Hey, Jamie, I've got this boat. Let's go to the South of France, take a few girls, have a laugh and do some pictures?" I'm thinking, What?! Have I got "Knob" tattooed on my forehead? Why would I ever want to do that?

Tell us one of the lighter negative stories.

A few years ago (1998) I won the Best Dressed Man Award, and the *Daily Mail* — as they should — rallied against it. They dragged out ever single picture they could possibly find of me looking a mess and wrote, "This award is disgusting!"

If you could wipe away one story from the cuts, which would it be?

(Another long pause. Then, it has to be said, unconvincingly...) It would be a review by Nicholas de Jongh for a play I did in the West End called *Hone and Beauty* by Somerset Maugham. It was a full page-three review — which he rarely does — in which he savaged everything and said it was the worst thing he had ever seen. It was such a shame. Everyone had put so much into that production and I felt it was slightly because of me that he had given it such prominence in the paper.

How would you sum up your media image as others perceive you, and what is the real you?

People tend to be more interested in the fact that I do lots of different things. Not many people have their own TV show, radio show and do the odd West End play. What am I like? I'm kind of honest, I guess. And hard working and, you know, like gardening and...

You don't think the public's perception might be more focused on the shagging and partying?

I hope not. Christ! I suddenly have this horrible thought that, you know, after 12 years of busting my balls, my epitaph will be: He shagged Kylie!

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JAMIE'S NEWS SCHEDULE

Newspapers:

I get to work at 5am. The papers are vital to the show and are our primary reference point. The producers cut all the tabloids and I tend to go straight through the *Telegraph*, *Times*, *Indy* and *Guardian*. I focus on leaders and columnists that will give me varying opinions on stories we will talk about.

On Sundays, I get a big wedge. I get the *Sunday Times*, *Observer*, *Sunday Mirror*, *News of the World*. I like the revamp of the *Observer*.



Magazines:

I buy *GQ*. I have a broad interest, so apart from that, I pick up whatever catches my eye.

Columnists:

I find Giles Coren very funny in *The Times* on Saturday, and that's the only time I buy a paper specifically to read a columnist. But I like his column, not the restaurant reviews. I have no interest in finding out what someone's dinner was like. I also like Jane Moore in *The Sun*. For politics, Terence Blacker in the *Indy* is consistently good.

Television:

I am a bit of a news junkie, and Sky News is on at home pretty much most of the day. Channel 4 News is great. I like documentaries and sport, and it seems that *More4* has been tailored for me, so I pick up most of my stuff from there.

Radio:

I Sky+ all the other London breakfast shows, like *Capital* and *Magic*. And I scan through to find out what they are doing at certain times — how they are cross-promoting, how clued into London they are, the combination of speech and music and how many callers they get. God, it's fucking boring!



Web:

I'm an eBay addict. I'm probably on there twice a day and I've bought all kinds of junk. I get very excited about the whole concept of bidding, and I've even bid on Aston Martins — unsuccessfully!

One of my hobbies is collecting old FA Cup Final programmes, and you often see those on eBay, but not the really rare ones. I have got every programme back to 1929, except three. I also like www.ananova.com for news.

Jamie Theakston's

FANTASY FLOWERS

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

OFFICIAL: BEER IS GOOD FOR YOU! I like a few pints and can keep up with the best of them. But this is read by journalists, so I would probably be considered a lightweight!

What would be the Fantasy Headline involving yourself?

PENELOPE CRUZ AND EMMANUELLE BEART SAY YES TO THREESOME!! (What — again, Jamie??)

What would be the headline you most dread?

I've probably had headlines about as bad as they get...

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

Simon Cowell, and I would ask, "What do you genuinely believe has been your contribution to music?"

What question would you never answer?

"Tell me your biggest secret" and "Which tabloid editor would you like to burn?"

What headline would you like on your Obituary?

I'd rather be here than in Maidstone!