



# BREATHLESS

# PRODUCTION NOTES

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## INTRODUCTION

Produced for ITV by the ITV Studios drama team, *Breathless* features a star-studded cast as Jack Davenport (*Smash, Pirates of the Caribbean*) is joined by Natasha Little (*Kidnap and Ransom, Vanity Fair*), Joanna Page (*The Syndicate, Gavin & Stacey*), Shaun Dingwall (*Vera, Above Suspicion, Rock & Chips*), Zoe Boyle (*Downton Abbey, Sons of Anarchy*), Oliver Chris (*Bluestone 42, One Man Two Guvnors*), Catherine Steadman (*The Tudors, Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*), Sarah Parish (*Hatfields & McCoys, Monroe, Mistresses*) and Iain Glen (*Game of Thrones, Prisoners Wives*).

Co-created and written by Paul Unwin, who has also directed the first two episodes, *Breathless* follows the lives of a group of doctors and nurses working in a London hospital, a world in which everything and everyone has their place. But underneath the shiny veneer simmers a cauldron of lies, deception and guilty secrets, driven by love, ambition and sex.

The series opens in 1961, a time when Britain was on the brink of the Sixties revolution – abortion is illegal and the contraceptive pill is only just becoming available to married women. Set in and around a busy Gynaecology unit, medicine becomes the perfect stage to play out the shifting and complex moral codes of early 1960s society.

Jack Davenport plays Otto Powell, a brilliant and charismatic surgeon, who passionately believes he can make a difference to women's lives, even if that means risking imprisonment under the abortion laws of 1961.

Otto and his elegant wife, Elizabeth (Natasha Little), preside over the rich ensemble of characters. They are the beautiful people living the consumerist dream and the couple which others aspire to be like. But Otto and Elizabeth are hiding a devastating secret about their marriage, an event in their past which could shatter the careful illusion they have created.

Otto's oldest friend and closest colleague, Dr Charlie Enderbury (Shaun Dingwall), is an experienced anaesthetist who is married to ex-nurse Lily (Joanna Page). Together they share a warm and loving marriage and Charlie has hopes for a promotion that will guarantee a better life for them.

But his ambitions are dashed when newcomer Dr Mehta (Ronny Jhutti) is appointed Chair of Anaesthesiology over him. Charlie also holds another, far deeper burden. He alone knows the truth about Otto and Elizabeth.

Dr Richard Truscott (Oliver Chris), a junior consultant, oozes boyish confidence and charm in the face of his medical students and is constantly irritated by Otto's superiority. He is engaged to Jean Meecher (Zoe Boyle), a sensual and fiery nurse who is convinced her dream is to become a doting housewife living in the lap of luxury, but as an independent woman, Jean cannot always do what her husband expects of her.

New to London is Jean's sister Angela Wilson (Catherine Steadman), who arrives from Portsmouth to take up a job in the hospital. Angela is a dynamic and striking nurse with a strong moral sense who won't let her responsibilities be compromised. But when she meets the charismatic Otto Powell, she can't help feeling an urge of temptation that she struggles to repress – and no one has caught Otto's eye in years in the way that Angela has.

*Breathless* is produced by Jolyon Symonds (*Thorne, Complicit*). ITV Studios Kate Bartlett is the executive producer alongside Paul Unwin. The other writers are Peter Grimsdale (the show's co-creator) and Simon Tyrrell (*Lightfields, Survivors*).

Kate Bartlett, executive producer for ITV Studios said: "*Breathless* is an exhilarating and charismatic character drama, set against a glamorous London backdrop. The medical stories and events are there to illuminate and complicate the lives of our key characters and 1961 is a fascinating time in which to explore the changing role of women in society."

ITV Studios Global Entertainment will distribute *Breathless* internationally.

## QUOTES FROM KATE BARTLETT – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

“We wanted *Breathless* to look stylish, gorgeous and colourful but our primary aim was to make a compelling character driven drama. To create characters you want to watch, that you’re going to fall in love with, and to tell great stories.

“*Breathless* is set in London during 1961 just before the sexual revolution. This is a time when abortion was illegal and the pill was only made available to married women. This drama touches on some of the issues women faced during this time. It’s a fascinating era and the role of women today has changed significantly since then.

“When I read Paul Unwin’s first script I fell in love with it and felt passionately about making it. *Breathless* breaks the typical convention of the medical genre with oppressive struggles being at the heart of its storytelling. As Paul Unwin says, ‘the medical world is a great world to tell stories through’, and I agree.

“It’s a wonderful way to gauge what’s happening to society and the women living through it. Some of the attitudes are frightening when seen from the very different viewpoint of today. But thankfully changes were coming.

“1961 is an exciting time visually to set a drama in. We talked considerably about the look of the show and wanting to make it feel gorgeous and glamorous but also accessible and appealing. We had incredibly talented crew members heading up each department – Director of Photography, Tim Palmer, Costume Designer, Charlotte Holditch, Production Designer, Matt Gant, and Hair and Make-up Designer, Nadia Stacey. We all discussed wanting to give *Breathless* a stylish, vibrant and distinctive look.

“The locations for filming were all within London itself or just on the outskirts. Some parts of London haven’t really changed. If you put some period cars on the corner of Harley Street, you’re back in 1961 again. It can sometimes be tricky to film in London and there may be a little bit of CGI work to do but it’s achievable. We sometimes had to split our locations to make them work, for example, the front of our hospital was the Trades Union Congress (TUC) building in central London and the back was St Bartholomew’s Hospital.

“In one of the later episodes we have a scene set at night on the Embankment in front of the Houses of Parliament and there’s something slightly magical about the illuminated Houses of Parliament, the out of focus twinkling lights of boats going past and our characters dressed in gorgeous costumes. It does make you think this is exactly how it would have looked in 1961.

“Then there are locations like Otto’s (Jack Davenport) and Elizabeth’s (Natasha Little) house, which was in Surrey. A beautiful, stunning property with immaculate lawns and roses in the garden that looks like it is straight out of the 1960s.

“Our Production Designer, Matt Gant, has had a great time styling the sets and locations. I think 1961 is a period that is a joy for a production designer to work in. However, the style always has to come from the character so actually the only couple with a home that is distinctly 1961 in its style and furniture is that of Richard (Oliver Chris) and Jean (Zoe Boyle).

“I’m incredibly proud of the cast we have assembled. We always knew we wanted Jack Davenport to play the charismatic Otto Powell and so we were thrilled when he said yes having read the first two scripts and very quickly too! It’s also fantastic to have Jack back on British TV again.

“We were also thrilled with all our other wonderful cast – Iain Glen, Joanna Page, Zoe Boyle, Shaun Dingwall, Oliver Chris, Catherine Steadman and the glamorous Sarah Parish for four of our episodes.

“*Breathless* is set two years before the Profumo affair emerged and it’s a world where appearances mattered and certain things were hidden. I hope *Breathless* tells great stories. And even though this is a world that is glamorous and beautiful, at its heart the drama is about secrets, lies and great characters.”

## PAUL UNWIN - CO-CREATOR, WRITER, DIRECTOR AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

*"Breathless* is not like anything I've done before," says Paul Unwin.

"Although the 1960s weren't that long ago it was a very different period in Britain. While the Prime Minister encouraged people by saying they had 'never had it so good' it was also a time when people were repressed and felt they had to cover up the truth about themselves. That's where this drama comes from.

"It features a group of strong characters who have a lot of stories to tell. I believe everyone will find a character to recognise, to fall in love with, and I hope they come along for the ride."

Paul Unwin co-created *Casualty*, the world's longest running primetime TV medical drama, and has written, directed and produced widely in film, television and theatre.

*Breathless* is set in 1961 against the backdrop of a new NHS hospital in London. "It is a drama about a group of characters that expands as the story goes on. It is a world in which people are often forced to hide the truth, or lie," explains Paul.

"The characters are connected through a hospital and many of the stories stem from and go back to medicine. But it's not a medical drama in the traditional sense. It's very different and something I don't think viewers will have seen before in that it takes medical stories as the stepping off point...

"With its gynecological background, *Breathless* is about the lives of women. It was a time when women had less control of their bodies: the contraceptive pill had just been introduced but only for married women who had the permission of their husbands to take it. Astounding. And it was a time when abortion was still illegal."

After talking to relatives who grew up in the '40s and '50s, Paul describes how he discovered the world was so much more about appearances then. "This wasn't just about who had money, and who didn't, but also about keeping up appearances and how you were supposed to behave.

"In *Breathless* you have class and aspiration, but that is only the surface. Characters like Otto (Jack Davenport) and Elizabeth (Natasha Little) are living the life that everybody wants. However, while they appear to be one thing they turn out to be something quite different. Their story is only one of several – lives built on half-truths, necessary secrets and lies..."

But most fundamentally, *Breathless* is about how very different the early Sixties were for women....

*"Breathless* is startling in the way men spoke to and treated women. Those attitudes were perhaps most exposed when you get the confidence of doctors against the most intimate lives of women."

Paul's *Breathless* journey began four years ago.

"In creating *Casualty* Jeremy Brock and I discovered that the world of medical drama is less about the illness and more about the cause of the illness.

"So years later I was thinking, 'I'd really like to do something about the early 1960s and particularly about the position of women then. As I developed the idea I realised it was best to focus on the power of gynaecologists; an uncharted area in medical TV!

"At the same time I became fascinated by those American dramas which are like novels. Where every episode you get enough of the story but you don't get the whole thing. And so *Breathless* was born out of those two ambitions and an interest in trying to write stories about women, along with some very strong male characters."

Paul created *Breathless* with documentary producer Peter Grimsdale, who co-wrote the first episode.

"Peter is an old friend of mine. We hadn't seen each other for years and we met up again at a party when I was wandering around with this idea. I said, 'Let's get together.' Because of his knowledge of the period and how that world worked we collaborated in setting up the series and together wrote the first episode.

"I wanted the series to be set just as the pill started and the world of Profumo scandal was on the horizon. I wanted to be able, if the drama was a success, to follow my characters into the excitement and sexual revolution that occurred in the mid-1960s.

"Making *Breathless* has been an astonishing experience and to now have filmed the entire series and see it finished is thrilling."

He explains: "The series is called *Breathless* because you should feel breathless as you are drawn into the story. It's not an explicit show but it has a sexiness about it. At its centre is sex and sexual politics. And it's also a polite homage to a great film of 1960, Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless*.

"ITV drama is at a really strong point at the moment and I think they have created something here which is very different, original and engaging."

That includes the look of both the characters and the drama itself.

"I worked very closely with all the visuals because I wanted it to be very stylish. Zoe Boyle's wardrobe as Jean, for example, includes a striking red dress. I wanted her to look both exotic and remind us of the world of the Empire and where stuff came from then."

Award winning costume designer Charlotte Holdich's previous credits include: *Any Human Heart*; *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*; *Housewife 49*; *Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley*.



“What Matt and I tried to do is to make the hospital gleam. The NHS wasn’t new in itself but it was a new idea with the notion of a service there for everybody. It was all bright and positive with few of the stresses that we see now in the NHS.”

Production designer Matt Gant’s previous credits include: *Life On Mars*; *Ashes To Ashes*; *Endeavour*.

“It was difficult to shoot a 1961 drama in 2013 London but the fantastic team on this drama made it a lot easier,” says Paul, who wrote five of the six episodes. The director of photography, Tim Palmer (*Doctor Who*, *Being Human*, *Ashes to Ashes*, *Life on Mars*) was a very key element in achieving the look. Using bright colours and strong key lighting, he has created something that is beautiful to look at and hugely reminiscent of the period. What we most wanted was to avoid ‘period sepi’.”

Paul describes a shot, which so reminded him of his mother coming down stairs that tears filled his eyes. “Of course it wasn’t my mother, but it took me right back to being a young man just a few years later.

“But there’s also a lot of fun in watching the wonderful period details in the series. The food in a dinner party scene, for example. Some of the younger people on set were going, ‘What on earth is this? A piece of tinned pineapple on a piece of cheese?’ And I had to tell them that’s what people ate then.”

Paul pays tribute to the ensemble cast, led by Jack Davenport.

“As soon as I realised Jack was available I became obsessed by him. He is a very fine, strong, powerful actor. It’s both a very overdue return to British TV and is in my opinion, one of the best performances I’ve ever seen him give.

“I’ve always admired Joanna Page (Lily) who wanted to audition even though she had just had a baby. She came in and after reading just three lines of a scene I thought, ‘Dear God, I hope we can get her.’

“We’ve been blessed by a phenomenal group of actors. From Oliver Chris (Richard), and Zoe Boyle (Jean), who are incredible. Catherine Steadman (Angela) is a wonderful discovery and then you have the fantastic talents of Natasha Little (Elizabeth), Shaun Dingwall (Charlie) Sarah Parish (Margaret) and Iain Glen (Mulligan).”

Iain and Paul go back years as they worked together on a seminal *Hamlet* and the premiere of Arthur Miller’s *The Man Who Had All The Luck* in the theatre.

Paul continues: “I directed the first two episodes of *Breathless* which was an extraordinary privilege. Because I’d been so involved in getting the production going, it seemed like the right thing to do at the time. Although sometimes, when I was a little weary, I wasn’t so sure,” he laughs.

“The other directors were Marek Losey and Philippa Langdale who are both brilliant. As directors we worked with each other a lot more than you would on a normal show – they supported me, and me them.” Paul says: “The episodes just get better and better as the series grows and that is a testament to Marek and Philippa.

“Jolyon Symonds is a delightful, skilled producer. His mum had worked as a nurse around this time so she came in to talk to the cast. She was great at the social detail of how people lived then. And loved telling me off!”

He adds: “Working with ITV has been incredibly exciting. Kate Bartlett and her team at ITV Studios loved the show and we worked very closely on it from beginning to end. It has been a very positive collaboration. Steve November, the Director of Drama, and Commissioning Executive Victoria Fea, have also been amazing. Their attention to detail has been tireless. They have tested everything about the series. It is incredible to feel so supported.”

Paul concludes: “*Breathless* is ambitious, for all of us. It is a multi-character drama that tells a lot of story and it tells that story over the first six episodes. It will, I know, surprise the viewer. It is a show that will get people talking.

“I think the time is right for *Breathless*. I hope the audience embrace the series and really enjoy it.”

Paul’s previous screen credits include: *Casualty*; *Holby City*; *Holby Blue*; *The American*; *Poirot*; *Messiah*; *Marple*; *Bramwell*; *Shameless*. His TV film *Elijah* won the Gemini and Leo award for best film in 2009. His short film *Syrup* was nominated for an Oscar and won the Jury Prize at Cannes.



## JACK DAVENPORT PLAYS OTTO POWELL

*Breathless* is set against the backdrop of a London NHS hospital in 1961. But Jack Davenport explains this new series is not a typical medical drama.

Making a long-awaited return to British TV, the *Pirates of the Caribbean* star says: “The only measure by which I can ever choose to do something is, ‘Would I watch it myself?’”

“When I first got the scripts I thought, ‘A medical drama? I think the world has more than enough of them.’ But very quickly I realised it wasn’t some turgid procedural at all. In fact it’s a very cleverly chosen setting. It explores the personal, not just the professional.

“By choosing this particular area of medicine at this particular period in history, the creator Paul Unwin has opened up the drama and broadened it to explore issues facing women in society, how they were breaking free of certain social shackles and how the medical establishment treated them.

“*Breathless* subverts your expectations both in terms of setting and by utilizing characters who are incredibly veiled and adept at covering their true feelings. It’s a world of obfuscation.”

Jack plays Otto Powell, a brilliant and charismatic surgeon with a dark secret in his past. He lives with his wife Elizabeth (Natasha Little) and their son Thomas (Rudi Goodman). To the outside world they appear to be a golden couple in a perfect marriage.

“Otto is the senior consultant in the obstetric wing of a new NHS hospital and he also has a private practice. Abortion was still illegal then, and birth control via the pill had only just become available to married women, although incredibly, it could only be prescribed with the permission of their husband!

“He provides a service to women that need it. As a medical man he doesn’t consider abortion to be a moral issue. It’s that simple for him.

“Initially, I rather hope the audience might be thinking, ‘Who the hell does this guy, Otto, think he is?’ But slowly but surely, a part of the story becomes about subverting what may have been your initial assessment of him.”

Adds Jack: "1961 is such an elegant choice to set the show. People assume, 'Oh, it's the swinging Sixties!' Well numerically speaking, yes. But it's still very much a post-war world with social upheavals yet to come. Even *The Beatles* don't turn up until late 1962 and when they do they're mop tops.

"So it's not quite the Sixties we might think we know, and yet you can almost hear the social timbers creaking in various ways. So the time period was chosen with some precision with great possibilities in terms of what experiences these characters might go through."

Otto and Elizabeth seem to be living the dream, with Jack and Natasha Little reunited on screen for the first time since they co-starred together in 1990s series *This Life*.

"They have a big house in the suburbs and all appears as it should be. But they have been thrown together by circumstance and you begin to realise that, in many ways, Otto is a prisoner of his past mistakes. They appear to have some kind of arrangement but it's not quite clear what it is."

One clue comes when Otto begins to pursue nurse Angela Wilson (Catherine Steadman), a young woman also trying to escape from the past.

"You begin to wonder what has motivated Otto to behave like that and why he feels he can get away with it. It's also not clear if his wife knows about his pursuit or, if she does know and turns a blind eye."

What does Otto see in Angela?

"For all his slightly overwhelming confidence and incredible calmness in the face of anything, he can't quite pin down Angela.

"In a world before industrial tribunals, being sidled up to by the senior consultant and twinkled at could be the beginning of a new life for a young nurse... But Angela is having none of it. He quite likes that. It intrigues him. Then very quickly he starts to be overtaken by his feelings for her. I think they're equal and opposite forces."

*Breathless* is set in a period when women were still viewed as secondary to men in society. Including when they were in hospital.

"It's pretty shocking how unfeeling and dismissive these men of a so-called caring profession are towards these vulnerable women. It acts as a metaphor for society as a whole. Although Otto is more compassionate than some of the other doctors in the story in terms of just acknowledging what it is he's actually doing. I find it still, to this day, slightly staggering how many gynaecologists are men."

Back then, if a nurse married a doctor she had to give up her job.

"You couldn't be married. That was true of a lot of professions, which is amazing to think now. The attitude seemed to be, "You can go into the workforce, but, obviously, if you get married all of your domestic dreams now come true, so time to get back in your box and be the little woman at home."

Jack agrees that it takes a special sort of character to be a surgeon like Otto.

"I have met surgeons and they are like the jet pilots of medicine. They are very alpha. They have to be. They hold people's lives in their hands. It takes a certain kind of natural self-confidence - they're very self-possessed people."

Otto served in the Army Medical Corps in 1953 Cyprus with his anaesthetist Dr Charlie Enderbury (Shaun Dingwall) when he encountered Ronald Mulligan (Iain Glen), who was then a sergeant in the Military Police.

Now a Chief Inspector with Scotland Yard, Mulligan sees Otto when visiting the hospital. "They had very brief, rather intense dealings with each other in the 1950s and are doomed to have their paths cross again," explains Jack.

On set Jack is dressed in the consultant's best black tie and tuxedo for a photoshoot. "Outside of scrubs, there is just one scene in the entire drama where Otto is not wearing a tie. And that was after some negotiation," he laughs. "There are a lot of high waisted trousers in my world."

Otto drives an Alvis car, made by the British manufacturer of the same name later taken over by Rover. "It's a pretty cool car and very well chosen. 99 per cent of the time the one we have is an absolute delight to drive because, unusually for a period car, it's also automatic.

"I've driven a lot of old cars and the problem with them is they have old gearboxes which are crunchy. And obviously you're very conscious of the owner standing three feet away with their head in their hands while you screech through a 50-year-old gearbox.

"But the Alvis was an absolute dream. It's even got power steering. It's an elegantly understated machine. I wish I could take the credit for choosing it. It's lovely.

"The hospital set itself is shiny as a new pin. There was probably no more modern, forward looking structure in Britain in 1961 than a brand new teaching hospital in central London. The National Health Service still wasn't that old and the centrepiece post-war government programme.

"One of the most startling things is not all the beds are full - not like a hospital today. There are always three or four empty beds, which is extraordinary."

Knowing the history of exciting change in the Sixties, would Jack like to have lived through that decade?

“There are elements I suppose that would seem appealing. We live in such nostalgia soaked times now. The music was clearly extraordinary and from that point of view, yes.

“But realistically speaking, I think I’m happier where I am now. Nothing really worked back then. And a couple of visits to *The Cavern Club* aren’t really going to cover for the rest of it, are they? So maybe not!”

It’s been a bit of a breathless work schedule for Jack who after filming took a long awaited break.

“It’s a nice problem to have but this is my 12th straight month of filming and I could do with a little bit of a pause before seeing what’s around. But there are one or two things that might happen.”

Jack’s previous screen credits include: *Pirates of the Caribbean; Smash; Coupling; This Life; The Talented Mr Ripley.*



## NATASHA LITTLE PLAYS ELIZABETH POWELL

"It was unlike anything I've read before. I was immediately gripped," reveals Natasha Little as she reflects on her *Breathless* experience.

"The stories are interweaving and you're desperate to find out what happens next. As a cast we were given the first two scripts, then three and four and we didn't read five and six until we were shooting three and four.

"There would be times sitting in the make-up trailer when a head of department would have a script and you're not allowed to see it yet. And you're just going, 'Oh give me a tidbit. Go on. What happens to Elizabeth?'

"So when the scripts were finally released we could have a gossip about what happens to our characters. We were all really excited."

Natasha plays Elizabeth Powell, wife of consultant Otto (Jack Davenport) and, it would appear, one half of a perfect marriage in a dream home.

"She is, it would seem, in a very happy marriage. They're an affluent couple with a delightful son and enviable lifestyle. She is always impeccably dressed and socially graceful. Everything on the surface looks really polished. But what lies underneath that?

"Elizabeth can appear very cold but I don't think she's cold at all. She's just desperately trying to hold it all together given a set of circumstances that are really tragic. Her actions come from wanting to protect her son and her husband.

"She faces a series of terrible crises and torments but has the spirit of a lioness in terms of looking after her son Thomas, who she adores, and is remarkably resilient. The queen of self-control. So I really admire her for that. That she keeps it together."

As the drama develops, a Scotland Yard detective blackmails Elizabeth. But Chief Inspector Ronald Mulligan (Iain Glen) is not after money.

"There's no way out for her. She really is trapped. Elizabeth is determined to solve the problem without involving Otto because there is a threat that if she does, that will be the end for him.

“There are moments when she thinks she can control or manipulate the situation. But ultimately there is nowhere for her to turn. So she sacrifices herself to protect her husband and son.”

Although 1961 is just 52 years ago, it was a very different era for women compared to today. “It’s not that long ago. Living memory for quite a large number of people or at least their parents or grandparents.

“Attitudes towards women were shocking back then. I also doubt there were many female consultants in that world. We have a very different idea now of the concept of responsibility, duty and social acceptability.”

*Breathless* reunited Natasha with *Pirates of the Caribbean* star Jack Davenport. The pair last appeared together in 1990s TV hit *This Life*.

“That was my big break,” she recalls. “Apart from being a fantastic job in itself, it created lots of future opportunities. It’s great to be reunited with Jack because you know you’re going to be working with someone who, firstly, is a terrific actor and, secondly, it’s going to be easy working with him because he’s a very lovely man.”

The *Vanity Fair* actress says that in another life she might have liked to have been a doctor.

“I’m fascinated by sickness, illness, broken bones and how our bodies work. Both my children were born by Caesarian and I was desperate to watch because I thought, ‘I’m going to have the best seat in the house.’ But my husband wanted the screen up.

“When I was at school I didn’t taken any science subjects at A-level, so for that reason I would have been a terrible doctor. Maybe I should have just sat in on some hospital sessions. But it’s a lot of hard work. Not an easy route.”

Natasha was also struck by how daily experiences have changed since 1961.

“The food in this series is quite extraordinary. It really jumps out at you and all looks so dated now. Elizabeth also goes out for lunch and tries this new thing called pizza.”

There was a rather extraordinary coincidence in the script.

“In one episode I take Elizabeth’s son Thomas, played by Rudi Goodman, to see the first stage production of *Oliver*, which has just opened in London. Rudi’s dad Michael was on set all the time to look after him and Michael was in that original real life production of *Oliver*, playing the Artful Dodger.

“So I was taking my screen son to see his dad playing the Artful Dodger! What a coincidence. Of all the shows they could have chosen in the drama, they chose that one.



“Michael had very clear memories of the time. He knew exactly what we were talking about and the excitement around that production.”

Natasha’s previous screen credits include: *Case Histories*; *Kidnap and Ransom*; *Mistresses*; *Vanity Fair*; *This Life*.



## SHAUN DINGWALL PLAYS CHARLIE ENDERBURY

Filming a hospital beauty pageant involving nurses on parade in swimsuits gave Shaun Dingwall pause for thought.

“That was the thing that put everything into perspective. What was interesting was how uncomfortable it was to film it,” he recalls.

“There were several supporting artists up on stage wearing swimsuits with everyone else judging them. I remember watching Miss World as a child and being extremely judgmental about the contestants. If anything sums up the world of 1961, it’s the beauty pageant.”

Shaun plays hospital anaesthetist Dr Charlie Enderbury who is married to Lily (Joanna Page) and is haunted by a secret from the past.

“Charlie is Otto Powell’s (Jack Davenport) anaesthetist. They have a very close working relationship as well as a close friendship. Which is down to a shared history between Charlie, Otto and his wife Elizabeth (Natasha Little).

“Something happened in Cyprus years before which all three of them were involved in and it created a bond that they never talk about. It’s something that has affected Charlie throughout his working life, as well as his marriage.

“He has a level of anxiety that is constantly simmering underneath his everyday life which manifests itself occasionally in a fairly explosive way. Otto and Charlie are chalk and cheese. Otto’s attitude to life is that everything is going to work out. But Charlie can’t bring himself to truly believe that.”

*Breathless* was co-created by Paul Unwin who also directs the first two episodes.

“Part of Paul’s brilliance as a writer is that everybody has something going on and nothing is what it seems to be on the surface. While the drama is set at a time when society is about to undergo dramatic change, including sexual liberation, the pill, legalised abortion. It’s all the things leading up to the Cultural Revolution. I guess it’s a breathless time to be around and that’s the whole idea of the series.

“When I first read the scripts my initial reaction was what a challenge Charlie would be. That’s the one thing you focus on as an actor, the character. Then you move on to the story and the whole plot.

“So the first thing that struck me was what a challenge that character would be in terms of him having all this energy simmering away. Working out when to show that and when not to show it. Exposing those private moments when he’s on his own. Then you start to get the gist of what he’s really about. I knew I was going to have fun with it.”

A lot of work went into creating the world of 1961 in the sets and locations used for filming.

“It all helps get into the character. It never ceases to amaze me when you walk around a corner during a scene and suddenly there are five vintage cars, doctors, nurses and other people wandering around in period costume and an old double-decker bus goes past.

“It’s lovely to work on something where there is the means to do that properly and to get pretty wide shots in London that look completely authentic 1960s. It’s an absolute pleasure and a bit of a dream to work on something like that. It’s all been done very well.”

Filming in a street by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) HQ and British Museum attracted quite a crowd.

“We could only film there on a Sunday and obviously that part of London is pretty busy on a Sunday. People are less bothered these days when they see film crews but it did look very impressive so drew in a lot of people.

“Charlie gets to drive a Morris. It was a beautiful looking car with leather seats. A bit tricky to drive but it looked the business and the owner was happy to let us get on with it.”

The costumes also tell a story. “People believed then that you could judge somebody by their clothes. Charlie is very presentable, very smart, but slightly behind the times. His suits are more from the previous decade as opposed to the Sixties. Otto and Richard Truscott (Oliver Chris) are more up to date.

“You will see Charlie in a bow tie sometimes. That’s for purely practical reasons. If you’re bending over to examine a patient, you don’t want your tie dangling down over them.”

It’s not only the cars and clothes that were different in 1961.

“We all take things for granted today and thank God we do. Particularly equality. But it didn’t exist back then. If you were a man you had a huge advantage in life. You were expected to be the breadwinner and feed your family. But also to tell your wife what she could and couldn’t do. What you wanted for dinner and when you wanted it.

*"Breathless* doesn't shy away from those things. All of the characters behave, as they would have done in the 1960s. I think that's a very bold and brave way to do things. I hope some people will be shocked by just how different life was then.

"I remember having conversations with my grandfather about that time in history. I was fascinated by it because of the music. I think of the clothes that he wore and the polished shoes. It was all very polished.

"It was all there in the script. It was a gold mine of research because so much work had been put into it and into the look of the whole thing. The look of the clothes and the hairstyles tell you an awful lot about what people are thinking and what's going on in the world at that time.

"You can get into a character's head by looking at what the designer thinks are the clothes they will wear and looking at the decor of their house. It gives you an awful lot. Most of that is basically surface sheen and then the rest of the stuff that's bubbling underneath, that's our job as actors to find."

Charlie and his wife Lily live in a comfortable home.

"They are middle class and have all the demons that go with that including being aspirational and maybe having a sense of entitlement that often comes with the trappings of not having quite enough.

"They have everything they need. A nice house, clothes, food, warmth. But they don't have that really lovely car that Otto has got. And Lily might not quite be able to afford those shoes that Elizabeth has. So there's always that slight sense of not having quite enough. I think that propels a lot of the drama for many of the characters in *Breathless*."

When Charlie goes for a promotion he finds himself in competition with a new face at the hospital - Dr Mehta (Ronny Jhutti).

"That's a cause of huge resentment. But Charlie is in this predicament of not wanting to leave Otto and the business that they get up to on the side. He's addicted to that life where it feels there is something at stake and can't leave it behind."

Anaesthetist Charlie is called upon to make critical life or death decisions every day of his working life.

"It's the be all and end all of doctors. It's about saving people's lives and making them feel better. How you get up and do that every day for 30 years, I don't know. It's an extraordinary thing to do."

Concludes Shaun: *"Breathless* is pretty unusual. A genuinely different idea. The whole story and style is unusual and I don't think it's like anything we've seen for a very long time.

“I believe it will be really interesting to watch and I can’t wait to hear what people think about it.”

Shaun can also be seen in David Suchet’s final Agatha Christie adaptation *Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case*, due on ITV later this year.

Shaun’s previous screen credits include: *Vera*; *Doctor Who*; *Rock & Chips*; *Above Suspicion*; *In a Land of Plenty*.



## JOANNA PAGE PLAYS LILY ENDERBURY

Mum was definitely the word when Joanna Page auditioned for her role in *Breathless*, having given birth to her first child just three weeks before.

“It was the first time I’d left my daughter Eva. She was in a hotel with my mum in London’s Leicester Square. So I fed her, ran in to do the audition and then ran back.

“My mum hadn’t moved. She was in exactly the same position with her because she was terrified she was going to wake up,” laughs Joanna.

The *Gavin & Stacey* actress, who is married to actor James Thornton, gave birth in the Lindo Wing at St Mary’s Hospital, Paddington in February 2013.

Five months later the world’s media descended on the hospital to cover the arrival of Prince George, the first child for the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.

“If I have any more children I would go straight there again. It’s fantastic and the midwives and staff are brilliant,” reflects Joanna.

“My mum has been amazing. Before I had the baby I would never let anyone come on set and watch me filming. Now my mum’s there all the time.”

Joanna started work on the *Doctor Who* 50th Anniversary special episode, to be screened in November, just a few weeks after that audition and before going on to work on *Breathless*.

“The day I auditioned for *Breathless* I came home and got a phone call saying they’d really like me for the role of Lily in the drama. And then an email arrived saying; ‘Oh and also, you’ve just been offered the part of Queen Elizabeth in Doctor Who’s 50th.’ I didn’t even have to audition.

“It was so weird. I thought I would probably never work again and then suddenly I got two jobs, just like that. It was bizarre.”

Joanna plays Lily Enderbury, an ex-nurse married to hospital anaesthetist Dr Charlie Enderbury (Shaun Dingwall) and a woman who is desperate to start a family.

“Lily was a children’s nurse and then married Charlie, which in those days meant she couldn’t work anymore and is now a housewife. She’s lovely, very sweet, good-natured and wants to please everybody.

“She doesn’t have the same standing class-wise as Elizabeth (Natasha Little) but would love to be like her. She genuinely loves Charlie and he loves her. But bubbling underneath are a lot of things that are unsaid.

“There’s a distance between them because Charlie is carrying the weight of a secret around with him and she knows nothing about it, although she realises something is wrong.

“All she wants to do is have a baby but the chemistry has gone in the bedroom because of his guilt. But when Charlie goes for a new job outside of London she hopes it can be the start of a real family life for them.

“She’s also the worst person to tell a secret to because she’s so honest.”

Did Joanna have any qualms about returning to work so soon after the birth of her daughter?

“I had said I wasn’t going back to work for a year. Then my agent sent me the scripts for *Breathless*. I loved both the drama and the character. But because I wasn’t in the frame of mind of working I thought, ‘Oh well, I probably won’t get it anyway so I might as well just go and meet them.’

“In the event I was so relaxed it was probably one of the best auditions I’ve ever done and I got the job. It felt right and it was also nice not having to make the decision to go back to work, thinking, ‘OK. You’ve had a year off, now let’s start auditions.’ I just fell back into working again.

“From the start I was adamant that I would take my daughter to work. I’ve been breast-feeding so she’d come on set and when they were changing the cameras around I’d give her a feed. She’ll meet everybody then go back to the trailer. My baby is coming everywhere with me and that’s it!

“I think I’m doing better work now because your priorities change when you have a baby. Before I used to think, ‘I’ve got to learn all of this and be really good in a massive scene tomorrow. Is it going to be all right?’ Now with her on set, I don’t worry as much. Which then makes you do better work.”

Having just given birth herself, Joanna could understand Lily’s yearning to have a child.

“It’s hugely powerful. We got married 10 years ago and I’ve been a real career girl, doing different jobs and enjoying my life. It was ages before I started getting broody. But when it hits you, it hits you. I can certainly feel for Lily. She would be the most perfect person to be a mother.

"I loved the scripts because I was in that world anyway, with obstetricians and giving birth. But then as I started reading more I realised that the medical side is just the backdrop. It's not the whole story by any means.

"The more you watch *Breathless*, the more you realise there's so much going on under the surface for everyone. It's not a medical drama at all. It just so happens that's where a number of the characters work. It's a relationship drama about the sexual politics and the relationships between the marriages."

1961 was a very different time for women, with Lily having to give up her job when she got married.

"My nan trained for ages to be a nurse and went on to be a matron, working in the 1950s. But then as soon as you got married, that was it. Lily is still very traditional. She'd also love to be like Jean (Zoe Boyle), all expressive and embracing the Sixties. But she just can't do it.

"The dream for many back then was to marry a doctor. These days the women would be the doctors but that is what nurses wanted, to meet some dishy doctor. It's incredible.

"Lily and Charlie's house is so sweet. It's a lot smaller than everybody else's and really quaint. So neat and perfect."

Domesticated Lily helps Jean prepare for a Sixties' dinner party.

"That was my first day on set, with Lily teaching Jean how to cook and I had to do a soufflé. So I'm doing these big speeches as I'm breaking and separating eggs. Zoe Boyle, who plays Jean, is a giggler and makes me giggle. So I was trying to remember my lines just weeks after having a baby and separating eggs at the same time!"

So will Joanna be taking more time off after *Breathless*?

"Well I said I was going to but whether I do or not remains to be seen. Filming is amazing because my baby is with me all the time and that's great.

"Being a mother is the most wonderful feeling ever. I never ever realised I could love anyone as much as this. My heart just aches when I look at her."

Joanna's previous screen credits include: *Gavin & Stacey*; *The Syndicate*; *Love Actually*; *Mine all Mine*.





## ZOE BOYLE PLAYS JEAN MEECHER

Zoe Boyle joined the movers and shakers when she found herself in the soon to be swinging Sixties.

The former *Downton Abbey* actress plays nurse Jean Meecher who steps up from her old life to marry a doctor and settle in London's exclusive Dolphin Square apartment complex.

"Jean has a lot of dancing scenes which is great. But all my mates thought I was in a musical because I kept talking about my dance rehearsals and dancing scenes.

"I've discovered that Jean dances like my mum. We had a number of choreographers who were brilliant and I'm dancing just like my mum with a lot of twisting and that sort of thing.

"The costumes also make such a difference. I was having a panic before filming thinking, 'How do I find a way into this? How do I create this character?' And then the costume went on, the hair and make-up got done and I thought, 'That's 50 per cent of it there.'

"It's so nice to have a transformation like this. You adapt to what you wear and how you feel. They dyed my hair so I already felt completely different to how I normally am in my regular life. It's good to have something like that, which is unfamiliar.

"Jean wears a lot of high heels. They're all terribly uncomfortable but it makes you walk differently. And having a tight dress on makes you more aware of your posture. I'm a terrible sloucher but Jean can't be a sloucher. So all of those things help you find a way into it."

When we meet Jean in the first episode she is finishing her final shift at a London hospital ahead of her wedding to junior consultant Dr Richard Truscott (Oliver Chris).

"You weren't allowed to be married and a nurse at that time but Jean gives up her job very willingly. She's absolutely thrilled to have got a doctor - no more bedpans for her.

“She loves Richard but Jean also has an agenda. She is a social climber and wants to elevate herself above her station in life, which was very important back then. In order to do that she lies about her background, denies that she has a sister and a father who is suffering from the early onset of dementia. And she also happens to be pregnant with Richard’s child.”

Jean lives in the east end of London with father Monty (Finbar Lynch) and her secret sister Angela (Catherine Steadman), who is also a nurse.

“Background really mattered in those days, especially if you wanted to marry into a family like Richard’s. We decided that Jean and Angela would have a bit of a London accent but they would ditch it when they were at work.

“That was something that happened quite a lot. Nurses had to be well spoken. Class was felt a lot more than it is now and certainly by Jean, who is incredibly aspirational and feels weighed down by her background.

“I absolutely fell in love with the *Breathless* scripts and the role of Jean. At the time I was reading a lot of other scripts because I was in Los Angeles doing pilot season and you get sent loads and loads. So I felt saturated with scripts.

“Then this one landed and it was so brilliant. I immediately engaged with the time period and each character has intrigue and contradictions. There’s such humour in it as well.”

Zoe enjoyed filming in the Meecher family home, which was a real house in Hackney.

“The way they’ve designed the inside and dressed it for the drama is stunning. There’s just stuff everywhere - old newspapers, records, receipts. It’s Monty’s world, their father who doesn’t leave the house and so understandably a whole load of things are going to pile up. You can understand why Jean wants to leave and goes to any lengths to get away.

“And Jean makes it to Dolphin Square. That set is ultra-1961 modern, a really swanky designer pad straight out of a magazine. Jean loves it. For her it’s a case of, ‘Wow! I’ve completely come up in the world.’”

Jean feels the need to measure up to the expectations of her parents-in-law Mr and Mrs Truscott, played by Cheryl Campbell and Michael Troughton.

“Particularly her mother-in-law, whose influence in Jean’s relationship with Richard is pretty heavy-handed and terrifying for her. Mrs Truscott is a force to be reckoned with.

“It’s particularly hard for Jean because they come from a world that she’s not part of. She always feels she has to work extra hard to impress Mrs Truscott and it’s tough. Jean is under quite a lot of pressure.”

That includes preparing a dinner party with what we would now regard as some vintage 1960s food.

“It’s quite striking that Jean was happy to go along with the idea that once you got married you had to be a housewife, wear a pinny and cook. But she can’t cook! So Jean enlists the help of Lily (Joanna Page).

“Those scenes were really fun to do and it was brilliant working with Jo. I panic in real life whenever I have to have a dinner party. I’m not very good at them. But Jean is even worse and burns it all.

“I think it’s important to show women at that time who say, ‘I know I’m meant to be able to do this but I can’t.’ And that’s what Jean says. She’s never going to match up to this ideal of the perfect housewife.”

One scene sees Jean throwing a plate at Richard. “I was so worried about filming that because I’m a terrible thrower. Yet I got it right every time, which I was really quite impressed about. It did get a bit too close to Oliver at one point but it was a safety plate - a wax plate that crumbles when it breaks. But it made a nice crash, which I really enjoyed.

“Richard has still to fully grow up. He’ll do something incredible in the operating theatre and then crack an awful joke at the expense of the patients. He almost feels uncomfortable with being the hero and has to undercut it. That comes from a lack of self confidence but it’s always masked with bluster.

“I suppose it’s the same with Jean. In fact Richard and Jean are probably quite a good match because Jean feels vulnerable and she masks it with vivaciousness, a nice dress and lots of make up.

“Then interestingly, she misses her nursing and goes back to doing the abortions with Otto (Jack Davenport) and Charlie (Shaun Dingwall). I think that comes from an urge to do something for herself that is independent of her husband at a time when so much was about to change in society.”

Adds Zoe: “I’m not sure I’d like to have lived in the early Sixties. Women being expected to be wives and mothers doesn’t really appeal to me. But it was such an interesting time culturally, politically and the fashions are amazing.

“Almost all of Jean’s clothes are originals aside from a red dress for a scene in episode one where Jean and Richard get a bit saucy on the dance floor. They wanted it to be absolutely figure hugging so it was made to measure. I couldn’t breathe but I loved the dress.”

Did Zoe speak to any members of her family about that period of history?

“I come from a family of doctors, including my grandfather and uncle. But I didn’t really talk to them about it. My grandmother was a nurse and it was interesting to hear the way she talked about her work.

“The producer Jolyon Symonds’ mother was a nurse back then and we had a good chat with her. Nursing is secondary for Jean so I found out enough but I didn’t feel the need to go into great detail for the character.”

Jean’s also has to cope with the consequences when Richard renews his acquaintance with an old flame called Margaret (Sarah Parish).

“That’s one of the reasons *Breathless* is so interesting because it’s not your typical love triangle. Sarah plays Margaret brilliantly and is so full of charm. Jean and Margaret develop a bond, a connection.”

Zoe played Lavinia Swire in *Downton Abbey*, Matthew’s wife who died in an influenza epidemic, alongside *Breathless* co-star Iain Glen, who was *Downton*’s newspaper magnate Sir Richard Carlisle.

“It’s a pretty special thing to have been part of such a phenomenon. When I’m in America I still get, ‘It’s Lavinia,’ when I go into rooms. That’s quite funny. It was a really great thing to do but it’s nice to have this part as Jean, which is so different. But it’s still a period drama.

“Hopefully *Breathless* will continue its story in future series. I really want to get into some late Sixties, wear a mini skirt and get those pins out...”

Zoe’s previous screen credits include: *Downton Abbey*; *Freeloaders*; *Sons of Anarchy*.



## OLIVER CHRIS PLAYS DR RICHARD TRUSCOTT

The *Breathless* journey for Oliver Chris began thousands of miles away from the drama's London filming locations.

"I've known Zoe Boyle for a long time," he says of the actress who plays his on screen fiancée and then wife Jean in the drama.

"I met her in a corridor in Los Angeles during pilot season and she said she had auditioned for this new ITV series called *Breathless*. It was the first I'd heard of it.

"Then when I got back from Los Angeles my agent called and said, 'I've got this script, *Breathless*.' And I said, 'Oh, I've heard about that.' Then they told me the part I was going up for.

"The whole thing about *Breathless* is that emotionally everything works on a knife edge or in a mirror. Everything is veiled and nothing is simple and it walks that line brilliantly.

"When I came out of my audition the first thing I thought was, 'Blimey! If I get this part and this show is popular, I'm going to be the most hated man in Britain.' It was a bit of a worry".

"Actually, though Richard isn't a villain and I haven't tried to make him one. He's a lost man-child who hasn't grown into one thing or another and has moments of insensitivity. If people eventually see him as a sympathetic human being, I'll be really pleased but if they just want to demonise him and love to hate him, then I'll be equally happy.

"It was one of the best scripts I'd ever read, it's just so different from everything I'd ever seen, and I thought, 'I could really do something with this.' Richard is a character that really interests and excites me. On the surface he's this sexist, arrogant playboy but he also has this vulnerability. He's a product of his time and he deals with his insecurities by putting on a show. Really though he's just lost and trying to make his way in the world. Just like the rest of us."

Dr Richard Truscott is Otto Powell's (Jack Davenport) junior consultant. "He's Otto's protégé in many ways. But Richard has a strange and difficult relationship with him. Richard idolises Otto as a mentor but he's also a huge source of resentment because Richard feels that Otto patronises and undermines him at every turn. I think the real problem though, is that Richard secretly knows that he just isn't as good as Otto and he's scared he never will be."

Oliver continues: "When you first meet Richard he is about to marry the super-sexy delightful Jean Meecher, (who he's got pregnant). But Richard is excited about both marrying this nurse and having the baby, even though his parents, particularly his dominating mother, totally disapprove. For Richard it's all about the romance and the excitement and he embraces the adventure with open arms, which is why he is so cut up when things don't work out how he had hoped. He's been betrayed and he is hurt.

"It would be easy to write Richard off as a philandering playboy. But he just has these adolescent feelings of resentment and competitiveness that get in the way of him being a good doctor and a good human being.

"Richard makes a fundamental mistake with his students. He tries to be liked instead of respected. So he's always making inappropriate jokes and trying to make his immediate circle laugh."

Oliver adds: "*Breathless* is set in the early Sixties for a reason and is not a period drama which has a cosy sense of nostalgia. It was a very male dominated time with a very different outlook and it uses the past to contrast the differences between then and now.

"Back in the Sixties the doctors would say to their patients, 'Yes, Mrs Brown, I appreciate you're the one who is ill. But while you're in hospital your disease belongs to me.' It was about the doctor's relationship with the illness and the patient was simply a side issue."

"Richard is pretty stylish and has got all the cool stuff that comes with a boy trying to show he's a man. He drives a beautiful Jensen, which is an amazing car but really difficult to drive. You needed all your strength to turn the steering wheel. Well I do, anyway.

"I also love Richard's costumes, though I'm not too sure about the high-waisted trousers and square cut jackets but there was an attention to detail and tailoring back then, which I admire.

"And then there's the dancing. Natasha Little, who plays Otto's wife Elizabeth, and Richard dance to some amazing music in this Chelsea club. The set was incredible and we do this dance, which we rehearsed with a choreographer. Great fun. I love doing that 1960s slow twist, a little touch of the cuffs and a headshake. There were times in my dinner suit in that Chelsea club when I thought, this is the closest I'm ever going to get to being James Bond."

Drink driving and smoking were also far more widespread than they are today.

"I basically smoke and drink my way through episodes one to four and then I seem to slow down a bit in the last two," smiles Oliver.

"There's a lot of smoking and for filming they have to be herbal cigarettes, which are fairly gross. I used to smoke but I don't anymore and haven't for years. But having a whisky and a cigarette in your hand does take you to a place, which is not normal.

"I don't love having lots of props to deal with but it's quite nice to feel like you've got something that's not you to take you out of doing what you naturally do. I had a specific lighter that became a really important way for Richard to deflect expressing his emotions."

Could Oliver ever have contemplated a career as a doctor or surgeon?

"I'm an actor for a reason. I don't have the patience or the physical, mental intelligence or fortitude to do anything that's properly difficult," he laughs. "So me a doctor? Unlikely."

Later in the series Richard meets up again with old flame Margaret (Sarah Parish), who runs a club in Chelsea.

"She's a friend of the family, an older woman who took a shine to Richard in the past and he took a shine to her. A kind of old flame. Margaret excites him and he can let her take control. With her he doesn't have all the difficult, confusing emotions that surround his relationship with Jean.

"To Richard, Margaret is an escape, a source of comfort and an impotent cry of revenge. Being *Breathless* there are reasons and complex morality as to why he's doing what he's doing and as the storyline develops it becomes much more testing and revealing for all of them."

Oliver's previous credits include: *Bluestone 42*; *One Man Two Guvnors*; *Green Wing*; *Rescue Me*; *The Office*.



## CATHERINE STEADMAN PLAYS ANGELA WILSON

“It will shock people how much we have moved on in the last 50 years in terms of gender politics and so many other things,” says Catherine Steadman.

“Some of the things that happen in *Breathless* will be surprising especially for younger viewers, and almost funny because they’re so unbelievable. The things people used to get away with.

“Such as a group of male doctors standing there and staring at an attractive woman walking past. That was just accepted. In fact, women probably thought, ‘Oh, I must look nice today.’ They wouldn’t think, ‘Why are you staring at me?’

“It all stems back to who had the control. And men very much had the control. So I think when people watch it they’re going to be shocked and realise how far we’ve come, as well as how much further we need to go.”

Catherine plays nurse Angela Wilson who catches the eye of married consultant and brilliant surgeon Otto Powell (Jack Davenport).

“Angela is Jean Meecher’s (Zoe Boyle) sister and estranged from her husband. Their mother developed cervical cancer and the two sisters looked after her until she died. Their father was a bank clerk in the City and it took a hard toll on him.

“Once their mother died we realised we would probably be best served being nurses and went our separate ways. Jean studied in London and Angela moved to Portsmouth to make a fresh start and try and move on from what had happened.

“Angela married a sailor called Joe. But then he disappeared and it doesn’t look like he’s coming back. So she decides to return to London, with men out of the picture for a while. Which is when she meets Otto.”

While he is keen to pursue a relationship, Angela isn’t interested. “She’s not playing hard to get. She just doesn’t want any more trouble in her life. And for some reason, it seems to be the case that if you’re not interested and have your own independent life going on, then you suddenly seem more attractive.”



Catherine recalls meeting *Breathless* co-creator Paul Unwin at her audition.

“Paul said, ‘What do you think of the script?’ And I said, ‘I’m going to be totally honest. I was waiting for there to be a bad scene.’ I read the first episode and thought, ‘Wow. I hope the second one is good.’ And I just went on from there, thinking, ‘This is amazing. If I get this I will be so happy.’ And then I did.”

“Paul said of the characters when we started, ‘Everyone has got a lot of fuel in the tank.’ There are all sorts of things that people have done that they don’t want anyone to know about. That makes for complicated, interesting characters.”

“It’s not a medical drama but a perfect setting to show the gender battle at the time and on the cusp of so much change. But we do have to know a little bit about the medical side. There were only certain things you were allowed to do back then if you were a nurse. Especially in a gynaecology ward.”

Catherine’s mother was a nurse who retired last year. “I grew up in a nursing home for old people in Hampshire. My parents owned it and lived above the shop, so to speak. It was an unusual childhood but very interesting, as were the people I met. I also learned to play a lot of card games.”

“So I know how to take temperatures and pulses. I also knew how to do blood pressure but not on the old machines they have in *Breathless*.”

“My mum gave me lots of tips. She said, ‘If you lift someone incorrectly on telly I’m going to be very cross with you!’ So hopefully I’ve got it right.”

Catherine also spoke to the mother of producer Jolyon Symonds who was a nurse at the time *Breathless* is set.

“She came in and talked to us about the social situation and all the things we would have done. It was really helpful to hear what it was like from her perspective. She said everyone was excited to come to work and do their job because they felt like they were doing something important.”

“I wondered why Angela would wear the cape and uniform even when she left the hospital. And she explained it was because there was such pride as well. Pride in wearing the uniform.”

“The uniform includes a very white pinny and I did wonder how many times nurses would have to change that in a hospital. It really gives you a feel for how clean and how in order everything had to be to reassure people that you knew what you were doing and it was all going to be OK. Just that, almost, illusion that if you come into a hospital you’re going to be fine.”

“Also nobody questioned the doctors. They were the doctors. They knew everything. So there was a definite power structure in place.”

We discover from the outset that Angela has a strong moral compass when she is duped into helping with an illegal abortion.

“Immediately she’s thrown into a situation where if she got caught she would go to prison. She turns up and nobody tells her what’s going on in an environment where women were always the last to know. So she finds herself involved without initially realising it and people assume they can simply pay her off.”

Back in 1961 the NHS was still relatively new. “It was shiny, new and full of hope. I had this kind of epiphany. We were filming a scene where a patient is being operated on. Angela is looking through the observation window and everything looks so beautiful - the sets are gorgeous and all the doctors were in their pristine outfits.

“And then it starts to go wrong for this patient. It just struck me - despite all of the idealism, style and whatever else, there are things that we have no control over in terms of the ultimate outcome.”

Filming involved transforming parts of London back to how the capital looked in 1961.

“I loved shooting on location because it really feels like you’re in Sixties’ London with all the period cars and double decker buses going past and all the extras in period costume walking around. It’s so much fun. We also filmed around Harley Street and it looks exactly the same as it was back then.

“The art department loved working on this, along with everyone else. Everyone was taking shots on their cameras of the buses and the cars. One day we had Douglas Fairbanks Junior’s Rolls Royce and everybody wanted a picture of themselves with that car.”

Otto drives a classic Alvis. “No seatbelts, of course, in those days. It was so cool sitting in the car - and we all felt so cool when we were driving along in the car with the costumes on. At the speed we went you could probably get out and run as fast. But it was lovely.

“The one thing that really shocked me was that when they mentioned the Sixties, I had in my mind Twiggy, mini skirts and all that sort of thing. But 1961 is still really in the Fifties but on the brink of that social, cultural and sexual revolution.

“Imagine living back then and later hearing The Beatles for the first time? And going, ‘Wow, no-one’s ever done that before.’ It would be amazing. Just all that novelty and so many other new things emerging.”

Angela lives with Jean and their father Monty (Finbar Lynch). “We used a real house in Hackney which, in the story, has seen better days and is now crumbling. Their dad is a hoarder so there are stacks of newspapers and all sorts.

“Monty would be recognised today as suffering from Alzheimer’s. There’s still a lot of stigma attached to mental health issues today but back then it was much worse. Today he would have a home carer and there wouldn’t be an issue - thanks to the NHS.”

Otto knows that Angela is also married but still pursues her.

“She doesn’t really understand what he sees in her and why he’s bothering so much. They’ve both done things in their past that they regret and if they could go back they would change them. But they can’t. I think she sees a kindred spirit.

“Otto is also very astute and knows that if she was in love within a good marriage she wouldn’t even be talking to him at all. He’s hard to resist because he keeps turning up and won’t go away.

“It’s great working with Jack Davenport. He’s so easy to get on with.”

Attitudes towards women in 1961 are highlighted again during a hospital beauty pageant involving some of the nurses.

“When I first read that I thought, ‘Oh my God, am I going to be doing this?’ The utter humiliation.’ Thankfully Angela is not involved. But there were people doing that back then and it was basically a cattle auction. Which one do you like? Some of the nurses are flushed with embarrassment. As you would be.”

Catherine’s previous screen credits include: *The Tudors*; *Quirke*; *Salmon Fishing In The Yemen*.

## LOOKING BACK TO 1961

- *The Avengers* television series screens on ITV
- *The Sunday Telegraph* is first published
- *The Beatles* perform at The Cavern Club in Liverpool for the first time
- Sierra Leone gains independence from the UK
- Ernest Hemingway commits Suicide
- Betting shops are legalised
- Birth control pills become available on the NHS
- Population in the UK reaches 46.1 million
- Castro proclaims Cuba a socialist nation and abolished elections
- John F. Kennedy becomes the 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States
- Today's 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, Barack Obama, was born
- The most popular feature films released included; *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *West Side Story*, *The Misfits* and *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*
- Elvis Presley spent 6 weeks at number 1 in the UK charts with *Wooden Heart*
- Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man to fly into space
- George Formby dies suffering a heart attack
- Marilyn Monroe divorces her husband, playwright Arthur Miller
- The Ford Consul Capri coupé was released by Ford
- Elizabeth Taylor and Burt Lancaster win Best Actress and Actor at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Academy Awards for their performances in *Butterfield 8* and *Elmer Gantry*
- Average house price in the UK £2.7k
- TWA is the first airline to show an inflight movie, *By Love Possessed*, aboard its first class section of a Boeing 707 flight from New York to Los Angeles

## EPISODE ONE SYNOPSIS

**The following synopses are published in the production notes for forward planning purposes only. Please do not reproduce entirely and do not publish the ending.**

Otto Powell (Jack Davenport), a brilliant and charismatic surgeon, is summoned to the hospital's theatre where young surgeon and pretender to the throne, Richard Truscott (Oliver Chris), is about to make a rather serious error. Humiliating though it is Richard has his wife to be, ex-nurse Jean (Zoe Boyle), to take his mind off such things.

Away from the hospital Otto and his ever-faithful anaesthetist Charlie Enderbury (Shaun Dingwall) have been called out for a private operation. Angela (Catherine Steadman), new to the hospital and first time on a private procedure, is appalled when she discovers it's an abortion – 'a special', still very much illegal in 1961. Otto finds himself quite taken by this headstrong new nurse.

Back on the hospital ward Angela is concerned about a young patient, Maureen Mulligan (Holli Dempsey), who is determined to take any measures possible to escape her impending marriage to a man she doesn't love. Angela uses her knowledge about Otto's illegal side line to get him to help her try to buy the patient some time before her parents take her home to an unhappy future.

At a wedding dress fitting with Otto's wife, Elizabeth (Natasha Little), and Charlie's wife, Lily (Joanna Page), Jean has to confess that she is pregnant. In the face of Lily's slight shock she admits that it is probably the only reason Richard is marrying her.

Charlie (Shaun Dingwall) has his interview for chair of anaesthesiology and meets his rival, Dr Mehta (Ronny Jhutti). Initially confident the job was his, Charlie lets self-doubt creep in and when Otto, his oldest friend, abandons the interview board to help Angela he is certain things are not going to work out for him after all.

Jean miscarries on the morning of her wedding day. Distraught that Richard won't go through with the wedding if there is no longer a baby she begs Otto to help her and make sure she gets up the aisle.

A chance sighting of Otto at the hospital by Chief Inspector Mulligan (Iain Glen) sets in motion the drudging up of an event from Otto's past that will threaten his entire existence and that of his wife and son.

**Synopsis for episodes 2 – 6 are available upon request from the ITV Press Office**

## CAST LIST

### Principal cast

Otto Powell .....	Jack Davenport
Dr Richard Truscott .....	Oliver Chris
Dr Charlie Enderbury .....	Shaun Dingwall
Angela Wilson .....	Catherine Steadman
Elizabeth Powell .....	Natasha Little
Jean Meecher .....	Zoe Boyle
Lily Enderbury .....	Joanna Page
Dr Mehta .....	Ronny Jhutti
Chief Inspector Mulligan .....	Iain Glen

### Regular cast

Mrs Johnstone .....	Melanie Kilburn
Thomas Powell .....	Rudi Goodman
Monty Meecher .....	Finbar Lynch
Maureen Mulligan .....	Holli Dempsey
Sister Neville .....	Dystin Johnson
Matron Vosper .....	Diane Fletcher
Mr Truscott .....	Michael Troughton
Mrs Truscott .....	Cheryl Campbell
Mrs Mulligan .....	Cathy Sara
Margaret .....	Sarah Parish
Sam Roth .....	Tom Rosenthal
Susan Mehta .....	Sophie Scott
Inspector Thompson .....	Gordon Kennedy
Penny .....	Pennie Downie

## Episode one

Theatre Sister Farley ..... Jayne McKenna  
Major Domo ..... Angus Wright  
Duchess ..... Annabel Mullion  
Terence ..... John Hollingworth  
Mr Baring ..... Edward Hancock  
Mrs Baring ..... Lorna Nickson Brown  
Party Waitress ..... Crystal Leaity

**Cast list for episodes 2 - 6 are available upon request from the ITV Press Office**

## PRODUCTION LIST

Executive Producers .....	Kate Bartlett
.....	Paul Unwin
Co-creators.....	Paul Unwin and Peter Grimsdale
Writer's episodes 1 .....	Paul Unwin and Peter Grimsdale
Writer episode 2, 3, 4, 6.....	Paul Unwin
Writer episode 5 .....	Simon Tyrrell
Producer .....	Jolyon Symonds
Director episodes 1 & 2 .....	Paul Unwin
Director episodes 3 & 4.....	Marek Losey
Director episodes 5 & 6 .....	Philippa Langdale
Line Producer .....	Carolyn Parry-Jones
Director of Photography .....	Tim Palmer
Casting Director.....	Susie Parriss
Script Editor.....	Camilla Curtis
Art Director .....	Caroline Barclay
Costume Designer .....	Charlotte Holdich
Make up & Hair Designer .....	Nadia Stacey
Production Designer.....	Matt Gant
Editor episodes 1 & 2 .....	Trevor Waite
Editor episodes 3 & 4 .....	Mike Jones
Editor episodes 5 & 6 .....	Jon Costelloe
1 <sup>st</sup> Assistant Director episodes 1 & 2.....	Adam Young
1 <sup>st</sup> Assistant Director episodes 3 & 4.....	Steve Robinson
1 <sup>st</sup> Assistant Director episodes 5 & 6.....	Lydia Currie
Props Master .....	Paul Emerson
Graphic Designer .....	Carly Mason
Sound Recordist .....	Simon Farmer
Composer .....	Anne Dudley
Locations Manager.....	Mark Grimwade
Unit Manager .....	James Nash