



# CILLA

A new three-part drama for ITV

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**\*Please note that Sheridan Smith's quotes are to only be used as part of a wider feature on the show and not written as a one-to-one profile or cover opportunity.**



## CILLA

Acclaimed writer Jeff Pope has penned Cilla, a three-part drama for ITV, starring Sheridan Smith as the famous Liverpudlian songbird, Cilla Black.

Sheridan is joined in the cast by Aneurin Barnard (*The White Queen, Citadel, We'll Take Manhattan*) as Cilla's husband Bobby, Ed Stoppard (*The Politician's Husband, Silent Witness, Branded*) as Brian Epstein, John Henshaw (*Downton Abbey, Midsomer Murders, South Riding*) as Cilla's father, John White and Melanie Hill (*Waterloo Road, Hebburn, Merlin*) is Cilla's mother, Priscilla, known affectionately to her family as Big Cilla.

'Cilla' tells of her rocky rise to fame and will capture the essence of 1960s Liverpool, the atmosphere of promise and excitement as the Merseybeat music scene was on the verge of exploding in a blaze of tight-fitting skirts, stiletto heels, and beehives.

A young, unknown Cilla works in the austere environs of the typists' pool at a local company, dreaming of stardom. The drama looks at how she met the two men who came to love her and ultimately fought over her - future husband Bobby Willis and legendary manager Brian Epstein, the tragic young businessman who also guided the career of The Beatles.

We learn how Cilla's burgeoning friendship with John, Paul, George and Ringo - the four young men who went on to conquer the music world - shaped her career. It was family friend Ritchie Starkey (Ringo), the teddy-boy with a greasy quiff, who help her to cross paths with Brian Epstein and producer George Martin - who were to launch her career with recording sessions at the world famous Abbey Road Studios.

The ITV Studios production recounts the dark days of her early career, her on-off relationship with Bobby, a baker at Woolworth's with the gift of the gab, who struggled to accept Cilla's iron determination to succeed and become a star at the expense of practically every other area of her life.

We see the young Priscilla White, touring Liverpool in Bobby's Crawford's biscuits van as she moved from the Cavern to the Zodiac Club, to the Blue Angel Club and the Iron Door Club, chasing a dream. But it was a meeting with shy young entrepreneur Brian Epstein, struggling to come to terms with his homosexuality at a time when to be gay was illegal in Britain, which was to change her life.

Cilla is produced by Kwadjo Dajan (*Mrs Biggs, Appropriate Adult* – as Co-Producer, *The Widower*) and executive produced by Jeff Pope (*Lucan, Philomena, Mrs Biggs, Appropriate Adult* – as Executive Producer and not writer \*\*) with Paul Whittington (*The Widower, Mrs Biggs, Vera, DCI Banks*) directing.

Cilla is an ITV Studios/GroupM Entertainment production for ITV.

NB \*\*Neil McKay was the writer of *Appropriate Adult*. Please ensure you don't credit Jeff wrongly for this drama.

## **Foreword**

### **By**

### **Jeff Pope**

The life of a sixties girl pop star certainly does seem something of a departure for me, having spent decades making dramas about serial killers, murderers and heavyweight politicians, but in truth a story like 'Cilla' was always something I had yearned to do.

The chance to capture performance as well as drama has always been an ambition, and with Cilla there were some iconic songs to choose from. I can't remember the first moment I decided to look into her life, but I do know that quite quickly I found the ending to the story I wanted to tell and worked backwards from there - something I do quite a lot. I discovered that in the mid-sixties Cilla's recording career was, by her own dizzying standards, on the wane, and that her then-manager Brian Epstein was urging her to move into a new career - television.

Ranged against him was Cilla and her boyfriend (later husband) Bobby Willis, who couldn't imagine what on earth she'd do on TV – all it meant to them was a way to promote her latest record. When Epstein died in 1967, on the bed next to him was an unsigned contract from the BBC for a new entertainment show which the corporation wanted Cilla to present. Until that moment she'd had absolutely no interest in signing it.

This fascinated me, the idea of a pre-Blind Date/Surprise Surprise Cilla running a mile from the career that (for those of under pensionable age) now defines her. I was interested in exploring her relationship with Epstein, the complicated and tragic figure who was so central to the success of Liverpool's most famous export, The Beatles. A closet homosexual (in an era when homosexual sex was still illegal) he was a brilliant businessman and visionary but a tortured soul who felt trapped by his sexuality.

Priscilla White (Epstein changed the name to 'Black' because it sounded more dramatic) and Bobby Willis were just a couple of 'scallies' from working class areas of Liverpool whose love spanned a yawning religious divide in the city in those days. She was a Catholic from 'Scottie Road', he was a Proddy whose father forbid him to bring home any 'Fenians'.

The story spans Cilla's rise from total obscurity, working as a typist for British Insulated Callander Cables Company Limited, to a botched audition with Epstein, spectacular success with two consecutive number ones and her gradual isolation as a ruthless ambition drives her on, leaving Bobby by the wayside.

I spent many hours with Cilla talking through her story, getting to the point where she gradually trusted me enough to reveal intimate and in some cases never previously discussed details. She was brave enough to give her blessing to a warts and all picture, which doesn't flinch from some of the darker episodes in her life.

I was very lucky that my ambition to work on a drama about a singer coincided with a period in my career when I have forged a close and wonderful working relationship with actress Sheridan Smith. The part of Cilla asked for the lead actress to age from gawky girl to polished performer; from rough edged rock and roll singer to elegant diva. Sheridan - as she did in her Bafta-winning performance as 'Charmian' in 'Mrs Biggs', handled all these gear changes with consummate ease. She worked for months to get her voice in shape for the rigours of a two month shoot and also to get that 'Cilla' sound, which is essentially two voices - a deep 'corncrake' sound (as described by her producer, Sir George Martin), and a sweet, delicate one. I think the result is astonishing.

Director Paul Whittington shot all Sheridan's vocals live, on set. Nothing of what you see is lip-synced. We didn't want to make a musical, where effectively the story stops whilst a number is performed, but a story which has music in it. Sheridan injects such emotion into her songs that you feel you are right there with her as she struggles to make it as a singer.

Cilla herself says that if she were a teenager now she would have been a hit on 'The X-Factor'. I'm sure that's true, because she had such personality to go with her talent. But back in the early 60s there were no talent shows and if you made it you did it through sheer hard work, scrapping your way up from the bottom of the pile and trying to get a reputation going purely by word of mouth after pushing your way up on stage and convincing a band to let you do a number with them. I think her story will resonate with 'anyone who had a dream'.

## CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

### CILLA (Sheridan Smith)



Born in Liverpool in 1943, Priscilla Maria Veronica White (later to become Cilla Black after a misprint in Merseybeat) came from humble beginnings.

Educated at St. Anthony's School, she was brought up as a catholic in a flat above a barber's shop on Liverpool's 'Scottie Road' with her mam and dad, two older brothers George and John and at the age of five, Cilla's cousin Allan was brought to live with the family as a 'brother'.

After leaving school, she became a typist at BICC and later, determined to become an entertainer, she was employed as a cloakroom attendant at the famous 'Cavern Club'. One day she met Bobby Willis who was to become the love of her life. Dreaming of stardom she got the opportunity to sing with local Merseybeat bands including the Beatles.

When Brian Epstein discovered Cilla's singing talents she became an important part of the 'Merseybeat' music scene. Cilla was signed to Epstein and then to Parlophone Records where George Martin produced her first single 'Love of The Loved'. Released in 1963, the Lennon & McCartney song did not do as well as expected (35 in UK singles chart).

However, her success came with her next two singles 'Anyone Who Had A Heart' and 'You're my World', released in 1964, which both reached the number one spot in Britain and sold more than a million copies worldwide.

Burt Bacharach, co-writer of the song 'Alfie' arranged and conducted the orchestra on Cilla's recording of the song. Her version of 'Alfie' charted at Number 9 in the UK, again a success. Cilla Black was slowly but surely becoming a household name in the UK.

After the tragic death of Brian Epstein, Bobby Willis became her Manager. They married in 1969 and had three sons — Ben, Robert and Jack — as well as a daughter, Ellen, who tragically died just two hours after she was born prematurely in 1975.

Bobby managed Cilla's career until his death in 1999 and during this time she became the highest paid performer on British television.

### **BOBBY (Aneurin Barnard)**



Born in 1942, Bobby Willis grew up as a protestant living in Anfield, Liverpool with his mum, dad, brother Kenny and adopted older sister, Jean.

As a charming and handsome young man with the gift of the gab, he easily impressed the ladies. When he met Cilla he was working at Woolworths in the bakery and confectionary department.

As a talented song writer in his own right, he eventually got the chance in September 1963, for one of his own songs "Shy of Love" to be featured on the B-side of "Love of the Loved", Cilla Black's debut release.

Bobby always made Cilla feel special. His love for her was unconditional and he always put her career ambitions and desires before his own.

To explain Bobby's constant presence at Cilla's side, Brian Epstein gave him the job of road manager but they had to keep their relationship secret.

After the death of Brian, Bobby took over her management duties and over the next thirty years developed her popularity with television family audiences. He helped Cilla to become the highest-paid female presenter on television.

After successfully managing Cilla's career to the end of his life, Bobby finally lost his battle with cancer in 1999 aged only 57.



### BRIAN EPSTEIN (Ed Stoppard)



Brian Samuel Epstein was born into a wealthy Jewish family on 19 September 1934 in a private nursing home in Liverpool.

Boarding school educated, he had a privileged upbringing and after stints in the British Army and at RADA, he returned to Liverpool. His father put him in charge of the record department of the family's newly opened NEMS music store, which was the beginning of an extremely significant career.

After discovering the Beatles in the Cavern club he became their Manager in 1962 and secured deals for them with Decca and Parlophone Records. With an eye for spotting young talent, he went on to discover other artists including the young Cilla Black.

Brian's homosexuality was not publicly known until some years after his death. Although it had been an open secret among his friends and business associates, he struggled to conceal it throughout his life.

Having fallen into a world of drugs, gambling and depression he was admitted to The Priory where he tried to cure his acute insomnia and addiction to amphetamines.

Pressures mounted and he tragically died alone in 1967 at the age of 32 from an overdose of sleeping pills that was later ruled as an accidental death.

### BIG CILLA (Melanie Hill)



Priscilla Blythen was born in Liverpool on 8 December 1911 to parents Joseph Henry Blythen and Ellen Pim. Having married John White on 20 January 1936, Priscilla was affectionately later named 'Big Cilla' when her daughter was born.

Priscilla was half Welsh with a Protestant father and an Irish-Catholic mother. She was a strong woman and a devout Catholic, who spent much of her time at Mass with people rumoured to say 'she eats at the altar rail'.

For income, Cilla's mother ran a second hand clothes stall in the local Paddy's market.

As her daughter had a job as a typist and was the only one in her family that had ever been suitable for office work, she initially had reservations when Cilla's singing career began to take off. In time she was very proud and encouraging of her daughter's career in showbusiness.

Big Cilla was an excellent soprano and would often sing at family gatherings - everything from country and western to opera.

Big Cilla sadly passed away in 1996.

### JOHN WHITE (John Henshaw)



John Patrick White was born on 31 October 1904 to parents George White and Dora Connor. He later married Priscilla Blythen (nine years his junior) on 20 January 1936 at Our Lady of Reconciliation church in Liverpool.

John worked as a Liverpool docker, having previously worked in construction at London's Dorchester Hotel.

John was a well-turned out man who always wore Brylcreem in his hair and a waistcoat. He kept his boots so highly polished that his mates at the docks called him Shiner.

John would spend his spare time playing the mouth organ and looking after his Budgerigars. Like many of his generation he also enjoyed a pint with his mates down at the local pub.

He was a shy, traditional man, who didn't like the idea of losing his daughter to showbusiness. However, when Cilla eventually became a star, he was extremely proud of his daughter's achievements.

John White sadly passed away in 1970.

## SHERIDAN SMITH IS CILLA



"I'm sure I was born in the wrong era. I wish I'd been around in Liverpool in the 60s," reflects Sheridan Smith.

"But the next best thing to that is re-creating it. In an identical Cavern Club with a packed audience of extras and me standing in the middle of them as Cilla."

BAFTA-award winning actress Sheridan plays Cilla on her journey from a teenage girl in 1960 to musical stardom and the start of her legendary TV career in 1968.

The Mrs Biggs star met Cilla before filming began.

"We went to dinner and I was so nervous. When you've grown up watching someone on telly you just hope they're going to be as nice as they come across. And she was.

"She gave me her blessing and I just hopes she likes it."

Sheridan adds: "The story ends at the start of her television career. She went on to become the highest paid female presenter in TV history, which is an amazing achievement."

"The drama is slightly more daunting because Cilla is so well known. And it's daunting thinking what Cilla will make of your performance.

"The director Paul Whittington and I talked for a long time. We didn't want it to be a mimic of Cilla. I'm not an impersonator and that would be doing her a disservice. It's done with much more respect than that.

"Cilla's story is very well documented online so I had lots of material to look at for my research."

The idea for Cilla was first discussed when Sheridan was filming Mrs Biggs in Australia with Jeff Pope, director Paul Whittington and producer Kwadjo Dajan.

"It had been in Jeff's mind for a while and we were talking about it in Australia. It's so nice when you get a team of people you can really work with and feel so comfortable around. They are the best of the best. A winning team.

“Then Jeff approached me about it and asked what I thought. I jumped at the chance, of course. Obviously they then had to see if Cilla wanted that. And she was really behind me.”

Those who only know Cilla from her TV career may not know about her huge singing success in the 1960s and 70s, having been discovered in the Cavern Club by The Beatles’ manager Brian Epstein.

Cilla - the girl everyone wished lived next door - had a string of top hits and was the best selling British female recording artist in the UK during the Sixties.

“One of the great things about telling this story is that some of the younger generation have no idea about Cilla’s singing career. They know Blind Date and Surprise Surprise onwards.

“This is the time of Merseybeat. What an exciting era. Hopefully the older generation can re-live it and younger viewers will think it’s as brilliant as I did when I first saw the footage.”

Sheridan has won two Olivier Awards for stage roles, including Best Actress In A Musical for her portrayal of Elle Woods in the London West End production of Legally Blonde.

How did she approach singing in Cilla’s Sixties’ style?

“We did all the songs live on set. I had some singing lessons leading up to filming because Cilla has a very distinctive sound. She has two voices. A really soft voice and then a singing voice from the back of the throat when she does those big ballads.

“The first episode is more the rock and roll stuff at the Cavern when she belted the songs out. I think it was because the audience was screaming so much you couldn’t hear, so you had to sing for your life.

“We filmed in Liverpool for six weeks where they re-built an identical Cavern Club and an identical Abbey Road studios.”

The technical requirements of recording TV drama meant Sheridan was one of the few people who could hear the backing track when she took to the Cavern stage.

“I had earpieces in with the backing track of the band in my ears. Obviously all the crew and the extras playing the audience don’t have earpieces. So I’m singing along and it’s like when someone is caught singing in the shower!”

Sheridan later went to the real Abbey Road studios in London to sing in the same studio where Cilla recorded.

“They’ve kept almost all of the live stuff we did in Liverpool because they didn’t want it to sound all polished and preened. If I cough in the middle of the song, the cough’s in.

“The one thing they wanted to do was put on the orchestral strings to Alfie.”

Cilla’s classic 1966 hit and title track to the film starring Michael Caine was co-written by Burt Bacharach who was a hard taskmaster during the Abbey Road recording.

“To get to go to Abbey Road and THE studio where Cilla recorded Alfie with this massive orchestra was such a thrill. They were amazing.

“I wrote on Twitter something about them being ‘bad ass’, which doesn’t really do them justice. My mum went, ‘What’s this bad ass thing?’ And I went, ‘It means they were really, really mega-good, mum.’ Just absolute pros.

“It was breathtaking. I really got goosebumps when the orchestra played that opening ‘pling’ to Alfie. And then I got to sing, ‘What’s it all about, Alfie...’ With this amazing orchestra in Abbey Road.”

Abbey Road also features in an emotional conclusion to episode two featuring Cilla’s first No 1 hit Anyone Who Had A Heart in 1963.

“We filmed in Liverpool for six weeks and they were a fantastic team. Costume designer Amy Roberts is brilliant. I think she took a lot from images of the time and I had the most fabulous wardrobe.

“I fell in love with Liverpool. The people were so friendly to me up there. I was so looked after the whole time. Everywhere you went everyone was chatting.

“There are a couple of scenes where Cilla and Bobby wait for a phone box to ring beside a row of houses. We were shooting really late at night and the people who lived there were giving me cups of tea and telling me stories from back in the 60s.”

“My own first memory of Cilla is on Blind Date. I knew she had been a singer and had done Alfie but I certainly wasn’t aware of just how much she had achieved in her musical career.

“I bought all of her albums as soon as I knew I was going to play her and listened to them all. She’s sung an almost endless number of songs which I put on my phone. So Cilla songs keep popping up and my mates are like, ‘Who’s this?’ And I say, “It’s Cilla Black!””

Cilla also charts her meeting and subsequent relationship with Bobby Willis (Aneurin Barnard), a young man from Liverpool who later became both Cilla’s husband and manager.

“I didn’t know the full story about Bobby and how he’d been there right from the beginning. Aneurin was fantastic as this little scally that comes into her life.

“Even though she knocks him back at the start, he’s so determined. You can just tell he is madly in love with her from the beginning. And even though they had their ups and downs they were a real team and became inseparable.”

Bobby was a singer and songwriter himself and could have had his own record deal.

"I've seen Aneurin in one of his West End shows and he has a gorgeous voice. I was a bit nervous singing in front of him. He played Bobby sweetly and brilliantly. He even has a look of him. Perfectly cast."

Bobby, who died in 1999, encouraged Cilla to continue with her singing career when her initial audition for The Beatles' manager Brian Epstein (Ed Stoppard) went wrong.

"It must be one of the only times she lost her nerve a little bit like that. Bobby was the one who said, 'Come on girl, we're not wasting this talent. Get back out there.' Then lo and behold Brian Epstein was back in the audience, signed her up and the rest is history.

"Bobby really was her rock. The fact they stayed together for all those years is wonderful. Cilla wrote something in her autobiography which I thought was such a lovely thing:

"Bobby said: 'Every successful woman needs a good man behind her.' When Cilla said she thought it was the other way around, Bobby replied, 'So? Why shouldn't we break the mould?'

"This massive love story between Cilla and Bobby is at the heart of the drama. As they said themselves, two little scallies."

The drama also tells the story of Cilla and Brian Epstein, who turned her into a star and died of an accidental drugs overdose in 1967.

"A lot of people haven't seen this side of Brian's story in relation to Cilla. It's such a journey from those early days in Liverpool to his tragic death.

"Cilla had a really special connection with Brian. But she was a good Catholic girl, I think a lot of that stuff was probably hidden from her.

"Ed Stoppard is a brilliant actor. You really feel for Brian and his journey is so tragic and behind closed doors. It gets very emotional. Cilla really loved him and he used to call her his 'Little Cilla.'

"We also find out Brian's role in launching Cilla's legendary TV career. Cilla and Bobby wanted to concentrate on the singing but Brian knew television was the future."

Melanie Hill and John Henshaw play Cilla's mum and dad Priscilla and John.

"They were both fantastic. John is hilarious. There are loads of funny little things they've kept in with us messing about. So that was nice because Cilla got on great with her dad. And I loved Melanie so much. She's such a warm lady. She texted me on my birthday saying, 'Happy Birthday from Mamma!'

## ANEURIN BARNARD IS BOBBY



“It’s one of my favourite roles to have ever played. But I didn’t think I had a chance of getting the part.”

The White Queen star Aneurin Barnard explains: “My first reaction when I read the Cilla scripts was I loved it.

“Then I phoned my agent and said, ‘I can’t be doing this. The script is great. It’s brilliant. But they’re never going to cast a boy from the valleys as a blond, blue-eyed Liverpudlian.’

“My agent and the casting director said, ‘You’ve got to do this.’ So I worked as hard as I could to convince the powers-that-be I could transform into Bobby.”

The Welsh-born actor plays Bobby Willis, the young man who fell in love with Cilla in the early 1960s and later became her husband and manager.

“It was the most dramatic transformation of my career so far. My hair was dyed blond every seven to eight days, the eyebrows every two days, eye lashes, contacts in every day.

“And, of course, then changing the accent. I looked at the Liverpudlian accent many years ago for a job I was supposed to do but didn’t end up doing it in the end because I was tied into another role.

“I’d worked really hard on it so I’d already done the root work. Then I found interviews with Bobby. You have to consider exactly where he was from and in that period as well. So getting his pitch right was quite a delicate process.

“In the end the director, producer and I made decisions as to what we thought was right. How close we could get to Bobby, with artistic licence of course.”

Aneurin continues: “It was a hell of a transformation but I didn’t find it difficult. I found it thrilling. I love being able to embody someone completely different from myself.

“The more I have to work the more enjoyment I get out of it. I love doing detailed work and it was great to be able to dive into a completely different dialect.



“Our costume designer Amy Roberts was wonderful. We had both done our research and she was very open to my opinion. There were also pictures of Bobby from that time so we could work in great detail.

“We first see Bobby as a raw young lad. He is backstreet Liverpool and lives with his father and brother. His mother died when he was young so he had to grow up quickly and look after his father.

“Through the circumstances of losing his mother, and the morals and attitudes of his up-bringing, made the man created later on.”

Bobby was a bakery worker with the gift of the gab when he first met Cilla at the Cavern Club in Liverpool and tried to chat her up.

“He told her he was older than he was and that he owned a car when it was a hire car. Basically he was just a young lad trying it on.

“It wasn’t love at first sight. He tried to flirt his way into her life and she stood her ground. But their relationship grew. They had their ups and downs like any couple. They disagreed about things.

“But they could not walk away from one another because their love was too strong. In 40 years of marriage I think they spent three nights away from each other. They were inseparable.”

Aneurin adds: “They are beautifully written scripts by Jeff Pope. We had re-writes as well throughout the process and it just felt like he was topping it up all the time. There’s a great heart to this story.”

Bobby, who died in 1999, was an important influence on Cilla’s career even before he became her full time manager after the death of her first manager Brian Epstein.

The Beatles’ manager Brian (Ed Stoppard) discovered Cilla (Sheridan Smith) singing in the Cavern at a time when Bobby was already helping her professionally.

“Bobby was a driving force in his own right. It’s interesting how Bobby and Brian’s relationship developed. They didn’t always agree but they both only wanted the best for Cilla and became great friends.

“Brian had a wise mind and at times managed Bobby in terms of persuading him and Cilla his opinion was correct. But Bobby obviously learned from Brian over those years.

“He always had his ears and eyes open to see how things were done. Also learning from Brian’s mistakes as well as his success to become a great manager himself.

“It’s a very powerful story about Cilla and also Bobby and Brian. It’s about that triangle of people on her path to stardom and their relationships behind closed doors.”

As was the way in the pop world of the 1960s, Cilla had to pretend she was not in a relationship to increase her appeal to record buyers.

“That was one of the hardest things for Bobby, who was also her road manager. Being in a relationship with Cilla but having to lie about it.”

Cilla’s dad John White (John Henshaw) was also keen to ensure his daughter’s boyfriend didn’t overstep the mark.

“Even though this was the 1960s, you can still see the attitudes of the 50s and 40s through the parents.

“It was a great experience and a privilege to work with both John Henshaw and Melanie Hill, who plays Cilla’s mother ‘Big Cilla’. As a young actor you aspire to work with people like that.

“John and I were laughing in between takes because of the circumstances with her dad warning off Bobby. We had a real giggle. But then when it came to the ‘take’ we’ve got to do our job and then it becomes very serious. It gave us licence to play those moments.”

Aneurin was surprised by the scale of Cilla’s musical career. At one stage she was selling 100,000 records a day.

“I only knew about Surprise Surprise and Blind Date. I’m 27, so that was my era. But I’ve spoken to people a little older than me and they didn’t realise she sang either.

“That’s why this story is so substantial. It’s great that we get to show how Cilla got to where she did and that huge singing success in the 1960s.”

Many also don’t know Bobby was a singer himself - helping with backing vocals on her chart topping hits - wrote songs and turned down a recording contract for the sake of his relationship with Cilla.

“It was either that or they would have broken up. And he wanted Cilla more than he wanted that career.”

Aneurin’s singing voice has featured on stage and screen and is heard in Cilla. Does he have any vocal ambitions of his own away from acting?

“I don’t think so. I have been approached once or twice to do some music. I do write myself and I still sing but it’s not going to be like, ‘Here is the actor Aneurin Barnard releasing a new album.’ None of that.

“It’s more for maybe fans who ask me to do some material or for anyone who wants to have a little listen. It’s more personal for me. I just enjoy doing it that way rather than making a business out of it.”

What was it like working with Sheridan Smith?

“Sheridan is a great talent and a fantastic actress. She really took on the role of Cilla and attacked it. And she recorded all the vocals live.

“It’s so good when you get to walk on set having done your work and you can see someone else doing theirs with the director Paul Whittington pushing you both to create the best drama and storytelling you can.”

It was a big step at the time for a young woman like Cilla to go to London to further her career.

“I think it still is for some people. When I first came to London from the valleys it was a hell of a step. You go, ‘Wow, look at this place.’

“But back then even more so. Today you get to know so much more in advance from television and things like that. So it was quite a thing for her. And for her parents to let their daughter go to London.”

The drama shows Cilla, Bobby and Brian in New York as she attempts to follow The Beatles in conquering America.

“We filmed that in Liverpool on a freezing cold Sunday morning. I remember being picked up very early from my hotel and the driver was dodging people coming out of the clubs at 5am.

“Then filming a New York scene in a Yellow Cab where they shut down the street, with a load of American Corvette cars. And it was blowing a gale.

“I was thinking, ‘How can I just drive through Liverpool and see loads of people falling out of clubs and then an hour later be in what totally looked like New York?’ There are moments like that as an actor where you go, ‘Bloody hell, my life’s weird!’”

He drove a series of 1960s British cars and a vintage biscuit company van during filming.

“I’m a lover of cars anyway, especially vintage cars. My father loves cars as well so he gave the knowledge to me. I also had a great uncle who collected old cars and used to drive over the valley and show me them when I was a young lad.

“They’re not the greatest things to drive, especially being so old now. In some the gear box is non-existent and the clutch on its last breath. And you may as well be turning a tank with the steering.

“The owners were always there. You could see a cold sweat slowly running down their face hoping the actor didn’t crash their car. But there were no mishaps. It was great fun. The biscuit van was fantastic and actually the nicest one to drive.”

Aneurin met Cilla in London before filming began.

“Jeff, Sheridan and I sat down and had dinner with Cilla and her son Robert, who is now her manager. It was a nice thing to do and a lovely evening before we entered upon this big story.”

When they first met, Cilla greeted Aneurin with the words, “Hello Bobby.”

He reflects: “It was a privilege to meet her and then just to get the tip of the hat to say, ‘Yes, please, you can continue to play my late husband.’

“Bobby was the best of men, in my opinion. He had a good heart, he was a strong man, he was compassionate, reserved, always respectful and had fight in him as well. A very emotionally connected bloke.”

He concludes: “When I was growing up I fell in love with The Beatles and all of that era. So thanks to my profession, I get to be as close to that period as possible. Especially when they build a Cavern which is identical to the original, millimetre by millimetre.

“You’ve got 150 extras dancing and sweating like it would have been, all in period costume, with a band playing on stage as The Beatles who have had their hair done to perfection and are wearing every piece of clothing identical to how it was.

“You walk in there and get butterflies in the stomach straight away because you are stepping back in time to such a special moment. I had to pinch myself.

“Anyone would pay a fortune to experience that.”

## ED STOPPARD IS BRIAN EPSTEIN



He discovered The Beatles and Cilla, made them stars and died in tragic circumstances.

“Paul McCartney is quoted as saying if anyone was the ‘Fifth Beatle’ it was Brian Epstein. Their story might have been very different without him,” says Ed Stoppard.

“Brian also found Cilla. That was one of his great talents. The ability to spot talent and know what would appeal to and resonate with their audience.

“He saw something in Cilla and was very protective of her. He was extremely loyal to the very end, until his death in August 1967.

“Cilla and Brian’s stories are intertwined. They were incredibly close. Cilla relied on Brian and he adored her. She was the only female artist in his stable.”

Ed was desperate to play Cilla’s manager as soon as he read Jeff Pope’s scripts and met director Paul Whittington and producer Kwadjo Dajan.

“At that point I started making burnt offerings to various acting gods so they would offer me the role. And happily they did.

“I knew Brian Epstein would be a very interesting character to investigate. Obviously we’re charting Cilla’s journey but the drama reveals his story too.

“We first meet Brian in the early 1960s when The Beatles are at the point where they are about to have that initial explosion in the UK. It’s an incredibly exciting time for him.

“He ran NEMS (North End Road Music Stores) in Liverpool and entered into this world of management with no experience, probably more in hope than expectation.

“Brian is just starting to form into that fledgling mogul which he quickly became. He took his role very seriously and brought something into the mix which, arguably, very few others could have done.

“Before The Beatles got their break he worked tirelessly for them, often with no success. Famously everyone turned them down until George Martin at Parlophone picked them up.

“Brian didn’t lose heart, he didn’t lose faith. By 1964, when The Beatles are triumphing in the States, he is the pre-eminent management figure in the UK pop industry.

“In the early years he was absolutely vital in turning Lennon and McCartney from two great singer-songwriters into a global phenomenon.

“He saw opportunities and understood how imaging and positioning worked in a way that was unusual then and which we just take for granted now.

“He was something of a trailblazer, getting them on the Ed Sullivan Show in America. Without Brian The Beatles would have been a different affair.”

Brian saw Cilla (Sheridan Smith) singing at the Cavern Club in Liverpool in a simpler and more innocent era compared to today.

“That extraordinary thing that you could go to the Cavern Club at lunchtime and watch The Beatles when they were the biggest band in Liverpool and just starting to become a nationwide phenomenon.

“In those days people queued up to buy records in shops which doesn’t happen now. Technology has moved on. I guess there was a more up close and personal quality to that early pop world where people were available and you could have contact with them.

“We still have the pop star phenomenon today but there was a different quality to the passion then.

“After 1965 The Beatles retreated from touring. Brian was instrumental in managing not just the logistics of that crazy lifestyle but also the mental and emotional toll that might have had on the band.

“They absolutely trusted him. When Brian died, there’s news footage of John Lennon and you can see he is totally shell-shocked. He knew that was the beginning of the end for The Beatles.

“The only person who could hold this extraordinary force together was Brian, even when he was struggling to keep his own life on track.

“Cilla also relied on Brian. Some of his other acts probably felt they’d suffered because of the amount of time and attention The Beatles required.

“And Cilla would probably argue the same. But she had more attention than the others. She was important to him. Cilla was a huge deal.

“I’m of a generation where you say ‘Cilla Black’ and think of Surprise Surprise and Blind Date. I knew she was a singer but, I have to be honest, I thought she was a 60s’ pop sensation, flash in the pan, one hit wonder.

“But she wasn’t that at all. Cilla was a huge musical deal in the 1960s.”

Ed says it was a very special experience filming scenes in exact replicas of the Cavern Club and the iconic Abbey Road studios in London.

“Oh my goodness. When I stood in the Cavern and ‘The Beatles’ got up on stage. It was all I could do not to just grin throughout the entire day. Amazing. It was hairs on the back of your neck time.

“The art department also did a great job re-creating the Abbey Road studio. Really wonderful. Then hearing Sheridan sing Anyone Who Had A Heart, belting that out in the booth. There were a lot of very special moments filming this.

“Sheridan makes Cilla so real. It would be so easy to end up doing a caricature. That is always one of the things you’ve got to keep an eye on when you’re playing a real person.

“And when it’s a public figure, where the only time you’ve ever seen them is in front of the camera, obviously that’s not the real person.

“So the great skill is to make that person live once they step off stage. Once they exit through the door, get into the car and go home. What is that person really like?

“For Sheridan to do that and also sing those numbers, mapping that extraordinary journey over what was a relentless period, it’s astonishing. Pretty chameleon-like.

“There’s a scene at the end of episode two...you feel a shiver run through you when you read it on the page. What a way to end an episode. I can’t wait for the audience to see it.”

Ed continues: “Aneurin Barnard also does an extraordinary job as Bobby Willis, her road manager and later husband.

“It’s tricky because Bobby was the consort, which is a difficult role to play I imagine in real life and certainly as an actor. But Aneurin nailed that. Bobby was obviously beyond crucial to Cilla.”

The man who helped create Beatlemania was skilled in handling Bobby’s concerns about the best path for Cilla’s career.

“Brian wasn’t cynical about people. He saw them as innocent until proven guilty. So with Bobby there was a genuine fondness between the two of them. Brian felt they both had the same interest at heart, which was Cilla’s career and welfare.

“Sometimes opinion diverged over what direction was best for her and he respected Bobby. But Brian knew his own mind and stuck to his decisions. He had the courage of his convictions. He believed in his acts and he believed in himself.”

Ed explains: “Brian was Liverpool posh. He was middle class and several years older than Cilla and The Beatles, at that age where it makes an enormous difference. He could give off a more worldly quality.

“But then at the same time he wasn’t a patronising middle-aged industry suit. He clearly had great passion.

“The fact he ran NEMS meant that even if he at first didn’t know an awful lot about management, he knew a lot about music and the public’s musical tastes. He knew what worked and could see at first hand what was selling and what you could do to generate interest in records.

“So he brought some very useful skills. But probably the fundamental quality was his acts trusted him.”

The drama explores Brian’s troubled private life at a time when homosexuality was still illegal.

“If you wanted a perfect storm, to be born into a respectable Jewish family in the north west of England in the 1930s is almost the worst circumstances to be a homosexual.

“The pressure on him, the anxiety and the fear of being exposed must have been almost intolerable. It was clearly troubling for him in his adult life.

“Brian was very unhappy in love, sadly. His trust was abused. I’m sure that took its toll and was part of a combination of pressures through the 60s that led to his descent into drug dependency.

“He couldn’t accept himself as he was. Which is so sad.

“It’s hard for a modern audience to comprehend just how different things were back then because we live in an age where pretty much anything goes. Homosexuality was legalised just a month after his death. It’s tragic.”

An inquest ruled Brian had taken an accidental overdose of sleeping pills. He was just 32.

“This drama will introduce many to a period in Cilla’s life and a whole side of her they probably weren’t particularly familiar with. And equally with Brian Epstein. I was overjoyed Jeff wanted to explore Brian’s story and not only in connection to Cilla. It’s all relevant to the drama.”

Brian also launched Cilla on her legendary television career.

“Cilla and Bobby didn’t think it was a good idea. They wanted to stick to the singing. But Brian had that vision. He could see things other people couldn’t.

“He achieved an astonishing amount in those five or six years. But you can’t help wonder what else he might have gone on to do.

“Obviously we will never know.”



## MELANIE HILL IS BIG CILLA



"I was really excited to play Cilla Black's mother. 'Big Cilla' was quite a character herself and shaped Cilla and her personality," explains Melanie Hill.

"But more than anything I was attracted by the prospect of working with Sheridan Smith. She is a tremendous actress and I knew she would morph herself into Cilla, which she did.

"There was a scene set at the London Palladium with Cilla singing on stage and Sheridan just blew me away. I was genuinely in tears.

"I had seen the original clip of Cilla there and Sheridan transformed herself into her and sounded amazing. She is like a sponge and soaks everything up."

Waterloo Road star Melanie plays Cilla's mother Priscilla, who was known to her family as Big Cilla.

"When we were filming in Liverpool, people remembered Big Cilla and had stories about her. She worked on a market stall and obviously loved her daughter very much.

"The family lived on Scotland Road but had no front door because they were above a barber's shop. Big Cilla was quite a proud lady and she hated that.

"Cilla inherited the gift of the gab from her mother, who was larger than life. Their house was always full with people coming in and out. A real hive of activity.

"I think that rubbed off on Cilla. As well as having a great voice she had a great personality to go with it. That's why people took to her because she was so genuine and funny."

Priscilla and her docker husband John (John Henshaw) were proud of their daughter working in a typing pool - the first in the family judged "suitable" for an office job.

“They wanted her to have a proper job. None of this singing malarky. But obviously when she started doing well they got right behind her.”

Adds Melanie: “John Henshaw was a joy to work with. I’ve worked with him before on *Candy Cabs* and *When Saturday Comes*.

“But it was lovely to play opposite him because we got to mess about a bit. The director Paul Whittington let John do his thing. He’s a great actor. Fresh and honest.

“The writer Jeff Pope is also just top class. Everything he does is brilliant so when I got the call I was thrilled.”

Melanie’s research for the role included watching footage of Cilla singing in the 60s and 70s.

“I knew her from things like *Blind Date* and the fact she is a massive figure in British TV history. But she also had an incredible music career and such an interesting story.

“I didn’t realise she did lots of things, like sing a duet with Marc Bolan who is one of my idols. She was so edgy.

“People think about Cilla Black as the Queen of Light Entertainment but many won’t realise how cutting edge she was in the 1960s. She was friends with Ringo Starr and The Beatles and part of all that scene at The Cavern Club in Liverpool.

“The Beatles asked her to go to Hamburg with them but her dad wouldn’t let her go. Can you imagine that happening now? But it was the era where young people did what their parents told them.”

Big Cilla might have pursued a professional singing career herself with Melanie displaying her own vocal talent on screen.

“Paul Whittington rang me and said, ‘Look, you’ve got to sing a song. Is that all right?’ And I said, ‘Yes, that’s great, I’m thrilled.’

“Then he sent me a link on YouTube of what it was I had to sing, which was very interesting - because it was yodelling!

“So I actually had to learn to yodel for a party scene in the drama. At first it was daunting because you watch someone and think, ‘There’s no way I’ll ever be able to do that.’ But I had a really nice guy, who was a musical director, helping me.

“I don’t think my neighbours were too happy because you can’t yodel quietly. You have to push the air out and sing loud. So I spent four weeks yodelling at the top of my voice.

“It is true. Big Cilla could have sung professionally. That was my favourite day of filming doing that. It was really good fun.”

The first episode begins in 1960 on the verge of the Swinging Sixties. But Cilla's mother still has a look very much of the 1950s.

"The older generation did look old before their time in those days. I remember looking at pictures of my gran and grandad and they look like they're in their seventies. And my mam would say, 'Oh no, they were only late 40s in those photos. They just looked older.'

"Our costume designer Amy Roberts did a fantastic job. The clothes she put us in were amazing. She dresses you right down to the bra and knickers of the period - even for the extras. Amy has got such an eye for detail and it really pays off."

It was the first time Melanie had worked in Liverpool since she played the role of Aveline in classic TV sitcom Bread.

"I've not really been there since so it was lovely going back. It's changed a lot. I walked up and down the quayside and along the river and they've done such a lot.

"It's really beautiful. And the buildings are epic. So I really did make the most of being back there."

Melanie has enjoyed a long and acclaimed acting career. But was she, like Cilla, ever judged suitable for office work?

"I didn't actually ever do office work," she laughs. "But coming from our generation I had a Saturday job from being 15. That's just what you did. You worked as soon as you could.

"I did loads of different jobs - working for a betting company, in a sports shop, selling make-up. It just so happened that I got into acting but I would have taken anything that came along, to be honest. You just did to make money and support yourself."

Luckily, Cilla also left her early jobs behind - including working as a cloakroom attendant at The Cavern - to embark on what became a record-breaking singing and TV career.

"I have met Cilla a couple of times over the years at functions but just in passing. I don't think younger people realise what a wonderful singing voice she had.

"Sheridan went out for dinner with her and they chatted through the script. The could not have picked anyone better for the role.

"Sheridan is an infectious, wonderful girl and I loved being with her. She's got that joie de vivre and is on the go all the time.

"Having fun, enjoying her life and doing her job very professionally. I think viewers are in for a real treat."

## JOHN HENSHAW IS JOHN WHITE



"It doesn't seem that long ago to me," reflects John Henshaw.

"But it's frightening when you think it's 50 years since The Beatles and Cilla sang at the Cavern Club."

Manchester-born John plays Cilla's father John White, a Liverpool docker who watched as his daughter became a Sixties' singing star.

"I'm still a fan of the 1960s and all that music. It was a great time for music and culture. So you do a double take when you read the script and see names like John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

"You think, 'I wish I'd have met them all.' But it was nice to go into the pub after work and say, 'Oh, I was talking to Brian Epstein today.' They are icons.

"John White was a working class lad and a bit of a character. He could be a quiet sort of a bloke but had been away to sea and had tales to tell.

"When he got down to the pub and had a few pints with his mates his extrovert side came out. He liked a bit of a drink and a sing. And there's nothing wrong with that."

Born and Bred and Downton Abbey star John was in his early teens when Cilla had her first big hits.

"I was interested in this project because it was my era and Jeff Pope is a brilliant writer and comes up with some cracking stuff.

"The title is 'Cilla' but it's also about Bobby Willis (Aneurin Barnard) who later became her husband and Brian Epstein (Ed Stoppard), who managed Cilla, The Beatles and other Merseyside acts.

Adds John: "Cilla was never pushed by her mam and dad. She jumped on stage at the Cavern, had some knock backs but kept at it, helped by Bobby.

"And she left home in Liverpool for London to get on, which was a big step for a young girl her age in those days. John was naturally worried about what might happen to her.

"She must have been very brave. Then performing in front of thousands of people. It takes a lot of bottle.

"The world is a much smaller place now. I remember going to London as a young man, when I was a pipe fitter, and I was terrified. I got lost. It felt really out of my comfort zone. But you had to do it. So full respect to Cilla."

Like all fathers, John White was protective of his daughter and keen to ensure, then, road manager Bobby behaved correctly.

"It was a different world back in the early 1960s and John quite enjoyed the power he had over Bobby. He gets the message over, 'Just behave yourself. I'm watching you.'

"I think that will resonate with a lot of people, including father-in-laws and son-in-laws. As the father of a girl myself, nobody is good enough for your daughter.

"There were also complications because Bobby came from a Protestant family and the Whites were Catholic. Religion was very important in Liverpool, with its links to Ireland, and mattered to John. As did the football team you supported.

"But I'm sure a lot of it was tongue in cheek. He'll have been there himself as a younger man. And Aneurin is fantastic as Bobby. He's a cracking actor."

John is also full of praise for Sheridan Smith's performance as Cilla.

"She is absolutely brilliant and it was nice to work with her again. Sheridan played my daughter in a Christmas special of The Royle Family. She was a really young kid back then and lovely. And she's not changed.

"Sheridan is so talented and a nice girl. It's astonishing to think she's not that old and yet has already done so much. In a way she is like Cilla, a young woman getting out there and showing how talented she is.

"But she is very modest about it. Sheridan is a kid from Doncaster and you can't go back to Doncaster and have any airs and graces. Which is great. It's good to have that base. She's not full of herself. She just does it."

Those who haven't heard Sheridan sing before - such as in her Olivier Award-winning role in West End musical Legally Blonde - are in for a pleasant surprise.

“She’s got a wonderful singing voice. I remember first hearing about it when she was doing Into The Woods on stage in London years ago and people were raving about her voice then. I think she’s brilliant.”

Adds John: “I’ve got a lot of Sixties’ music at home and when I was filming I put a Cilla CD on. She had a really terrific voice and was a massive singing star, which people forget.

“I think this drama may prompt a few people to listen to some of her early stuff. The arrangements are terrific. Cilla was very well looked after musically.

“Of course she went on to do things like Blind Date and Surprise Surprise. That’s another talent and hard work in itself. But those who only know her from that will learn a lot.

“I’m sure viewers will really enjoy this drama. It was a great fun time back in the 1960s. It’s Cilla’s story but also Bobby’s and Brian’s. And there is a lot more to the story than you might think.”

## SYNOPSES

### Episode 1



It's 1960's Liverpool. There's a renewed energy and excitement across the city as the Merseybeat music scene takes hold.

Priscilla White is a typist working in a stifling office environment. She has an amazing singing voice, and yearns for a career in the limelight. After frequenting iconic venues like the Cavern Club and The Iron Door, she is soon mesmerising crowds when invited to perform on stage with rising stars like The Beatles; The Big Three and Kingsize Taylor.

Childhood friend, Ringo Starr, invites her on tour with his band, Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, but Cilla's protective Catholic father refuses to let her go.

Cilla is distraught, but her spirits are soon lifted when she is swept off her feet by Bobby Willis - a charming, "older" songwriter with a nice car and "successful" career in the music business.

Unbeknown to Cilla, Bobby is not all he professes to be. In truth, he is the same age as her, works in a bakery, and drives around in hired cars to impress the ladies. When Cilla discovers this, she confronts him and vows never to see him again.

Bobby, however, is smitten by her and is desperate to win her back. The opportunity presents itself when he uses a chance encounter to successfully negotiate an improved performance fee for her. Cilla agrees to let him manage her. But the arrangement looks to be short-lived when Cilla, backed by her friends, The Beatles, lands an audition with legendary impresario, Brian Epstein.

Crest-fallen, and resigned to his fate, Bobby backs away. However, Cilla blows her big chance to impress Epstein when an attack of nerves gets the better of her. Devastated by this, she faces up to a future with no singing career, no Bobby and no way out of the typing pool.

## **Episode 2**



With Cilla and Bobby reunited, Cilla's confidence returns and she is once again dazzling crowds with her amazing voice.

The re-emergence of Brian Epstein propels her career to new heights, but this is soon followed by an all-time low when her first record fails in the charts.

Against Bobby's judgement Brian convinces her to gamble on a ballad – a change of direction that could alter her life forever.

## **Episode 3**



Cilla's success with 'Anyone Who Had a Heart' is soon followed by her second successive number one, 'You're My World.'

However, a failed attempt to break the American market; her tumultuous relationship with Bobby and the unravelling of Brian's private life threaten to derail her success.



## Cast

Cilla.....	Sheridan Smith
Bobby .....	Aneurin Barnard
Brian Epstein .....	Ed Stoppard
John White .....	John Henshaw
Big Cilla .....	Melanie Hill
George Martin.....	Elliott Cowan
Robert Willis.....	Andrew Schofield
Ringo Starr.....	Tom Dunlea
George Harrison .....	Michael Hawkins
John Lennon .....	Jack Farthing
Paul McCartney .....	Kevin Mains
Burt Bacharach.....	Daniel Pirrie
Pat .....	Tara Wells

## Production Credits

Executive Producer/Writer .....	Jeff Pope
Executive Producer .....	Robert Willis
Executive Producer for GroupM .....	Tony Mouldsdales
Producer.....	Kwadjo Dajan
Director .....	Paul Whittington
Line Producer .....	Matthew Hamilton
Production Designer.....	Lisa Hall
Make-Up Designer .....	Lesley Brennan
Costume Designer .....	Amy Roberts
Editor.....	Tania Redding
Casting Director.....	Andy Morgan