



**KAY MELLOR'S BRAND NEW ITV DRAMA
'GIRLFRIENDS'
WILL AIR IN THE NEW YEAR**

Rollem Productions brand new ITV drama ***Girlfriends*** - from the pen of BAFTA award-winning screenwriter Kay Mellor – will air in early 2018.

The series stars Phyllis Logan (*The Good Karma Hospital, Downton Abbey*), Miranda Richardson (*Mapp & Lucia, And Then There Were None, Churchill, iBoy*) and Zoë Wanamaker (*Mr Selfridge, Agatha Christie's Poirot, My Family, Gormenghast, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*) in the three lead roles and showcases a stellar supporting cast including: Daisy Head (*Guilt, The Syndicate 3*), Chris Fountain (*Coronation Street, Hollyoaks*), Philip Cumbus (*The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui, Comus*), Matthew Lewis (*Harry Potter, Ripper Street*), Val Lilley (*Cuffs, Mr Sloane, Shameless*), Anthony Head (*A Street Cat Named Bob, You, Me & Them*), Adrian Rawlins (*Hard Sun, Maigret in Montmartre*), Wendy Craig (*The Worst Witch, Unforgotten*), Dave Hill (*Porridge, Vera*), Steve Evets (*This Is Us, Looking For Eric, Rev*), Paula Wilcox (*Upstart Crow, Mount Pleasant, Boomers*), Chloe Hart (*Kinky Boots, Hairspray*), Elena Saurel (*Midsomer Murders, Silent Witness*), Thailia Zucchi (*The Windsors, New Tricks*), Emmett J Scanlan (*The Fall, In The Flesh*), Rochenda Sandall (*Love, Lies & Records, Broken*) and Matthew Marsh (*Love, Lies & Records, Riviera*).

For life-long friends Linda, Sue and Gail, the years have flown by, yet their lives seem more complicated than ever. When Linda's husband Micky vanishes from a cruise ship on their wedding anniversary Linda suddenly finds herself on her own for the first time in nearly 30 years. Widowed and out of her depth she turns to her old friends Gail and Sue for support, who each have their own problems to face...

Glamorous and successful Sue is shocked when she finds herself facing age discrimination in her job as the editor of a popular bridal magazine. After committing her best years to her career and to her married lover and business partner John, a devastated Sue starts to question the choices she's made. As the completion of her divorce to second husband Dave rapidly approaches Gail's getting cold feet about giving up on the man she still loves. But with an aging mother, ex-con son and demanding grandson to look after, is she too exhausted to be able to do anything about it?

As our girlfriends come back together to support their grieving friend, it's clear Linda, Gail and Sue's lives have changed over the years, but true friendship remains the same no matter how much time has passed.

Girlfriends is a 6 x 60 drama series and has been commissioned by Polly Hill, Head of Drama for ITV. The series will be directed by Kay Mellor (*The Syndicate*, *In The Club*) and produced by Josh Dynevor (*Fat Friends Series 3*, *The New Worst Witch*). The executive producers are Kay Mellor for Rollem Productions and Polly Hill for ITV. It is a Rollem production for ITV and the series will be distributed by All3media International.

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CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS

LINDA HUTCHINSON (PHYLLIS LOGAN)

Linda and her husband Micky (Steven Evets) met at school, but didn't actually get married until years later when they were in their twenties. Micky was a bit of a rebel and Linda's dad didn't really approve of him, mainly because Micky drove a motorcycle and he didn't want Linda riding on the back of it. But Linda didn't worry about things like that when she was younger. She met her best friends Gail (Zoë Wanamaker) and Sue (Miranda Richardson) at Hall Lane Youth Centre and together they formed a band and even hitched down to Greenham Common... Looking back now, Linda can hardly believe that she did those things and her son Ryan (Chris Fountain) and daughter Ruby (Daisy Head) definitely can't believe that their ditzy mum went on protest marches!

Linda's been a stay at home mum most of her life while Micky was the main breadwinner for the family. She did have a job as a comptometer operator before they got married but she never trained to do anything else and now there's no such thing as comptometers so she's not really qualified to do anything. She's never been good with paperwork or computers so Micky takes care of the bills for them. Linda prefers it that way; she only uses her smart phone to make phone calls and send the odd text, so the idea of Internet banking and paperless billing makes her head spin.

GAIL STANLEY (ZOË WANAMAKER)

Loyal and dependable Gail has worked hard all her life. Now, at an age where she'd hoped to be winding down and enjoying retirement, she's found herself stuck as one of the sandwich generation; burdened with looking after her aging mother Edna (Valerie Lilley) and being the main guardian to her beautiful grandson Ben, who she adores. And with working her shifts as a lollypop lady as well to make ends meet, Gail has no time for herself.

Gail's been married twice – firstly to Trevor, who is the father of her now grown up son Tom (Matthew Lewis), and secondly to Dave (Adrian Rawlins). After her first marriage Gail never expected to find love again but she and Dave were happily married for over ten years when her son Tom moved back home with his baby son Ben. Tom and Dave never got on and the constant stress and fighting eventually drove a wedge between him and Gail and now the finalisation of their divorce looms.

Gail always used to be very political; when they were younger she and her girlfriends Linda (Phyllis Logan) and Sue (Miranda Richardson) would wear 'ban the bomb' badges, sing protest songs in their band and go on marches together. Now she feels like she's lost her fighting spirit somewhere along the way.

SUE THACKERY (MIRANDA RICHARDSON)

Glamorous and successful Sue is married to her high-powered job as a bridal magazine editor, but actual marriage still eludes her. Sue met her business partner John (Anthony Head) over 30 years ago and together they started a bridal magazine 'Adorable'. Sue has committed a large part of her life to 'Adorable' magazine, sacrificing friendships and family to make it the success it is today. She's also committed a large part of her life to John himself – they've been lovers for the past 30 years and Sue adores him and the glamorous life they have together, despite his marriage to his wife Beth and his reluctance to leave her.

Working in the media, Sue is very aware of her age and works hard to maintain her appearance. She's a fierce businesswoman and is outspoken about the value of her years of experience, she just wouldn't want anyone to ever mention any specific numbers.

Sue met her best friends Linda (Phyllis Logan) and Gail (Zoë Wanamaker) when she was in her twenties and they've been friends ever since. Working long hours and bringing up her son Andrew (Philip Cumbus) has meant she hasn't seen them as much as she might have wanted to, but she knows they're always there if she needs them.

RUBY HUTCHINSON (DAISY HEAD)

Ruby works as a dancer on the Aztec cruise ship with her compere brother Ryan (Chris Fountain). She loves her parents and has always been a bit of a daddy's girl. Her work on the cruise ship takes her away for months at a time, but she still returns to the family home in between trips and her mum Linda (Phyllis Logan) is always delighted to have her back home with her.

RYAN HUTCHINSON (CHRIS FOUNTAIN)

Ryan Hutchinson works as the Head of Ship's Entertainment on the Aztec cruise ship with his dancer sister Ruby (Daisy Head). He was always quite independent growing up and moved out of the family home at 17. But he is still very caring and supportive of his family, particularly his mum Linda (Phyllis Logan) and returns home between cruise trips with his sister.

TOM (MATTHEW LEWIS)

After Tom split from his drug addict girlfriend he moved back into his mum Gail's (Zoë Wanamaker) house with his young son Ben in tow. However, Tom's frequent clashes with stepfather Dave (Adrian Rawlins) was a contributing factor in Gail and Dave's divorce, particularly when Tom's wide boy ways, penchant for petty crime and subsequent imprisonment led him to leave mum Gail holding the baby.

EDNA (VALERIE LILLEY)

Elderly but inquisitive, at eighty four years young Edna feels entitled to offer her opinions freely on the finer details of her daughter Gail's (Zoë Wanamaker) life. In particular, Edna is quite fond of her former son-in-law Dave and is disappointed that he and Gail have split. Sadly, Edna is beginning to struggle with the onset of dementia and she gets frustrated with her increasing forgetfulness and confusion.

JOHN (ANTHONY HEAD)

Silver fox and bridal magazine owner John has happily had his cake and eaten it over the years; enjoying a respectful family life with his wife and two sons whilst at the same time having an exciting extra-martial affair with long-term lover Sue (Miranda Richardson).

DAVE (ADRIAN RAWLINS)

After 12 years of marriage, driving school instructor Dave has since separated from wife Gail (Zoë Wanamaker). Although Dave remains fond of his former mother-in-law Edna, a deep-rooted tension remains between him and Gail's wayward son Tom (Matthew Lewis).

CAROLE (PAULA WILCOX)

Vintage boutique owner by day and groupie to ageing local tribute band by night, fiery Carole Hardcastle appears hardened and tough. But the pressures of recent events have hit her hard and she struggles with her emotions, which threaten to push her to the edge.

EPIISODE SYNOPSES

EPIISODE 1

The final night of Linda and Micky's celebratory wedding anniversary cruise takes an unexpected turn, changing their lives and that of their children forever.

With her world turned upside down, back home Linda turns to life-long friends Sue and Gail for support as she struggles to cope. When she discovers the depressing reality of the family's badly managed finances, Linda fears for the future, but the girlfriends are horrified to learn there may be bigger problems in store for their friend. Meanwhile overburdened Gail is juggling caring for her aging mother and looking after her demanding grandson as she anxiously prepares for her son Tom's release from prison. With her divorce to her second husband Dave nearing completion; an unwanted letter causes Gail to face her true feelings. But is it too late for her to do anything about it? When high-flying Sue gets a call from her PA she's not prepared for the devastating news facing her at work. As the future of her career as the high-powered Feature's Editor of the bridal magazine is thrown into question, Sue's horrified by the realisation this may have more to do with her age than her performance at work. After committing her best years to her career and to her married lover and business partner John, Sue starts to question the choices she's made.

EPIISODE 2

An unhappy Sue reluctantly faces the arrival of her landmark birthday. But her age quickly becomes the least of her worries when her son Andrew confesses a big secret he's been keeping from her and tensions rise at her birthday celebrations.

When Sue goes back to her flat in York, she encounters more than she bargained for.

Ruby and Ryan worry how their mum will cope as they head back to work on the cruise ship. But a knock on the door throws a spanner in the works when Linda is accused of pushing Micky overboard and Sue and Gail are forced to take matters into their own hands. But they're not prepared for the secrets they're about to uncover and as further information comes to light they're forced to question what they thought they knew about their friend Linda and her husband Micky.

Meanwhile, with her son Tom back inside for breaking his bail curfew, Gail is left holding the forte once again. Despite this she's determined to rekindle the sparks between her and Dave before their divorce is finalised. With the clock ticking she's desperate to reconnect with her ex and goes to extreme lengths, but all does not go according to plan.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Interview with Kay Mellor, Writer, Director Episodes 1-3 and Executive Producer

Tell us about **Girlfriends**...

“It is a warm piece, about three women and their families and what they mean to each other. It’s about how they support one another at times in their lives when they need it most.”

Girlfriends feel very different to your other recent work. Why is that?

“I think **Girlfriends** is different from my other work because I’ve unashamedly put these women of a certain age centre-stage in that role. We haven’t seen that on British television, to be honest. They are not just someone’s wife, girlfriend or partner and I think it is refreshing to see.

What I’ve tried to do in **Girlfriends** is focus on these women and emphasise how important they are in society. For example, without mothers who would be able to work these days? Childcare is a phenomenal amount of money. A lot of women that I meet - and a lot of my friends too - look after their children’s children and grandchildren, to enable their children to go out to work because it’s impossible today to manage on one pay packet.

With me hitting the age I am, going through menopause, juggling things with my children and grandchildren, looking after my elderly mum before she passed and looking after Anthony’s dad; I realised that’s how life is for people my age and I’d not seen that properly reflected on television or even in a movie. So, I wanted to put that at the forefront.

We too can have jobs, do aspirational work; we can be Hilary Clinton; we can be Theresa May. It’s great to see that in politics that’s started to happen, but I suppose what I’m saying is, in media and in the rest of life, we should catch up.”

Do you personally have a close group of girlfriends?

“I pride myself on the fact that I have three or four really good friends and probably one exceptionally good friend - Linda. There isn’t anything, not one single thing, that Linda doesn’t know about me and I’d like to think that there’s nothing that I don’t know about her too.”

Where do we meet our three leads – Linda (Phyllis Logan), Sue (Miranda Richardson) and Gail (Zoë Wanamaker) at the start of the series?

“We meet Linda as she and her husband Micky are celebrating a big wedding anniversary on a cruise ship and something untoward happens to her husband so she’s grieving and her life changes completely in episode 1.

We find Gail with her son just coming out from prison. She’s been looking after her grandson Ben while her son, who is the prime carer and was awarded custody of Ben, has been in jail. Gail only knows how to earn a bit of money – she has a small part-time job as a lollipop lady and is trying to make ends meet. She knows how to look after her child, she knows how to look after her mum and is running round and round in circles. She also finds herself getting divorced from a man that she still loves.

Sue thinks she’s got everything, and on paper she sort of has. She’s kind of free of commitment, but she’s got a long-term partner who she is still extremely keen on. She has a son, who’s doing very well in his law firm, she has a great job and all the accoutrements of a successful woman in terms of the perks; the clothes, the grooming, the car, and a thriving bridal magazine business which she set up with her partner. She is the Features Editor of the magazine and loves her job but things are not what they seem and it’s not long before you see her world being turned upside down.

We meet all three women at crucial parts of their lives really and the series is about how they are there for each other.”

How did you come to cast Phyllis, Miranda and Zoë for the roles of Linda, Sue and Gail?

“I had lots of people pitching to me that had heard about the project, and some of them were really big American names but I wanted an authenticity to it. I really wanted it to be a British series. I didn’t want an American doing an accent even though I know it can work but it’s not my world so I really wanted British talent. I wanted some northern actresses and I knew Miranda had hailed from the north, once upon a time, but it didn’t matter that actually she lived down south because for me, her character was the poshest of the three. When I went to meet her, I knew straight away that she could play Sue and she would be wonderful.

Then we talked about Linda and I knew, because Linda’s inspired by my friend Linda, a dear woman that I love, that it had to be somebody that had great warmth and Phyllis came up

very early in our discussions. She even does a fantastic northern accent, I mean really, really good. I met Phyllis on Skype and of course I knew her work of old - I think she's a glorious actress. She told me how much she loved the project and she really 'got it' and fictional Linda was born.

Zoë was different for me, because yes, she is southern and I hadn't ever heard her do a northern accent and Gail is a working-class Yorkshire woman, living on a council estate. But Zoë has that mercurial quality to her - she is fantastically versatile and she is brilliant as Gail."

What is your favourite scene in Girlfriends?

"One of my favourite scenes has to be towards the end of episode one when the three women are in the kitchen and they all come together. It kind of encapsulates what's going on in their lives and the friendship, that they're there for each other. You can see it, it's palpable, you can touch it, the warmth is there, genuinely, you know. I think Zoë and Miranda and Phyllis had bonded at that time and there was genuine affection there for one another and they end up all hugging each other."

Why should viewers tune in to watch Girlfriends?

"I think the draw for ***Girlfriends*** will be that it's about three women of a certain age and friendship. Each and every one of us, hopefully, has a friend, if not more than one friend. It's about friendship, companionship, marriage and family. It is also about the past: each of our three leads have a past. I mean that's the interesting thing about women of a certain age – they have got a past, they have got a future and they're living in the now. So, they appreciate what they've got, having been through life and that makes them interesting."

How does it feel to be back working with ITV?

"My return to ITV is a great feeling, because I feel it's where I started really, with *Band of Gold*, going back as far as that really, which is probably fifteen years ago now. Then of course, I did *Fat Friends* and *Strictly Confidential*. It feels lovely - it feels like coming home really. It's doubly nice because I get to work with Polly Hill. I love working with Polly - she gets my work, she understands it - and Kevin Lygo is there too and he seems to really get my work as well. I feel like I'm with people that love me and love my work."

Interview with Phyllis Logan who plays Linda Hutchinson

What attracted you to Girlfriends?

“What is nice about it - and I’m sure a lot will be made of it - is the fact that the series is about women of a certain age who are also at the forefront. We don’t play the wives of so-and-so or the mother of the main protagonist: we are the protagonists. In fact, we could have called it that instead of Girlfriends - ‘The Protagonists’.

I’m not saying that the male characters are subsidiary, because they’re very important, and very well rounded too – fantastic and lovely characters – but Linda, Sue and Gail are the main event, which is a nice thing to be involved with.

What attracted me to Linda, was the fact that she is quite straight forward and ordinary but with these hidden depths, shall we say, which we slowly begin to find out about. I think she’s funny too and a lovely mum to her two kids.

It’s been great working on a Kay Mellor project - or is it a Mellor-drama! That’s not original - my friend said ‘Enjoy your Mellor-drama.’ I thought, ‘Yes, I must use that.’”

Kay has talked about giving a voice to women of a certain age who feel like they are invisible and unheard. Is that a prevailing issue or theme in the industry? Is a project like this a rarity or becoming more of a norm?

“Because we’re all living so much longer, I don’t think we’re necessarily perceived as being old - maybe I’m deluding myself here - but I think it might be changing a bit, because there are lots of shows on the TV with women as the protagonists, both here and in the States. There is not necessarily a plethora but they are certainly there and I do feel that maybe our voices are being heard.”

Do you have girlfriends you have stayed in touch with for years and years?

“Yes, I do. I think we all have these girlfriends that have been there right from our young adulthood. We’ve gone on holidays together, we’ve seen ourselves through various heartbreaks and weddings. Our friends are very much part of who we are.”

What has it been like working with Miranda and Zoë?

“It’s been great! I think Miranda and Zoë have worked together before but I’d never worked with either of them before. So, it was a lovely thing to do. When I heard that they were on board, I thought, ‘I can’t wait, let me at it. This is going to be great.’ It’s been fun, we’re all as daft as brushes, in one way or another, and we do have a laugh, I must say. We like the same quirky, silly things, you know, so it’s been a revelation in a very fun way.”

Why should people watch *Girlfriends*?

“I think people should watch ***Girlfriends*** because there are so many boxes to be ticked. It’s a Kay Mellor project - tick, Miranda Richardson, Zoë Wanamaker - tick, tick. Me, perhaps a tick, and it’s such a great story. It’s exciting, it’s shocking, it’s hopefully funny but it’s about ordinary lives in a way dealing with quite extraordinary situations. It’s a must watch - it’s a no brainer.”

Interview with Miranda Richardson who plays Sue Thackery

What attracted you to *Girlfriends*?

“Number one, Kay has a very strong back catalogue of work and she is particularly strong on women and writing for women, across the demographic, so that’s always exciting.

I think it’s smart to write for this generation, or this age, generally, but women of middle years and upwards, have an accumulation of experience and stuff going on, connections, responsibilities, things they want to do in life.”

Tell us about our three main characters Linda, Sue and Gail...

“Broadly speaking, Sue is - to use a colloquial phrase - the poshest of the three. She is solid, middle-class and a rather genteel mother.

Sue - bad joke - I would say is like Cleopatra: she’s in denial because she thinks she’s got everything and on paper she, sort of, has. She’s kind of, free of commitment, but she’s got a long-term partner who she is still extremely keen on. She has a son, who’s doing very well in his law firm, she has a great job and all the accoutrements of a successful woman.

Linda is the slightly more romantic and, dare I say, hippy, of the three but imaginative and dreamy.

Gail is the sort of, secret naughty one, in a way. You know, Gail - when we meet her - is somebody who apparently won't say 'Boo' to a goose and is fearful of everything but then when you get in the midst of the situation, she is the one who shows the initiative or is the first person to speak."

What has it been like working with Phyllis and Zoë?

"Working with Zoë and Phyllis is a gift really. It's just not difficult, not difficult at all."

Do you have life-long girlfriends?

"Yes, I do and I'm lucky. Your girlfriends, who have stayed with you throughout your life are extremely important. It's the people that you feel, if you had to, you could ring up in the middle of the night, you know, and say, 'What do I do about this? I have no idea. Help.'"

Why should people watch Girlfriends?

"I think people will enjoy watching ***Girlfriends*** because they are about three very different, but connected, characters who all have rather interesting journeys and have complicated lives... and I think there will be something that everybody can relate to in at least one of those characters."

Interview with Zoë Wanamaker who plays Gail Stanley

What attracted you to Girlfriends?

"The script was the foundation and is always the foundation as far as I'm concerned before I accept a character. The journey of the character is the most important thing for me. I think, theatrically, it's been a very interesting journey for a TV series. I think it is lively and I the word 'intriguing' keeps coming up in my head. I think, because it's very British, that it's something that is unusual, it's not glossy, it's not chic, it's very real was very appealing."

Tell us about your character Gail...

“Gail is a working-class girl and she has grown up on a council estate. She has a son, who has when we first meet her just come out of prison.

I think Gail is quietly a very perceptive human being and isn't at all judgmental. She also doesn't want people to feel sorry for her.

Gail puts herself furthest down the list, for looking after people. She has very little self-esteem.”

Do you think having long-standing female friendships is an important part of our lives?

“Yes, definitely. It is an instinct that happens when you are young and you pick up people that you are intrigued by. You share emotions and secrets and frailties to each other that you wouldn't normally do to a stranger.

In this series, we find these three women in crisis. They're in a state of crisis and that's what brings them together.”

Kay has talked about giving a voice to women of a certain age who feel like they are invisible and unheard. Is that a prevailing issue / theme in the industry? Is a project like this a rarity or becoming more of a norm?

“Yes, but if you're taking this job as a career, this is what happens to you, whatever you do, whatever job you do. You're going to be retired at some point, somebody younger is going to come up and so that's to be expected. It's always interesting to carry on working and developing and finding new things that excite you, frighten you, and as far as I think I'm concerned, that's really what I'm interested in doing. ‘Women of a certain age’, keeps coming up, and it's kind of patronising, in the end.”

What has it been like working with Phyllis and Miranda?

“I am privileged to work with such graceful, front-footed, perceptive, creative women.”

Notes from Dominic Leclerc, Director Episodes 4 – 6

You have worked with Kay on earlier projects – including The Syndicate and Love, Lies & Records. What drew you to this project in particular?

“For me, it was, genuinely a dream come true, to get to direct Miranda Richardson, Phyllis Logan and Zoë Wanamaker. As soon as Kay mentioned the cast I said, ‘Yes please.’

I’m from Bradford, Kay’s from Leeds. There’s a northern soul to her writing, which I really understand. I think Kay is a phenomenally empowering Executive Producer and Writer. She wants the best from her cast, and her creative team. I love her writing, it feels earthy and real and authentic, and the characters all go on an emotionally rich journey, which is always really enticing for a Director.”

There are shades of *Shirley Valentine*, but also there’s *Fargo*, there’s *Shallow Grave*, there’s a black macabre humour, that plays out, especially in the second block [episode 4 – 6], where things get darker and darker, yet the series is laced with humour. Kay will always rub drama and humour up against one another and actually, we’ve pushed that tonally, right through the drama, in terms of performance, in terms of production design, so it is emotionally authentic, but yet, there is a slightly heightened edge. At times, there are scenes that feel a bit Jacques Tati but these rub up against an utterly gritty working-class dramatic environment as well. It’s a bit tonally different for Kay I think and that’s what excited me.

The characters go on a real journey, from episode one to episode six, with lots of plot and narrative surprises, but also a lot of emotional character development, that’s very nuanced and textured. There were lots of conversations with Kay in the early days of production just to really make sure that I’m totally on the same page with her about the characters because all her work is about character at the forefront. Yes, there is action, there are set pieces, there are house fires, there are dramatic events but, at the forefront, it’s all about serving the characters.”

Notes from Josh Dynevor, Producer

Sum up *Girlfriends* as a project for us...

“I always assumed when you say the word ***Girlfriends*** it would be about three people, before they have partners, i.e. they tend to be young, they tend to be in their late teens, early 20s, mid 30s, that tends to be the stock thing. Our girlfriends are not, these are mature women, all who have been kicked, knocked back and this is them fighting back which is fantastic to see.

They have all got problems in their lives, they come together, they rekindle their friendship, and they find through rekindling their friendship that they can confront these problems and get to a better place. It's their friendship that educates them, supports them and pushes them through.”