

AN EVENING WITHOUT KATE BUSH – UK TOUR FREE Q & A INTERVIEW

**What attracted you to Kate Bush as the possible subject for the show?
Were you a fan of her music before you created it?**

I've always loved Kate Bush's music and as a child of the 70's and 80's remember that first appearance on Top Of The Pops and all those amazing videos and songs which followed. Plus my brother fancied her a bit so her music was always floating through the house.

Kate Bush is a true icon: her music is unique, spanning nearly five decades, winning countless awards and selling millions of records, but the woman herself is something of an enigma.

Not performing live for over 30 years between her 1979 Tour Of Life and 2014 Before The Dawn, she spoke to us through her music.

In her physical absence, her fans created their own community: 'The Fish People'. They are at the heart of 'An Evening Without Kate Bush'.

We wanted to celebrate them through her music. That was the starting point of making the show.

Do you try and impersonate her in the show?

I never set out to impersonate her (I mean who could?) But it's amazing how many people tell me I sound like her though. A few fans thought I was miming at the start of the show!

How hard is it to sing in her unique vocal range?

It's definitely a vocally athletic workout! She sang them all live back in 1979 apart from 'Hammer Horror' (which we do in the two-act touring version of 'An Evening Without Kate Bush') so there's no excuse not to do the same. What you hear on the albums is months of intricate layering of harmonies and different instruments, so it's a more raw sound on stage of course.

I perform all the songs in their original keys and I think part of it is that she chose such specific phrasing and wrote such intricate melodies, hearing them instantly hot wires you back to the original.

With the movement I spent one day working with the amazing Tom Jackson Greaves, who is a director and choreographer. We watched a lot of her videos and noted down some of her choices. We explored those in our session; again, never trying to 'be' her, more tap into her spirit. Quite by accident, the nicknames we came up with for her moves (The Pulse, The Champagne Whipcrack, for example) found their way into the show. That's often how it happens with devised work - you become a sponge for every impulse and they jostle around your head during the making process until they either find a home or float off into the ether.

With the costumes too, my brilliant co-creator, Russell Lucas and I tried to evoke her, not copy her. We rub shoulders with themes (she uses a lot of nature and bird imagery in her work, hence the feathery headdress). The cleaner's outfit for 'This Woman's Work' is as much a nod to the cleaner's story we mention at the start of the show, as it is to her TV special appearance where Kate sang 'Army Dreamers' dressed as a cleaner or archetypal vintage housewife. That's one for the super-fans.

We did of course watch a LOT of footage, interviews, videos, everything we could find, to get to know her journey as an artist and also how the world around her changed. Her early interviews are so uncomfortable. She is often being asked truly banal or overtly sexualised questions. She is so polite and accommodating but it's great to see her later on her career take the reins and shut down lines of enquiry which show the interviewers have no idea what they are talking about. I also read the brilliant biography by Graeme Thomson called 'Under the Ivy'. It's the best music biography I have ever read and really lets you into her creative process.

Do you have to know her music and be a super-fan to enjoy AN EVENING WITHOUT KATE BUSH?

Absolutely not. It's one of the biggest compliments the show has received. Of course if you are a super-fan you'll hear lots of the songs you know and love plus some little hidden gems for those in-the-know. But none of that is at the expense of the audience members who have perhaps come along with a fan friend or just out of curiosity. We elevate and celebrate everyone and when someone tells me

after the show that they didn't know her work but are going home to listen to her music, then I am thrilled.

The show is partly interactive, how does that work?

The show is as interactive as you want it to be. I've been working in cabaret for over 20 years and my primary aim is that the audience have a good time. It's great to be challenged and surprised, but I want them to feel safe. That's really important to me.

The invitation to participate starts small, a wave of a hand or a howl in the dark. I'm always really careful with any audience interaction to choose people who want to participate. There's no enforced joining in - just gentle encouragement. I find that people self-select pretty easily. If someone doesn't want to play, their body language communicates that. So far I've never chosen anyone who didn't want to be asked and I've had people come up to me after the show and fling their arms around me with gratitude.

There's a lovely moment in the show where I invite a couple to dance together. During our Edinburgh Fringe run we had a mum and her son come and dance which reduced the whole room to tears and in London, a couple who'd recently broken up but wanted to stay friends, joined us on stage: they sought me out afterwards to say thank you. Our audiences have been brilliant - there is always so much love in the room.

Russell Lucas and I were inspired by Kate Bush flashmobs and events like 'The Most Wuthering Heights Day Ever' which have sprung up around the world, from Sydney, Australia to Folkestone, Kent. We've taken fans' stories and paid tribute to them on stage. You'll enjoy the songs you know and love but put through the lens of the fans' story.

You say after the opening song, 'And Dream of Sheep', "She's not here but you are!" How would you feel if the real Kate Bush was in the audience... and would you want to know in advance?

We would absolutely LOVE it if she came to see the show - although she'd have to wear a disguise as I think the audience would capsize if they knew she was in. When we were making it we always knew we wanted it to be something she

would approve of - so it's been created with love, respect and a hefty dose of joyful eccentricity!

Friends of hers have seen it and loved it and in Chichester I had the great privilege of meeting one of her original 'Tour Of Life' backing singers, Glenys Groves. She was so enthusiastic about the piece and is still in touch with Kate so you never know... we might yet have an evening WITH Kate Bush one of these days!

The show focuses on her fans worldwide – what are the most bizarre you came across?

Kate Bush's fans are really friendly and open! People have shared so many incredible and personal stories with me: there's the man who proposed to his wife to 'The Kick Inside', the young lad who found the courage to come out to his parents after listening to 'Wow' and the couple who chose 'Don't Give Up' as the first dance at their wedding. We've been touring a two-act version of this show around the country (with even more costume changes!) so I'm able to weave some of these new stories into the next night's performance. We've also heard from fans who went to see every single 'Tour Of Life' date, have tattoos of her lyrics on their arms and folk who come to the show dressed as her.

Does the show change each night depending on the audience's reactions?

No two shows are the same and I love that. It keeps it fresh and alive. I ask the audience what their favourite songs are or what's brought them to the theatre and then weave their stories into the evening's entertainment.

We call it a 'chaotic cabaret cult' and it really is! It's playful, anarchic, touching, hot and sweaty and full of music and laughter.

Imagine if Kate Bush made a tribute show about her fans and you come close to capturing the spirit of 'An Evening Without Kate Bush'.

Even if you just howl with the hounds or wave a hand in the air, you are still part of the experience.

I love hearing people's stories and I always come out into the foyer afterwards to chat to anyone who wants to stay and talk. The audience really make this show.

How difficult was it to decide which her songs to include?

It was a massive challenge as there are many across such a huge time span. Inevitably there are lots from her early albums. 'The Kick Inside' and 'Hounds Of Love' are a lot of people's favourites and first experience of her work. When we were making the show we ran a poll on social media to see what songs people wouldn't forgive us for not including! But we still had to leave some out. I adore 'Deeper Understanding' and 'Under The Ivy', for example. But if we put them all in it would be longer than 'The Ring Cycle!'

We take well known songs like 'This Woman's Work' and 'Cloudbusting' and give them a twist. So if you come to see 'An Evening Without Kate Bush' you might find yourself suddenly singing backing vocals or slow dancing with your partner at the school disco. If you speak Russian, you might enjoy joining in with my version of 'Babooshka!' The longer touring version allows us to include some surprises like her cover of Sexual Healing and a little slice of Pi.

Do you have a favourite moment in the show?

I love the moment, usually about half way through 'Don't Give Up', when the couple dancing on stage have realised they basically get to hug for six minutes and after some expected clowning about, just start to relax and enjoy the opportunity to be close. The audience is often singing with me and it's a lovely moment of coming together. At the end of the song I thank them and guide them carefully to their seats and they often say a big thank you or lean in for a hug.

I guess my favourite parts are when something spontaneous or unexpected happens as a result of some audience interaction. They keep me on my toes and anything unique to that gathering of people reminds them and me that this night, this configuration of people will never happen again. It's special. I like theatre which is made with love and danger; that excites me.

What's your favourite costume in the show?

The feathered headdress I am wearing in the poster is very special. We found that in Denmark and it was the first piece of costume we bought. The whole show is made from scratch so I hand-made my Vileda super-mop costume and the Snowflake head-dress I wear at the top of act two (in the touring version) took me

about two solid days to stitch so I love to because it was such a triumph of experience over skill in the making!

Why do you think Kate Bush remains so adored and intriguing to so many people after all the decades?

Her fans have travelled with her and as she has evolved as an artist, she has become the soundtrack to their lives. That's my oven-ready hypothesis. I also think she influenced so many other artists that the whole music scene is steeped in her musical juices as it were. She was one of the first people to experiment with the Fairlight, she mastered complex sampling of vocals including the Trio Bulgarka from Hungary and if you read the list of pop royalty lining up to play a couple of bars on her albums everyone wants to work with her. She never shied away from writing about the largeness of life either, epic themes, the loneliness of love, the wonder of creation, the sensuality of being human. Her albums are somewhere you can climb inside and dream in. She's one of us and yet totally Other. She's a tea drinking mum and an Ivy Glad Goddess.

If you could ask her one thing, what would it be?

“Please would you come and see our show?”

I feel like she's said what she needs to say in her music. Perhaps I'd just ask her if she'd like a cup of tea and we'd see what happens next...