

# Let's Talk

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Issue 193

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# SALLY PHILLIPS

*"I expected tragedy and got comedy"*  
Sharing her own story in Norwich

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**Y**ou will recognise Sally Phillips as Tilly “Bear with . . .” in TV’s ‘Miranda’; from the Bridget Jones’ films as Bridget’s best friend Shazzer, and from almost 25 years’ of TV appearances in comedies like ‘Parents’, ‘Smack The Pony’ and ‘I’m Alan Partridge’, hit series such as ‘Death in Paradise’ and ‘Midsomer Murders’, and panel shows like ‘Taskmaster’. She also stars, alongside Sheridan Smith and Mark Addy, in the new film from Jo Brand, ‘The More You Ignore Me’.

You’ll know her voice too - especially if you listen to BBC Radio Four - as the title character of the long-running series ‘Clare in the Community’, and as a curator of ‘The Museum of Curiosity’.

But also you should really remember Sally Phillips for an extraordinarily powerful piece of TV, broadcast by the BBC in 2016, in which she explored the ethical issues around pregnancy screening for Down’s Syndrome. Sally presented the programme, called ‘A World Without Down’s Syndrome?’, with insight, passion and intelligence - it was, after all, a subject closest to her heart. She has three sons, one of whom - Olly, now a young teenager - has Down’s Syndrome.

Sally was told of Olly’s diagnosis when he was just a few days old; it was broken to her as sad, bad news, but as Sally says in the documentary: “I expected tragedy and got comedy”. Olly has brought joy, love and delight to his family, and in the programme Sally highlights some of the many positive aspects of having a child with Down’s Syndrome and how these are not often brought to the attention of women having the test through the national screening policy. In this country nine out of 10 women choose abortion if their baby is diagnosed with Down’s Syndrome (in Iceland it is 100%) and Sally questions the ethical implications of ‘screening out’ particular types of people in this way.

Her documentary had a great impact on Stash Kirkbride, artistic director of The Hostry Festival in Norwich, who invited Sally to take



Sally Phillips is at The Hostry Festival in Norwich on October 27.

## Funny lady with a serious message

Actress Sally Phillips is one of the stars of this year’s Hostry Festival in Norwich, with a thought-provoking personal story to share. **Angi Kennedy** reports.

the stage for an ‘In Conversation With . . .’ talk as one of the highlights of this year’s festival.

“I was totally moved by the programme,” says Stash. “I have been a fan of her for so many years, and loved her in the Bridget Jones films. She is an extraordinary actor

but is more than that - a writer, comedian and obviously a deep thinker.”

Sally’s appearance at the Hostry Festival is especially timely because at the core of this year’s line-up of talks, plays and music is the world premiere of Boy In

# HOSTRY FESTIVAL

## Packed schedule

The Hostry Festival runs from October 13 to 28 this year at The Hostry, Norwich Cathedral, with a busy programme of talks, debates, music and opera.

It is the festival's eighth year and it includes Paint Out Norwich, which pits 40 jury-selected artists against the weather and with the public watching as they each create an artwork in just a few hours in the open air (for details of the Paint Out art trail, sessions and exhibition, pick up a festival brochure or visit [www.paintoutnorwich.org](http://www.paintoutnorwich.org)).

Also part of the festival events is The Norfolk Arts Awards, in association with the Eastern Daily Press, which consists of 14 awards and 36 nominations to celebrate the county's arts, culture and creatives. Let's Talk's editor Angi Kennedy was awarded the Outstanding Contribution to the Arts Award at last year's ceremony. This year's gala event will be hosted by arts editor for ITV News, Nina Nannar and BBC Radio Norfolk's Nick Conrad.



Photo: Mark Ivan Benfield

Peter Barrow (centre) co-founder of the Hostry Festival, in rehearsals with members of the cast of *Boy In The Lighthouse*.



Photo: Mark Ivan Benfield

Rehearsals for *Boy In The Lighthouse* from Total Ensemble Theatre Company.




Stash Kirkbride, artistic director of The Hostry Festival.

The *Lighthouse* by Total Ensemble Theatre Company. The Norwich-based inclusive theatre company, founded by Rebecca Chapman, works with a diverse group of performers who vary in age, ability and experience.

"When I found out we were going to commission Total Ensemble for the first time for the central production with a brilliant new piece of 'movement theatre', I thought we simply must try to get Sally along to talk about her career and also her own life-changing experience of being the mother of Olly," says Stash.

"The creativity and inclusivity of the festival is building all the time, and alongside that we have people with such a depth of personality,

like Sally; the actress Hayley Mills who was with us last year, and Melvyn Bragg the year before that who adapted his play especially for us."

"With Sally we will be talking about her acting, so those who want to come to hear about her career in television, film and radio will not be short-changed, but I will also be asking her to talk about the documentary and the question at the kernel of that which is what kind of world to we want to live in and who do we want to live in it with." 

## Tickets please

Sally Phillips In Conversation with Hostry Festival director Stash Kirkbride is on Saturday, October 27, at 2pm at The Hostry, Norwich Cathedral. Tickets are £15 (£12 concessions). To book, call 01603 598676, visit the website [www.hostryfestival.org](http://www.hostryfestival.org) or call in to the Norwich Theatre Royal box office.