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SCREEN QUEEN 'COLLY' TIPPED TO WIN GOLDEN GLOBE

Why Olivia is the nation's Favourite

By
**KATE JACKSON and
GRANT ROLLINGS**

WHETHER it is TV or cinema, BBC or Netflix, Olivia Colman is everywhere.

And with award season getting into swing, the queen of the screen could be set for her greatest year yet.

The 44-year-old actress is tipped for Golden Globe success tomorrow night for her role as Queen Anne in new film *The Favourite* – and an Oscar could follow next month.

"Colly", as she is known to friends, will be back in royal gowns as Elizabeth II when series three of Netflix's *The Crown* returns this year.

But viewers can currently see her in the BBC's adaptation of *Les Misérables*, which follows on from her voice role in the Beeb's version of *Waterloo Down* over Christmas.

The *Radio Times*

recently named Olivia – who has also starred in Channel 4's *Flowers*, ITV's *Broadchurch* and BBC1's *The Night Manager* – as the most powerful person in British TV.

Acting legend Meryl Streep – who she starred alongside in 2011 film *The Iron Lady* – described her as "divinely gifted".

Yet just a decade ago, Olivia considered retraining as a nurse because the parts were drying up. Even now she fears the phone will stop ringing – and once worked as a cleaner in between roles.

But would an Oscar calm that self-doubt?

Mum-of-three Olivia says: "If I'm honest, I've always dreamed of holding an Oscar. But I'm trying to sort of keep everything in check, keep calm."

"This is silly. What are the chances? I don't want to get excited. I don't want to face that disappointment. I just want to be on an even keel."

"I'm a mum, a wife, I'm a mate. I'm other things. You can see how people get sort of swept into it and I want to stay sane."

She showed off her down-to-earth side at the Palm Springs Film Festival on Thursday night, after she was presented with the Desert Palm Achievement Award by her co-star in *The Favourite*, Emma Stone.

For the after-party she kicked off her heels and instead paired her velvet suit with scruffy trainers.

According to Hollywood insiders, she maintains this attitude at work, too. One source said: "She smokes

like a chimney when the cameras are off and she brings her kids to the set."

The publicity-shy actress is not one for the high life or glamorous parties, either.

While she has had Botox in the past, she says she finds it "embarrassing to try to look good" and enjoyed letting herself go for *The Favourite*, where the Queen is

supposed to be overweight.

Olivia grew up in Norfolk

and now lives in

a terraced house in Peckham, South London.

She describes herself as a "hermit, unglamorous and

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ordinary" and prefers a cup of tea at home to champagne receptions. Olivia's mum, Mary, was a district nurse, who drove around rural Norfolk in a Mini. During the school holidays, Olivia would go along for the ride, nestling down in a makeshift bed in the back seat during her mum's appointments. Influenced by her car-mad dad Keith, a chartered surveyor, she learned to drive at 12 in the surrounding fields and got a rally licence at 16. Privately-educated Olivia – whose real first name is Sarah – fell in love with acting at 16 during a school production of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Last year she returned to Gresham's School, North Norfolk, and unveiled a plaque in the common room, which includes the words: "Olivia Colman, Old Greshamian, who played Miss Jean Brodie at an impressionable age and never looked back."

Recalling her school days, Olivia says: "I was a fairly jolly teenager, but I struggled with body confidence. I had black clouds and still do."

"It would be nice to tell my younger self, 'You'll be OK. This will pass. And you will be loved. Don't make any rash decisions'."

After school, Olivia initially went to Cambridge University to study to become a primary teacher.

Although she left after a term, her time at the famous Footlights drama group there put her in touch with future *Peep Show* co-stars David

Mitchell and Robert Webb, as well as future husband Ed Sinclair.

She says: "I suddenly found all these people who were a bit weird and a bit shy, like me."

Olivia went on to study drama at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, graduating in 1999. But that was followed by four years of temp work and roles in adverts.

She appeared in the AA's "Bev, Kev" commercials, along with others for Danone Actimel yoghurt and The National Lottery. Olivia recalls: "My mum said, 'You'll probably give it a year'. And I said, 'No, I'll give it ten'."

She got her TV break in 2003 on Channel 4's *Peep Show*, with her old friends Mitchell and Webb.

Since then, almost everything Olivia touches has turned to TV gold – from oddball hospital comedy *Green Wing* to Bafta-winning satirical

series *Twenty Twelve*, about the planning of the London Olympics.

But there have been some down

moments along the way, too. She regards 2006 flick *Confetti*, in which she starred as a nudist alongside Robert Webb, as "the worst experience of my life" and claims she was lied to about how much flesh would be shown.

In 2009 she started to look up midwifery courses having been out of work for five months. But the lull did not last long. Olivia is just as

comfortable in hard-hitting dramas as in comedies, and it is her grittier roles that have put her on course to be "her generation's Judi Dench", as actor Charles Dance describes her.

The turning point was 2011 film *Tyrannosaur*, in which she played a battered wife.

She said: "I suppose *Tyrannosaur* was a bit of a watershed moment. Suddenly people were saying, 'Oh, she

can do that, too'." She capitalised with a Bafta-winning turn as DS Ellie Miller in *Broadchurch* alongside David Tennant and a Golden Globe for *The Night Manager* with Tom Hiddleston.

She had already been cast in *The Night Manager* when she found out she was pregnant with her third child, leading to a tricky conversation with director Susanne Bier.

Luckily, Susanne decided to make her character, MI6 boss Angela Burr, pregnant too.

Olivia explains: "She said, 'Oh, right' and didn't look that pleased. But then she said, 'You know, just go with it for a minute. Remember the film *Fargo* and Frances McDormand? The pregnancy added to the drama'."

Olivia's baby was born in August 2015, a sister for sons Finn, 12, and Hall, ten, but she has never revealed her name.

No doubt they will all be cheering her on this awards season – but don't be calling her a national treasure. Not for some time, anyway.

She says: "I feel a little bit like I'm not ready to have that nice title on my shoulders just yet."

"I know it comes from a warm and loving place but I wonder if it means I'm at the end of my career, and I feel like I'm only just getting going."

"Or at least I hope I am."

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EARLY DAYS...with cast of skit show Bruiser, including Mitchell and Webb



**UNIVERSITY
LOVE... with
husband Ed**



**OLD SCHOOL
... as Miss Jean
Brodie, aged 16**

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The Favourite

Quirky period drama saw Olivia pile on 3st to play Queen Anne – and be in with an Oscar shout. One scene sees Emma Stone run her hand up her legs, so Olivia put a damp sponge at the top for her to aim for.

Les Misérables

BBC1's current adaptation stars Olivia as Madame Thenardier. Co-star Adeel Akhtar says: "She's a kind, generous human, who loves a cup of tea and will have a gab even if you only have a few lines with her."

Confetti

Olivia almost sued over her role as a nudist in the 2006 mockumentary rom com after she was shown fully naked despite claims she had been assured she would not be.



Peep Show

Played David Mitchell's on-off love interest for nine series of the sitcom from 2003. David said: "She understands what makes something hilarious, yet ensures it doesn't become too much."

The Crown

The Netflix hit's new series, airing this year, saw Olivia struggle to keep her face emotion-free as her character Elizabeth II would. To help, she listened Radio 4's Shipping Forecast through an earpiece on set.

Broadchurch

Such was her success in the Bafta-winning series as DS Ellie Miller alongside two Doctor Who actors – David Tennant and Jodie Whittaker – Olivia says the roles dried up as producers assumed she would be too busy.

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Fleabag

The godmother in the BBC Three comedy is described as a “c***” on the show – and writer Phoebe Waller-Bridge chose Olivia for the role. Olivia had apparently previously told her: “I’d love to play a real bitch.”

Beautiful People

Olivia dyed her hair blonde and added extensions for this 2008 comedy where she played heavy-drinking barmaid Debbie Doonan. The BBC2 show, set in Nineties Reading, ran for two series and was acclaimed by critics.

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SHOE SHUFFLE
... swapping heels for trainers, *inset*, at the Palm Springs Film Festival on Thursday

