

Despite being one of our most feted actors, and with an IMDB page harking back to 1969, Dame Joanna Lumley has become, at the age of 78, somewhat typecast. "All I get offered now are these bitch mothers," she laughs, as Radio Times sits down with her on the set of *Amandaland*, the freshly-launched spinoff of cult comedy *Motherland*.

It was in 2021 that Lumley made her debut as Felicity, the glamorous, but quite possibly sociopathic mum to Lucy Punch's social-climbing Amanda. "She's kind of a bitch really," the actor says of the role she played twice in *Motherland* before being promoted to series regular for *Amandaland*. "Quite a lot of women who were once pretty, when they've got a very pretty daughter, they're jealous."

There isn't, we hardly need to say, much of Felicity in the real Joanna Lumley, though few actors do haughty, narcissistic matriarchs quite like her (another recent she-devil role was as the catty Judith Burkett in Netflix's 2024 thriller, *Fool Me Once*). But with Felicity being a front-line presence now, there are, in Lumley's words, "a few different notes" to the character: "She is friendlier towards people who she usually wouldn't be seen dead with," she says, "and has become more tolerant of Amanda's slightly offbeat neighbours. She's less biting about them."

Perhaps the only life detail Dame Joanna shares with Felicity is that they're both mothers to only children. In Lumley's case, it's son Jamie, born when she was just 21. "I was a young mother, and that's nice, because when they're teenagers, you don't hang out and party, but you can talk to them almost as equals," she explains. "But I do like a parent-child relationship. I don't really like being buddies with children, I think a parent is a parent."

*Amandaland*, of course, isn't just about the fraught dynamic between Amanda and her exacting mum, it's also about dealing with the singular stresses of teenage children, especially in the social media-obsessed world of 2025. It's something Lumley sees as an acute danger for Gen Z.

"When Jamie was young there were no mobile phones, so none of this unbelievable vanity," she says about the difference in parenting a teen in the early 80s as opposed to now. "We were spared all that dreadful rot, this terrible addiction which has spread to our teenagers and made them so unhappy."

Though Lumley admits she's often stereotyped as the stuck-up dowager ("I'm never going to be cast as a small Irish woman," she sighs), she's clearly relishing the role of Felicity, comparing it to the joy she felt when she landed the part of perma-sozzled fashionista Patsy in *Absolutely Fabulous*.

"These roles are gold dust," she enthuses. "Ab Fab was so rare – so many sitcoms come and go, but that one remains because it was brilliantly written and dreadfully funny. It was unexpected at the time, because nobody thought a comedy about high fashion would work." Of course, situation comedies look very different now compared to when *Absolutely Fabulous* first aired, with studio audience shows rarer than a sober Patsy. When Radio Times refers to *Amandaland* as a sitcom, we're politely corrected: "It's not really a sitcom," the actor insists. "It's light, but sitcoms expect laughs and laughs, and this doesn't."

But does she miss that old style of situation comedy, performing live to an appreciative crowd?

"I think comedy misses it," she says, but notes that that form of TV show is particularly challenging for actors. "The hardest thing is playing on five cameras to an audience, because you're a servant of the cameras," she explains. "They're going out to millions, whereas there are only 300 people in the audience. Your instinct is to play to the audience, and so you have to go half and half."

Lumley last played Patsy Stone in 2016, the year she turned 70. That series – and the movie – was always about growing old disgracefully and the actor believes that, though ageism is still rife in the film and TV industry, there's now a wider variety of roles for seniors.

"You go back to the days of Bette Davis or Vivien Leigh, you were finished by the time you were 40," she points out. "Now there are so many more character parts. Old women were always absolutely mad or vain, but men could be anything, they could have nuanced characters. I think that's changed."

Lucy Punch told us what she admires most about her co-star is her "wonderful energy and outlook" and it's true that Dame Joanna's workload would shame even the most industrious millennial. At the time of our chat in late September she's about to jet to Australia for a series of one-woman shows and, when she's finished there, is flying to Ireland to resume filming on Netflix's Wednesday series. And that is, she assures us, just the tip of the iceberg.

Though she's not far off her ninth decade, Dame Joanna Lumley is busier than she's ever been, and though she may grumble about typecasting, as TV shows *Amandaland*, *Wednesday* and *Fool Me Once* couldn't be more different. So with so much work being offered, how does she decide what to say yes to and what to turn down?

"It's all about, is the part good?" she tells us. "And is the part well-written and is the show well-written? You just can't survive bad writing."