

WHEN BBC1'S CULT parenting sitcom *Motherland* aired its final episode at the end of 2022, it felt like a definite full stop on the story of middle-class mums in well-to-do west London. No one, it seems, not even Lucy Punch, who played the infuriatingly ritzy Amanda, expected to be back. But, while filming in the middle of Arkansas in America, the actor received a call out of the blue. "They asked if I'd be interested in a series based around Amanda," 47-year-old London-born Punch recalls from her home in LA (which was, she says, mercifully untouched by the recent fires). "I mean, it was an instant yes!"

The pitch for the series was that Amanda has been forced to move from Chiswick to the less Amanda-y environs of south Harlesden (around Wormwood Scrubs prison, to be precise), and has to navigate a new life, where she isn't the alpha mum or success story that she was in W4. "Amanda was the obvious candidate," co-writer Holly Walsh says of all the spin-off/sequel options available to them. "To see somebody who thinks they've made it in life fall is a fun story to write. South Harlesden is only about five miles away from Chiswick, but for Amanda that's huge, as she's so postcode-obsessed."

Walsh adds that another part of the appeal of telling more stories in the "Motherverse", as she calls it, was to deal with the singular stresses of coping with teenage children, so the new series is set a few years later.

In real life, Punch's kids are just three and nine, so she still has those headaches to come. "Most of my friends have older children, and it seems like a minefield," she grimaces. "Almost every episode of *Amandaland* covers some sort of teenage situation: boys or drinking or whatever... But then, Amanda's sort of a teenager herself. Now that they've reached the teen years, it's a teenager parenting other teenagers."

Talking to *Radio Times* on location for episode four at an old people's home in Croydon, south London, Walsh explains it's here that Amanda, having followed her mother Felicity, discovers her long-absent father, played by Shaun Scott.

"She hasn't seen him for ages because he abandoned them," Dame Joanna Lumley, who plays Amanda's narcissistic mum, says in a break from filming. "But he's in a care home now and doesn't remember things, so Felicity goes to meet him out of pity."

A series regular in *Amandaland*, Lumley's character popped up in just two episodes of *Motherland* but she was a reliably scene-stealing presence, and someone whose casual cruelty to her own daughter made Amanda a much more sympathetic character.

Punch couldn't be happier she's now working with Lumley on a full-time basis – after all, the two of them go way back. Lumley was friends with one of



THE MOTHER OF ALL SITCOMS

Lucy Punch returns to play Amanda, the bitchy queen bee from *Motherland* in a sitcom spin-off – with Joanna Lumley as her even bitchier mum in tow

'Women who were once pretty are often jealous of their pretty daughters'

JOANNA LUMLEY



MOTHER AND CHILD REUNION
Lumley and Punch also played mum and daughter in *Ella Enchanted* (2004), here with Anne Hathaway

have Philippa and Joanna and it's this whole new gang whose voices are distinct, specific and funny, and it clicked very quickly. I missed everyone else, but it just felt right."

The new gang consists of Amanda's neighbour Mal, played by Samuel Anderson (*Trollied* and *Doctor Who*), hipster chef Della (*Derry Girls*' Siobhán McSweeney) and her interior designer partner Fi (*Line of Duty*'s Rochenda Sandall).

Though there's no word yet on whether *Amandaland* will be going to a second series, Punch believes there's much more scope, certainly to delve into the new side characters. "The show isn't just about Amanda, it's taking us into another world with a lot of other brilliant and interesting characters," she says excitedly. "If it goes to another series, we'll hopefully go more into their lives."

FOR THE MOMENT, though, Punch is relishing her most famous character taking centre stage. Having played Amanda for ten years now, she's loving discovering new sides to her and says that, in an increasingly cynical age, it's Amanda's imperishable positivity that people respond to. "She's very hopeful and quite energised, if somewhat delusional, about getting her life back," Punch says. "She's certainly not passive. She was kind of the villain in *Motherland* but the writers have found a way to make her much more relatable and warmer."

In fact, Punch, who moved to Los Angeles nearly 20 years ago, adds that she's encountered lots of Amandas since taking on the role and having kids, so she won't be short of insight should she get the opportunity to revisit her again in a second series.

"In British schools there's maybe one Amanda, but here..." she leans in and whispers, "...there are loads! At my son's school there are über-moms and super-moms, I mean a lot of Amandas. I guess her sensibility is quite American, and she would aspire to all of that. I think she'd be in absolute heaven if she came out here!"

STEVE O'BRIEN

Punch's best friends' mums while she was growing up, and the two actors have actually played mother and daughter before, co-starring 21 years ago in the Anne Hathaway movie *Ella Enchanted*.

"She's been sprinkled through my life," Punch says, though she's keen to note that the real Lumley is about as far from waspish Felicity as she is from the social-climbing Amanda. "She's an absolute dream, and just as charming and lovely as you hope she will be. I adore her."

For her part, Lumley was thrilled to be asked back. "There are a few

different notes this series, but I wouldn't say she's wildly varied. Like a lot of those people, they're quite fixed in their ways – you're not going to suddenly get her shopping at Poundland.

"Felicity's just kind of a bitch, really," she laughs, adding that the root of her character's bitterness of Amanda is down to envy. "Quite a lot of women who were once pretty, when they've got a very pretty daughter, are jealous."

Punch hopes that this new series will help explain quite why Amanda is what she is: "You get to know more of where her bitchiness has come from. She's basically been bullied all her life by her mother and people who have been

bullied in their life often end up being the bully."

Aside from Amanda and Felicity, there's one more face from *Motherland* carried over – Anne, played by Philippa Dunne, who has been Amanda-free for a year when she bumps into her former hero-figure at the school gates in south Harlesden and finds herself once more under Amanda's spell.

Despite her presence, "It felt very odd the first few days," Punch admits about making the series without most of her old *Motherland* buddies Anna Maxwell Martin, Diane Morgan, Paul Ready and Tanya Moodie. "But my character was always a bit removed from them all. I still



PARENT SHOW
Motherland starred, from left, Philippa Dunne, Diane Morgan, Anna Maxwell Martin, Paul Ready and Lucy Punch