



"MUSIC IS THE CLOSEST THING HUMANS HAVE TO MAGIC"

AS JASON DONOVAN PREPARES TO SET OFF ON HIS LATEST TOUR, HE SITS DOWN WITH *CLASSIC POP* TO DISCUSS NOSTALGIA, PWL, PETER HOOK, ART, HOT LEMON DRINKS AND DUETTING WITH HIS 26-YEAR-OLD DAD...

STEVE O'BRIEN

On the day that *Classic Pop* speaks to Jason Donovan, press-wise it almost feels like it's 1989 again. 'Jason Donovan Lands Cameo In ITV Soap *Emmerdale*' screams the headline in the *Evening Standard*, with the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, *The Mirror* and *Metro* similarly whipped into a frenzy about his latest project. That the media are so fired up about what amounts to a single-episode cameo as himself, is testament to the fact that Donovan is, three years shy of 60, still a big deal.

It's 5 November 2025, a week later than we were originally due to chat with the singer, but a work injury and subsequent physio had derailed that appointment. We're here now, though, and thankfully he's (mostly) mended.

"I'm always having physio," Donovan laughs, his voice raspier than in his twentysomething youth, but still looking miraculously unchanged since his teen idol days. "I have a recurring neck problem, which I think is show-related. But at 57, there's always some fucking issue!"

It is, unfathomably, approaching 40 years since he debuted as the mulleted Scott Robinson in the Aussie soap opera *Neighbours* and 36 since he released his first album, the No.1-charting Stock Aitken Waterman-helmed *Ten Good Reasons...* Joining the PWL roster shortly after his co-star – and then-squeeze – Kylie Minogue, Jason was, for a brief time in the late 80s, one of our biggest and most lusted-after pop stars. Numerous members of the show's cast made the move into music over the years, including Stefan Dennis

JASON DONOVAN

After the success of his
Doin' Fine 25 live tour,
Jason Donovan returns to
the stage in February with
Doin' Fine Encore

© Steve Schofield



Jason Donovan, pictured during the recording of the Band Aid II single *Do They Know It's Christmas* with Kylie and Matt and Luke Goss of Bros



and Natalie Imbruglia, but Jason and Kylie were the first to really graduate to pop's premier league.

"I always wanted to be a pop star," he tells us about his boyhood ambitions. "As an actor you're on set 12 hours a day, you're part of a team, but you're not as in control of your own ship as much as you are as a pop star. Actors can't act without other actors, but singers can pick up a guitar and sing. But I don't really know the difference between the two, because if you look at what happened to me I slid from one to the other and one complemented the other. Probably that's the reason why the success was so large – I didn't go out and make a cool record; I went out and made great pop records."

It's refreshing to hear Jason's lack of embarrassment about his pop past. Though he was, in his words, "an alternative boy" in the 80s, more into New Order, Siouxsie And The Banshees and The Cure than someone who was bopping to Kajagoogoo, you won't hear him rubbish Stock Aitken Waterman – far from it. "I loved coming out of PWL," he says proudly. "*I'd Rather Jack, I Just Don't Have The Heart, This Time I Know It's For Real* and Kylie's *Hand On Your Heart*, I mean they're all bangers."

Does he ever wish he'd been offered some of those tracks? After all, SAW's songs were rarely written with specific

artists in mind. In fact, Jason only later discovered that PWL stablemate Rick Astley had been offered *Nothing Can Divide Us*, a 1988 No.5 UK hit single for Donovan. "Rick was able to turn it down," Jason shrugs. "After *Never Gonna Give You Up*, he could say, 'This is what I want, this is what I don't want.'"

But wasn't Jason in a similarly powerful position? After all, *Too Many Broken Hearts* topped the charts in multiple countries. "One of the problems that I had is I wasn't really a dance act and I wasn't a strong enough singer at that point to take a leap into the unknown," he reasons. "I didn't have enough knowledge about music to be able to dictate what I wanted was better

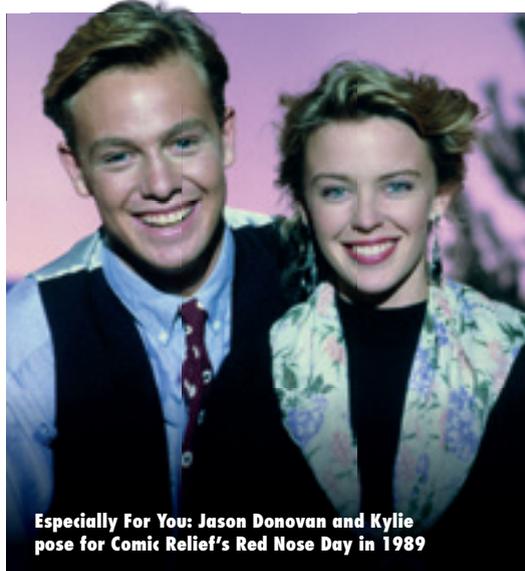
than what SAW were going to deliver. How could I argue with producers that were on the top of their game in one of the biggest markets in the world?"

THE MAGIC TOUCH

It's a sign of Donovan's pride in his pop past that he's never shied away from it. Unlike Take That, he never felt the need to cover *Smells Like Teen Spirit* to show off his punk-rock side, or pivot like Kylie did during the 90s on her Britpop-leaning *Impossible Princess* album. After all, his most recent tour, and the one he's reviving in 2026, is titled *Doin' Fine*, after a song on his second LP, *Between The Lines*.

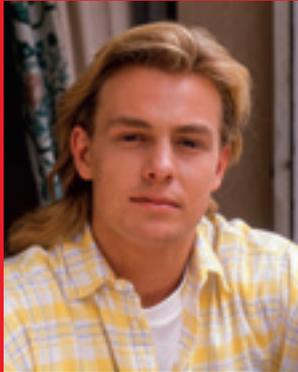
"Music is, I think, the closest thing humans have to magic," he suggests. "I was listening to Radio 2 the other day, and Van Halen's *Jump* [a No.7 UK hit in 1984] came on. I was like – fuck – I remember what I was wearing and even its smell. But the popular cultural cycle has now shifted from the 80s to the 90s, which is probably Oasis-driven. We're in a cycle in our lives where those records that we used to keep are put away for a while and then, at a certain age, we bring them out again."

Whether it's Oasis, Wham!, ELO or The Hollies, the thirst for nostalgia and the 45s that we fell for in our youth is unquenchable. And as the years march on, music once dismissed as throwaway



Especially For You: Jason Donovan and Kylie pose for Comic Relief's Red Nose Day in 1989

SCREEN SWITCH



Jason was one of a number of small screen stars in the 80s to try their hand at crossing over into pop, but as he explains, it wasn't a new concept for record labels to pinch pretty boy actors from TV and launch them into the hit parade. "I mean, there was David Cassidy before us, and even The Beatles and Elvis did films," he points out.

And he has a theory about how being in a successful soap aided his pop career, in that it helped form a narrative for fans to follow: "If you look at the format of *The X Factor*, it's about creating backstories for these characters that come on and sing your favourite songs, it's a similar scenario. You've got to fall in love with the people, and then the song becomes more powerful.

"In *Neighbours*, I had an audience of millions who loved me as Scott Robinson, so when I walk through the door as Jason Donovan singing *Too Many Broken Hearts*, they're like, 'Fucking great, man! This is it!' Scott and Charlene walking through the door as Jason and Kylie singing a duet about love with *Especially For You* – I mean oh my god!

"So when members of One Direction talk about their families and what it means to grow up in Bradford or Doncaster before they burst through the door and sing *Moments*, it's the same thing."

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proves its worth by simply surviving. As Jason said to CP the last time we spoke to him: "Time sorts out any issues about 'credibility'" and it's true – you can place *Too Many Broken Hearts* or *Especially For You* on a playlist sandwiched between *Blue Monday* and *Friday I'm In Love* and they melt seamlessly into the mix. "My example of that," he states, "is doing the Rewind Festival and seeing Peter Hook. He plays *Love Will Tear Us Apart* and the crowd go nuts. Then, two acts later, there I am singing *Any Dream Will Do* and the crowd are going nuts again, if not more. They fucking love it – it transcends cool and time does arrest any sense of that, because nostalgia doesn't discriminate."

STAGING A COMEBACK

Any Dream Will Do is an important song for Donovan as it was his first hit not to be masterminded by SAW. His second album with the trio had underperformed, compared to his first (though it made No.2 in the UK, it cratered at No.77 in Australia) and Jason left PWL.

A few years of soul-searching followed before he was offered the lead role in Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* musical. Despite initially thinking that its key number was "the cheesiest song ever", Jason ended up with a UK No.1 in 1991 – his first since 1989's *Sealed With A Kiss*. "It was a pretty easy transition," he says of his shift into musical theatre in the 90s. "I'll never forget the first rehearsals, we all were going to sing through the score and I hadn't done my homework, so that was a bit of a lightbulb moment. But I value theatre and musicals – the craft, the athleticism, eight shows a week. I've done it now for 30 years, so I'm a bit of an elder statesman.

"Even walking on as Joseph, as I did all those years back, I had currency. I wasn't 100 per cent perfect. A lot of the performers were very polished, but I wasn't –

that was part of my charm, that was part of why it worked."

Joseph came along at the right time for Jason. The dawn of the 90s found him adrift, both professionally and personally. He'd turned down the lead in the film *The Adventures Of Priscilla,*

Queen Of The Desert (a part that eventually became a star-making role for his *Neighbours* pal Guy Pearce) and passed on *Muriel's Wedding*, choosing instead to "go out and have a bloody good time", while half-formed thoughts of recording an album of his own songs came to nothing.

"My bubble burst," he remembers of those post-Hit Factory and *Neighbours* years. "I tried writing songs because I thought I could grab back that pop career but I realised that wasn't gonna pay the bills as much as taking on roles like *Rocky Horror*, *Camelot* or *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. So I guess I reverted to what I was best at, which was an actor who can sing."

Many actors steer well clear of the stage, let alone musical theatre, but it's clear that Jason loves the medium, and is pragmatic enough to know what he can bring to it. From the title role in *Joseph* to Parson Nathaniel in *Jeff Wayne's Musical Version Of The War Of The Worlds* to the "sweet transvestite" Frank-N-Furter in *The Rocky Horror Show*, this has pretty much been his jam for the past 30-plus years.

"Musical theatre has always had a bit of a stigma attached to it," he says, "and I can see why it attracts a certain style of performer. But what I enjoy is the emotion that I can give. I can be strong and vulnerable; I think I have those qualities. And I have an audience that puts bums on seats, and let's be honest, producers love bums on seats!"

And bums on seats – and indeed standing in front of them – is what Jason experienced during his Doin' Fine 25 tour, a series of gigs which found him playing not only his numerous PWL hits, but many of the songs he's been essaying as a star of the stage, including favourites from *Joseph*, *Priscilla* and *The Rocky Horror Show*. ▶



Jason Donovan's Doin' Fine 25 tour saw him play to 40,000 fans across the UK and Ireland

© Suzi Slight

A highlight of Jason Donovan's new tour is sure to be a duet that he performs alongside a recording by his father Terence

© Steve Schofield



rendition of *Pure Imagination*, from *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory* – “it’s such a beautiful song,” he beams.

IN FINE FORM

With the Doin’ Fine Encore tour in the diary and also another run of *Rocky Horror* (a show he first played in 1998), 2026 is shaping up to be a pleasantly hectic year. So how does a typical day go for Jason Donovan?

“If I’m working, I’m up at 8am and always start my day with hot lemon and water,” he says. “I try to take it easy in the mornings. I’ll definitely do a bit of swimming or steaming, try and eat a significant breakfast, and then just do bits and pieces before I go into work in the evenings. I don’t drink when I’m performing. I don’t cope very well with alcohol, and it’s easier to not drink if I’m working.”

That all sounds like a very different life to 30 years ago.

“I was experimenting with a lot of things in my life at that point,” he laughs. “I had also worked my bum off for about eight years. I’d been through an incredible washing machine of success and I just needed to be what I became, which was dark, introverted and selfish.”

But not now. The Jason Donovan *Classic Pop* meets today is far from that angry young man, someone who seems happy, content and at peace with his past. He’s also married, a father of three and is one of the titans of musical theatre. And not only that, but he’s about to cameo in *Emmerdale*.

Doin’ fine? He’s doing brilliantly, thank you very much. ■

● **Tickets are now on sale for Doin’ Fine Encore. Visit jasondonovan.com for details.**

Next up for Donovan is Doin’ Fine Encore, which will take him to many of the venues he didn’t manage to get to in 2025. “I haven’t even thought about the setlist,” he laughs about the tour that kicks off in Tunbridge Wells at the end of February, except he does know what he’s opening with.

“We’ve welded *Can’t Buy Me Love* by The Beatles into *I’m Doin’ Fine*, which is one of my songs and a bit of a Beatles tribute by SAW. So we’ve managed to do what they were thinking and combine the two.”

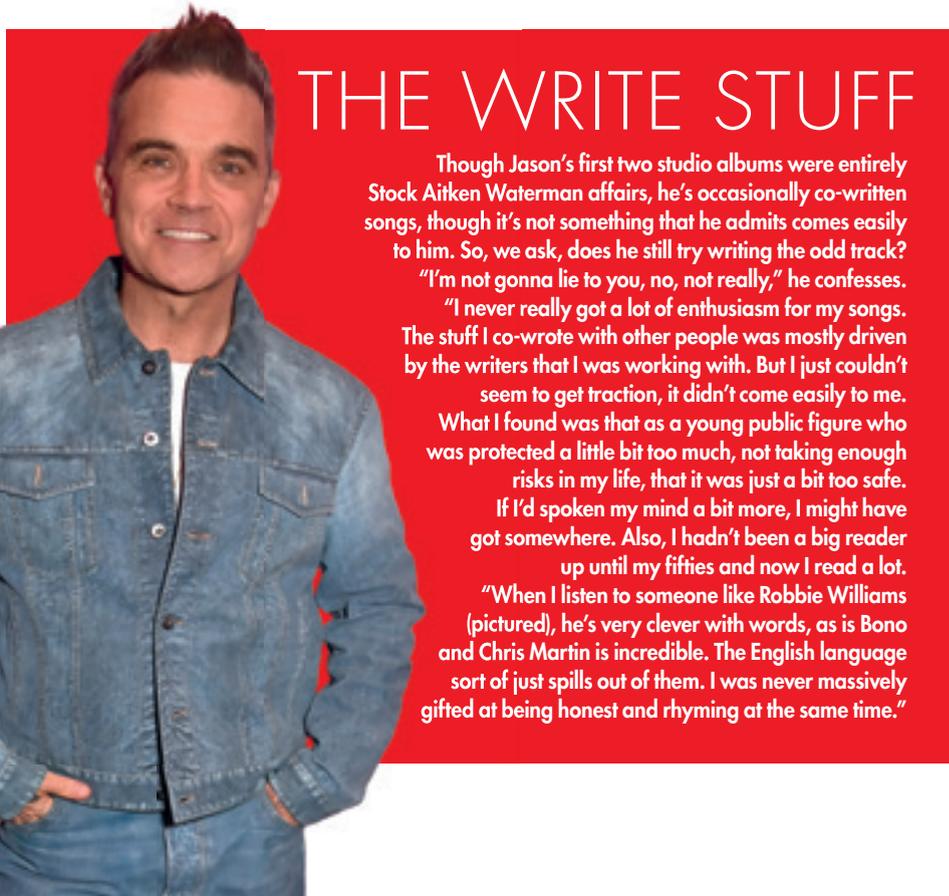
FATHER & SON

Apart from the obvious crowd-pleasers, a highlight will be a duet Jason performs with his father. Yes, his dad is still going strong, having recently celebrated his 90th birthday, but it won’t be the nonagenarian Terence Donovan that Jason will be singing with, but a recording from when Donovan Sr was younger than his son is now.

“My dad did a performance on Australian TV when he was 26,” Jason says excitedly, “singing *I’ve Got You Under My Skin*. Someone sent it to me and I just thought, ‘That’s a fucking great idea to somehow include in one of my shows!’ So we managed to pull that together.”

He also teases that he’s planning on a cover of Roachford’s hit *Cuddly Toy*, a song he admits he wasn’t sure was within his range, “but it worked well”, and also a

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THE WRITE STUFF

Though Jason’s first two studio albums were entirely Stock Aitken Waterman affairs, he’s occasionally co-written songs, though it’s not something that he admits comes easily to him. So, we ask, does he still try writing the odd track?

“I’m not gonna lie to you, no, not really,” he confesses.

“I never really got a lot of enthusiasm for my songs. The stuff I co-wrote with other people was mostly driven by the writers that I was working with. But I just couldn’t seem to get traction, it didn’t come easily to me.

What I found was that as a young public figure who was protected a little bit too much, not taking enough risks in my life, that it was just a bit too safe.

If I’d spoken my mind a bit more, I might have got somewhere. Also, I hadn’t been a big reader up until my fifties and now I read a lot.

“When I listen to someone like Robbie Williams (pictured), he’s very clever with words, as is Bono and Chris Martin is incredible. The English language sort of just spills out of them. I was never massively gifted at being honest and rhyming at the same time.”