



Charlotte Ritchie shot to fame shortly after leaving university in Fresh Meat with Jack Whitehall

# A sense HUMOUR

*Actor Charlotte Ritchie talks *Call the Midwife*, comedy and casting ahead of her new role in *The Philanthropist**

Words MADELEINE HOWELL

**T**he fresh-faced, charismatic Charlotte Ritchie was first introduced to acting at James Allen's Girl's School in Dulwich (more of which later) and is perhaps best known for her role as Oregon in the sitcom *Fresh Meat* alongside Putney-born stand-up star Jack Whitehall.

The show documents the trials and tribulations of six freshers as they navigate the pitfalls of university life (in Oregon's case, a particularly awkward love triangle ensues after she embarks on an affair with her tutor). Ritchie joined the cast straight from the University of Bristol, where she studied English and Drama. 'The filming experience itself was like an intense reimagining of university,' she says. 'We used to go out for dinner every night after filming and then go out on the weekend, so we kind of became the group we were portraying.' More recently, the 27-year-old (who, back during her own teenage years, could often be found in the since

sadly closed Brixton haunts Plan B and The Living Bar) has been melting hearts as Nurse Barbara Gilbert in the BBC's hit show *Call the Midwife*.

Ritchie herself is fond of the show, and has enjoyed playing a character that she sees as empathetic and kind. '[*Call the Midwife*] is light-hearted, until it's absolutely awful,' she says. 'It's got this very cruel way of luring you in with nice sandwiches with the crusts off, and then suddenly it portrays a mother losing her child. Life can be like that,' she reflects. 'One minute you're sitting down and having a nice cup of tea and then the next minute something terrible has happened.'

Her storyline in the Christmas special episode was a particular highlight of Nurse Barbara's storyline for Ritchie, in which she both accompanies her colleagues on a mission to South Africa and accepts a proposal from her boyfriend. 'She's a sweet person and she doesn't get things right all the time, but she's not a pushover either,' Ritchie >

She is currently starring in *The Philanthropist* at The Trafalgar with Simon Bird and Lily Cole



Ritchie has enjoyed playing the sweet-natured Nurse Barbara in *Call the Midwife*



explains. ‘In South Africa, she calls the group out on the fact that it’s a holiday for them. I like how she points out the problematic nature of people arriving and doing what they can for a bit, and then leaving. It was a big turning point for her.’

Next up, Ritchie is hitting the stage at Trafalgar Studios in a brand new production of hit comedy *The Philanthropist*, by Christopher Hamilton and set in the 1970s.

The casting is impressive, and also includes Simon Bird of *The Inbetweeners* in his stage debut, Tom Rosenthal, model Lily Cole and Matt Berry of *The IT Crowd*.

Running from now until the end of July, it’s an inversion of Molière’s classic comedy *The Misanthrope* and is billed as a ‘bourgeois comedy’. The humour, Ritchie tells me, is very intellectual, and quite dry. In her work, Ritchie has dabbled in different kinds of comedy, but when I ask her what her own sense of humour is like, she admits that it isn’t quite so sophisticated. ‘I couldn’t say,’ she laughs. ‘I’ve worked with so many talented writers, so I’m ashamed!’

One such talented writer is the celebrated Caitlin Moran. Last year, Ritchie also appeared as Ruby in Channel 4’s *Raised by Wolves*, a modern day re-imagining of Moran’s own childhood.

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‘I love Caitlin Moran’s book, *How to Be a Woman*,’ she enthuses. ‘I hadn’t actually seen *Raised by Wolves* until I got the audition, and then I binge-watched it and loved it. I don’t think enough people saw it and it was a great show. The whole cast are brilliant – it’s jam-packed full of

humour and the lines are so witty. I was really chuffed to be part of it.’

Her range so far is impressive, and Ritchie credits James Allen’s Girl’s School (affectionately known as

JAGS) with nurturing her talent and creativity from an early age. ‘It started with a lunchtime club when I was about seven. I performed a sketch of Toad of Toad Hall, the scene where he’s dressed up as a washerwoman. I remember really loving it and having so much fun – but I never imagined you could do it as a job,’

she looks back. ‘It’s the collaborative aspect of it that’s so much fun. JAGS was amazing for group projects and our GCSE and A-level drama classes were just incredible. The teachers were so exceptional and really encouraged us to work together and devise things.

‘I think that ability to work with people so closely has carried on, and that’s what I enjoy most about each new job – meeting a new group of people and getting to work with them.’ With such an impressive roster of talented young faces treading the boards with her in *The Philanthropist*, we can’t wait to see what fresh drama is in store at The Trafalgar...

**Charlotte Ritchie is currently starring in Christopher Hampton’s *The Philanthropist*, directed by Simon Callow at The Trafalgar Studios until 22 July. Call 0844 871 7632 or visit [atgtickets.com/the-philanthropist](http://atgtickets.com/the-philanthropist) to book tickets**



The actor discovered her talent at James Allen's Girls' School in Dulwich