

MEDIA ROYALTY

*As London prepares to host events marking
HM The Queen's 90th birthday, Jennie
Bond offers a unique insight into the
monarchy today*

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Me?' Jennie Bond feigns mock surprise, 'Oh, I still dabble.' To say that she 'dabbles' in journalism barely does her justice. It's a remark that is a perfect example of her oh-so British knack of self-deprecation. From an infamous appearance on *I'm a Celebrity...* to serious broadcasting as the BBC's Royal correspondent, Bond boasts one of the most renowned and varied careers in the British media to date.

Since abdicating from her role at the BBC in 2003, after a 14-year reign, she's never strayed entirely from Kensington Palace. 'I'll see the Duke of Edinburgh and he'll say something like "who are you?"' she roars, as if the Duke could possibly forget the distinctive blonde journalist who claimed to have forgotten her knickers as she climbed up Clarence House to report on the Queen Mother's 100th birthday celebrations back in 2000.

Now, to coincide with HM The Queen's 90th birthday, she has turned her hand to a new medium: narration. Alongside audio footage from historical figures, such as Churchill, the Queen herself and actors such as Tim Pigott-Smith, Bond will tell the 'warts and all' story of the House of Windsor as scripted by renowned social historian Ruth Cowen.

Bond has been a familiar face at Kensington Palace for many years



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‘It’s not a sycophantic portrayal of the Royal Family,’ she hastens to add. ‘It’s very honest. It goes into all the gory details, including the divorces and the affairs. But in the end, I think it reflects quite correctly that despite its weaknesses this monarchy is strong and thriving, has come through the bad times and is more popular than ever. The Queen has been a wonderful force of stability and continuity, and is part of the fabric of our nation.’

Having had the privilege of a front-row seat for much of Queen Elizabeth’s reign, Bond predicts a strong future for the constitution, though her own feelings about the institution are mixed. ‘I could take it or leave it,’ she confides. ‘I’m a political animal and part of me thinks it would be great to have a changing head of state every four years, but part of me thinks we could end up with Donald Trump. As it is, it works, it’s apolitical and I’m sure a referendum would vote to keep it.’

‘Kate and William have done brilliantly,’ she continues. ‘Thank goodness they learnt from the Diana years that you can’t just parachute people into the Royal Family without allowing them to adjust to the goldfish bowl. When I reported, you didn’t know if you were coming or going. I’d get the most extraordinary calls coming in: “Jennie, can you get in the office – it’s Fergie,

she’s been found having her toes sucked by her financial adviser... oh, and by the way, she was topless.” The next thing you know it would be Harry. It was just interminable scandal, gossip really. I think it’s calmed down quite a lot now and members of the family seem to have rediscovered their dignity.’

At what points in history has the House of Windsor most acutely feared for its survival? ‘Well, the audio book goes right back to the abdication, which is the biggest crisis it has ever faced. Of course, Elizabeth’s reign has seen crises to rival it. There was a point when we were talking about whether the monarchy would survive the death of Princess Diana, and the palace’s response to it.’ And what of the Queen’s personal

life? Elizabeth II is notoriously distant, as Bond admits: ‘I wish it was in her nature to be a little more tactile and approachable – but then again, perhaps that’s the secret of her success.’

‘One of the most significant events in her life is undoubtedly the fact that she clapped eyes on that Adonis of a prince, Philip. You can’t overstate how important he’s been in her life. They’ve been married since 1947. The audio does delve into the fact that they’ve had rocky periods, periods of separation, and times where he’s found it hard to conform to the restrictions put on him, like putting his naval career to one side. It hasn’t been all smoothness, but I think it’s the most important and enduring relationship of her whole life.’

So, what next for the illustrious media queen? ‘I never know what’s around the corner,’ she tells me. ‘It could be a game show, it could be a reality show, it could be anything. I’ll certainly be in London for the celebrations in June, and I may be broadcasting in some form or another.’ As she continues to ‘dabble’, we’re sure the irrepressible Jennie Bond will have some more surprises up her sleeve as the Queen celebrates her birthday this year.

Elizabeth II: Life of a Monarch, a new audio-biography narrated by Jennie Bond, is available free with a 30-day trial at audible.co.uk/HRH