



KATHERINE PARKINSON

The *IT Crowd* and *Humans* star on growing up in Kingston, her latest West End venture and why she feels at home on the stage and as a mother. By Oonagh Turner

This month, Katherine Parkinson will be taking to the West End for an 11-week run with Laura Wade's acclaimed comedic drama, *Home I'm Darling*. The play tells of vintage enthusiast, Judy, whose rose-tinted view of the past transcends into her everyday life. Judy quits her day job and throws herself into the role of playing the quintessential 1950s housewife, all the while stuck within the confines of the 21st century.

Like Judy, Katherine confesses to seeing the past through a rose-tinted lens, but for the ex-Tiffin Girls' School student, it's memories of growing up in Kingston that invoke nostalgia.

KINGSTON MEMORIES

"I feel very attached to the area," she tells me. "I grew up down the road in Tolworth but if there is a place that conjures up that nostalgia for me, it's definitely Kingston. I spent so much time walking around the Bentall Centre with my mum and I worked in TGI Fridays in my spare time – that was my childhood," she says.

"Weirdly, I've even ended up marrying a man who went to Grey Court School just down the road! Really, it's weird that we're not living there now, but I expect it's good for me to live in a different part of London," she says.

SCHOOL DAYS AT TIFFIN

Katherine also has fond memories of her school days at Tiffin and while it was university where she really threw herself into the drama scene, the prestigious grammar school provided a springboard for her to experiment with the performing arts. "I was one of four Pucks when I was at Tiffin and I realised I felt comfortable on stage. I used to do things like assemblies and I definitely felt endorsed at the school," she says. "When I got to university I was like a dog off a leash because it was so full of opportunity. I did a stupid number of plays and it's amazing I actually ever got any work done," she remembers.

Arguably best-known for playing the voice of normality as Jen in hit sitcom, *The IT Crowd*, starring Chris O'Dowd and Richard Ayoade, Katherine admits to feeling most comfortable on stage: "You can really get lost in a part whereas it's much harder with filming. I really



like the camaraderie of the cast too. I meet up every year with two casts from past stage plays and it's really fun. It's where I started out and so far my best experiences have been on the stage," she says.

VINTAGE VIBES

Katherine's glowing nostalgia for her childhood is full of sentimentality, something that she captures brilliantly onstage and why playwright Laura Wade cast the actress for the play's first run. "Actually, when Laura was writing this she was writing it with me in mind. I have always been into vintage clothes since I was a teenager and so I suddenly questioned whether this constrained character had echoes of me, but actually I think that was flattering myself because Laura just explained: 'Oh yes, you've always had some strange and interesting pieces,'" she laughs.

Katherine relishes playing the role of Judy, and expresses her delight at getting to wear the fabulous onstage costumes. "I definitely appreciate the dresses and the detail of the sewing. I have always been into different decades and have a love of history from an aesthetics point of view. I even get very excited by certain types of Tupperware so I am certainly excited by the set."

Where Katherine and her character differ is the underlying grittiness of Judy's married life that gives this satirical comedy real bite. It seems that behind all the gingham and

flouncy 1950s dresses, all is not as it may initially seem in Judy's pop-coloured picture perfect domestic life. "It's so nearly a tragedy but she is brought back from the brink," Katherine hints.

Playwright Laura Wade is also known for the satirical production *Posh* that transferred to the big screen under the name *The Riot Club*. Katherine confirms that audiences can expect a similar undercurrent of politicism from *Home I'm Darling*, with the theme of nostalgia for the past particularly pertinent given today's political climate.


METAPHOR FOR MARRIAGE

"Laura is a writer I have worked with a lot since I began acting. We workshopped this play for a while on and off so the play was actually sort of conceived pre-Brexit, but then once Brexit happened, the play suddenly had a new relevance," she says. "It does feel like it's tapping into that thing about people harking after a time that never actually existed."

Aside from the political narrative, Katherine thinks of the production as a metaphor for modern marriage and society. "It's relevant politically and socially," she explains. "It's about a person retreating from modern life and I think that lots of people feel overwhelmed with the changes that have happened recently with the technological revolution. It's made us a kind of frantic and busy population and I think a lot of people will empathise with a desire to shut your doors and remove yourself in that way."

BALANCING MOTHERHOOD

With films in the pipeline for 2019, as well as upcoming BBC drama *Defending The Guilty*, how does Katherine shut her doors and remove herself from the chaos of her own busy life? "I'm speaking to her in the weeks running up to Christmas, and so she's gearing up for a festive holiday to Scandinavia with her family. Katherine is mother to a four and six-year-old, so it seems motherhood is her downtime from the bright lights of the stage."

"I love motherhood but I'm finding it relentless at the same time, just like lots of mums. But it's just the best." 

■ *Home, I'm Darling* is at the Duke of York's Theatre from 26 January for 11 weeks