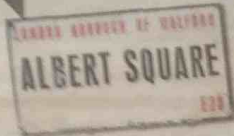


METRO 60 seconds



MICHELLE COLLINS, 52, played Cindy Beale in EastEnders and starred in rival soap Corrie. Now she's treading the boards in a new play, *The Glass Supper*

You're sounding a little throaty this morning – is there a lot of shouting in the play? [coughs] Sorry! It's early and we just had our first preview but yes, it's pretty full on, there's quite a bit of shouting. It's like I've gone three rounds with Virginia Woolf.

What's *The Glass Supper* about? I don't want to say too much about it – I want people to come and see it. But it's a play about two gay

couples and I'm Wendy, the friend of one of the couples, and things get complicated. Martyn Hesford, who wrote *Fantabulosa!* [the BBC4 Kenneth Williams biopic] is a really good writer and there's a lot of dark humour in it. Check out Martyn's *Brazen Hussies* with Julie Walters on YouTube. That's kind of the northern version of our play. It's hysterical.

What can you tell us about Wendy? She's

a big character. Think *Little Voice*, Abigail's Party. She's larger than life. She's totally caught up in the modern world, obsessed by celebrity, that Towie world, she loves her shopping. But she's also a leader. It's a great part for me, because I haven't done much comedy.

It's playing in a small studio space. How does that compare to a soap watched by millions? This is far more

terrifying. There's a hundred people around you, watching you. It's like they're in your living room. Once you've got that out of your head, it's not so bad. On the set of *Corrie*, if you were involved in a big scene, there could be a hundred people on set. That thought is helping me.

You've been rehearsing a fight scene. Does it get feisty on stage?

Yes, we've had a fight coordinator working with us. You have to learn to fight without hurting yourself. I'm pretty fit but this was tough. I fractured my shoulder a few years ago, so when a play is on for a month, you have to be able to make sure you last the run.

Was taking this play an antidote to the way your *Coronation Street* run ended?

That's absolutely the word for it. Manchester was never going to be my home. My daughter was down here [in London] and I knew I wouldn't stay more than three years. She's doing her A-levels, so I wanted to do work that meant I was at home. And doing this play is a wake-up call. Doing TV, you can get very lazy and spoiled. Doing this is physically draining. I've lived like a monk the past two months – I haven't had energy for anything else.

Is it hard to be taken seriously if you're known as a soap actress?

I've never been available before – I've gone for the money jobs because I'm a parent with a daughter to support. But yes, there's definitely a bit of prejudice if you're a 'soap actress'. People don't take you as seriously.

Has that affected you? You never really know. I've heard things like 'we don't want a Michelle Collins type', but they don't even know me. It's about making people believe you can do something different. It's a paradox. If they actually see you for a part, they say: 'You're not really like Cindy Beale, are you?' You're really quite bright.

Has the Lucy Beale murder memories – you're her mother, aren't you? I think I am. There were so many kids knocking around. I lose track. She was a twin, wasn't she? I met my supposed other daughter once, that was weird. Didn't look a bit like me – she obviously took after the dad!



“ I still get it from workmen calling out 'Oi, Cindy!' What do you do? Say 'Hello boys!'? ”

Even though Cindy Beale, your character, is dead, we're talking soap dead. So can you officially rule yourself out from the list of Lucy Beale suspects? Yes, I can confirm that I am not the killer of Lucy Beale. At least as far as I know.

Do people still recognise you as Cindy? Oh, all the time. I haven't been in *EastEnders* for 17 years but I still get it from workmen calling out [does convincing gruff builder voice] 'Oi, Cindy!'. What do you do? Say 'Hello boys!'. I can't stand that. I just wanna die. No, that's not quite true – you just have to learn to embrace it.

Is that frustrating when you've done different things – *Two Thousand Acres Of Sky* showed your softer side? It was a bit before its time. We were always up against *Midsomer Murders* on a Friday night, so it was a struggle, but we built an audience. We did three series then Paul Kaye wanted to leave to do other things and I didn't want to carry on without him. I was a bit cavalier. I suppose, I just assumed another great BBC project would come along. With hindsight, I wish I'd carried on with it, because I was really proud of that show. **Keith Watson**

The Glass Supper is at London's Hampstead Theatre until July 26. hampsteadtheatre.com

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