

Bella



Words: Deborah France, Lyn Corbett, Elaine Hayward, Amy Ireland, Tracy Todd.
Photos: BBC, Corneil, Cori Proctor, etc

Bella chats to former pop star Hannah, 34, about fake blood, living with Sheridan Smith and the love of her life...

What's it like joining Casualty?
I used to watch Casualty every Saturday night as a kid, so it's really exciting. The cast are incredible and very funny, and it's filmed in Cardiff, which is so relaxed. I'll never get bored with walking down the corridor on set and seeing actors who've come from the make-up department and look like they have their face falling off with a gruesome injury.

What's your character Mercedes Christie like?
She's troubled. She's had problems with drugs and has just split up with her boyfriend, who she has a 12-year-old son with. She's in a lot of debt and does a runner from her house when debt collectors call. She ends up in a fight with a bloke who gets taken to hospital, and then is able to blackmail his mate who hid and didn't help his friend. I'm in the show for about eight episodes, and you see she's not all bad...

You lived with Cilla actress Sheridan Smith when you were 16. How was that?
It was so much fun, I was so shy, but I joined the National Youth Music Theatre and was surrounded by confident people so it rubbed off on me. There were six of us – including Sheridan – cast in *Bugsy Malone* so we got a tiny flat in South London together. We were earning £250 a week and felt rich!

Are you still in touch now?
Yes, we all laugh about that time. It was a shambles. We lived off pasta and those cans of sausages and beans. The fridge was full of beer and alcopops.

You hit the big time with S Club 7 when you were 18. What was it like getting back together last year?
I was always on the fence about reuniting. I didn't want an embarrassing comeback where the tickets didn't sell, so it was a relief that the fans were happy to have us back. We all got on so much better than before. Hannah briefly rekindled her romance with ex-boyfriend and bandmate Paul Cattermole, but

they've since split. We all knew there was an end date this time, the schedule wasn't so relentless, and people's egos and priorities had changed over the years. It was a lovely time.

Have you ever nearly given up showbiz?
There have been so many moments! I was either being offered the wrong jobs, or you'd leave an audition and feel a bit sh*t, or just want a regular job with normal hours. I always knew deep down I'd stick at it, but a couple of years after *Primeval* [an ITV show which ran from 2007 to 2011] I nearly had enough. I've thrown dramatic, epic scenes at home!

How do you chill out?
I've just joined a spa in a posh hotel, so I spend a lot of time in a steam room. I share a dog, Stanley, with my ex, Andrew [Lee-Potts, who Hannah was engaged to but split from in 2013]. Stanley's the love of my life. I'm pretty clean living – heading to Yo! Sushi for dinner is the most rock and roll I've done this month!
● *Casualty*, Saturdays, BBC1