

Hilarious multi-award winning impressionist Bobby Davro is as much a part of the festive season as turkey and tinsel. Tim Saunders talks to him about pantos, camping and everything in between

BOBBY

Dazzler

The longstanding star of pantomime stars as Idle Jack in *Dick Whittington* in Southampton this Christmas. “As a family comedian, it is so wonderful seeing everyone from kids through to grandparents being entertained by you,” he says. *Dick Whittington* tells the story of Richard Whittington, a wealthy merchant and later Lord Mayor of London (between 1354 and 1423). The legend describes his rise from poverty-stricken childhood with the fortune he made through the sale of his cat to a rat-infested country.

A regular visitor to the South Coast, Bobby recalled when he was 16 spending a week literally chasing women in Sussex. “I went to stay on a holiday camp with my friends, getting drunk and generally getting up to no good. I got so sunburnt that I

couldn't put my shoes on, I couldn't even smile!”

Well-known on the panto circuit Bobby has played Buttons in *Cinderella*, Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* and appeared in *Jack and the Beanstalk* as well as *Robin Hood*. He has twice starred as Wishee Washee in *Aladdin*, once with Melinda Messenger. Pantomimes are no longer reserved for Christmas; Bobby has helped turn them into Easter extravaganzas too. Last Easter he starred in *Beauty and the Beast* with CBBC actress Dani Harmer, known for her portrayal of Tracy Beaker.

In 1981 Bobby made his television debut, but his

“I made an early impression at school when I was caught mimicking my headmaster, I was given six of the best

major breakthrough came with an appearance in *Live at Her Majesty's* two years later. This led to his own Saturday night series *Bobby Davro on the Box*, *Bobby's Sketch Pad* and *TV Weekly*, which topped the ratings for six consecutive years. At the height of his fame his weekly Saturday

night television shows attracted 10m viewers.

In 1991 Bobby moved to the BBC and made three series, *Public Enemy Number One*, *Rock With Laughter* and *Run the Risk*. He returned to our screens in May 1997 as host of *Winner Takes All* for 65 programmes. Versatility seems to be the key to Bobby's longevity, as a high profile personality he stated, “I want to go on TV to perform.” He continued, “I'm not conceited, but I am good at what I do. It's just the vehicles are not there anymore. Too much comedy is filthy these days.” He recalled how an impression he made as a child resulted



in a severe reprimand. "I made an early impression at school, when I was caught mimicking my headmaster - a Harold Wilson sound-a-like - I was given six of the best."

After leaving school, Bobby worked as a trainee manager in a large

department store, where he was soon trying out more impressions and honing his talents as John Inman and Mrs Slocombe. His next job was in his father's retail store, Davro Trading, named after sons David (the oldest and a golfer) and younger son Robert (Bobby). Bobby

"In 1981 Bobby made his television debut but his breakthrough came with *Live at Her Majesty's* two years later

later left the shop to pursue a full-time career in show business.

Bobby has even bravely appeared in *Dancing on Ice* with actress Molly Moenkhoff as well as other reality shows including *Celebrity Big Brother* and *Come Dine with Me*. From August 2007 to November 2008



As Vinnie Monks in *Eastenders*

he played wide-boy Vinnie Monks, a love interest for Shirley Carter in *Eastenders*. But theatre continues to be a draw for Bobby's comic talents. In 2015 he starred in the comedy *Not a Game for Boys* where he played a London taxi driver.

His personal life has made the pages of the

tabloids. For a decade he was married to former Page 3 model Trudi Jameson, from Sutton Coldfield, before divorcing in 2003. The couple have three children Brittany, Tierney and Marnie. He has battled depression but his friend the hypnotist Paul McKenna



Bobby with model Sam Fox in 1985



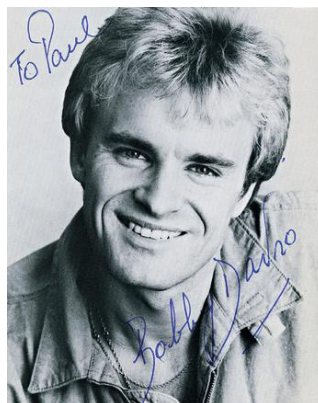
Camping with co-stars Michelle Collins, Cheryl Baker, Joe Swash and Stephen Bailey

has helped him tackle it by tapping acupressure points with his fingers. Bobby appeared on *In Therapy* where he spoke to therapist Mandy Saligari about divorce, family issues and struggling with alcohol. “The measure of success is happiness and peace of mind,” he says.

His father, Bill Nankeville, was a runner; a British national mile and 1500m champion, world-record holder who represented Great Britain in two Olympic Games. Bobby even followed his father in a similar vein, in 2003 he was one of the contestants in the reality TV show *The Games*, in which 10 celebrities

competed against each other in Olympic style events.

He is very involved in charity fundraising, including for Kids ‘n’ Cancer, Care After Combat and Variety, and on December 10 in London, Bobby appears alongside Jim Davidson and Jethro in *Legends* to raise funds for Care After Combat. Bobby also helped launch a new charity bingo game to raise funds for Variety. The funds raised from the new charity game boost the pledge made by The Bingo Association to raise £1m for Variety by the end of 2018. These funds are used to provide support to even more children through Sunshine Coaches, powered



and sports wheelchairs, specialist and sensory equipment as well as funding a number of memorable days and outings for disabled and disadvantaged children across the UK. Bobby said: “As a long-standing supporter of Variety, the children’s charity, I am delighted to help launch a new fundraising initiative that aims to raise £250,000 for Variety. I know what a difference these funds will make to the lives of children and young people throughout the UK.”

Born in Ashford, Surrey on September 13, 1959, Bobby likes the music of

Gilbert O’Sullivan. “I have played your new album constantly over the past few weeks,” he tweeted. “I believe it to be one of your finest to date. Full of wonderful songs that are written and produced in a style that reminds me of your early songs. First class and its success is everything you deserve.”

Bobby continues to keep a busy schedule, as well as television appearances he is in demand on cruise ships and relaxes by playing golf. Bobby has just filmed *Celebrities Go Camping* which will be aired in the New Year. Bobby is accompanied by four other famous faces: Michelle Collins, Cheryl Baker, Joe Swash and Stephen Bailey who pack up their celebrity lifestyles to go camping on the Jurassic coast. In five episodes, they all get up close and personal with the great outdoors, exploring campsites, from basic fields with compost loos to glorious glamping. A bit like Bobby – variety is the spice of life! ●

twitter.com/BobbyDavro1

