



# HE'S BEHIND YOU...

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW BY KAREN SHAW  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAZ ALAM

I love a good pantomime. 'Oh no, you don't!' I hear you all cry. 'Oh yes, I do!' And was therefore delighted to be invited to The Muni in Colne recently to discover the magic behind one of our country's oldest traditions. This year's panto is going to be a feast for the eyes with incredible dancers, amazing special effects and even a real flying carpet! It promises to be Colne's most extravagant and most magical pantomime ever! *X Factor's*

'Same Difference' Sean Smith as Aladdin, the rather gorgeous Kelsey-Beth Crossley, (former *Emmerdale* actress) as Princess Jasmine and last, but certainly not least, Bruce Jones, who many of you will recognise as Les Battersby from his time on *Coronation Street*.

Bruce will be playing the baddie Abanazar and despite performing in many a panto, he's rather anxious about opening this one. I wondered how treading the boards compared with performing on TV. ●●●



"I'm opening it, I've never opened a panto before. You can't stop and start. If you make a mistake you've got to cover it, you've got to get yourself out of it," he smiles.

Although confident with acting, he's relieved that he won't be singing or dancing on his own, and by the sounds of it, I too, am relieved.

Although many of us know Bruce as the irate and often irrational taxi driver in *Corrie*, he's certainly no stranger to the stage and screen. His first break came in 1993 when he was cast as the lead role of Bob Williams in the feature film 'Raining Stones' directed by Ken Loach, for which he received the European Actors Award. Other credits include: *Band of Gold*, *The Full Monty* - A part that he received the Stage Actors Guild Award for, the Shane Meadows film *Twenty-Four Seven* with the iconic actor Bob Hoskins. It was in 1997 that Bruce joined the cast of the ITV soap *Coronation Street*, playing the legendary role of Les Battersby, a firm favourite with the public for his outspoken opinions and incredible storylines. However, by 2007 Bruce decided to hang up his grubby body warmer and tossed away his tatty rings in pursuit of new opportunities.

"After 10 ½ years I began thinking that I'd never get out of *Corrie*. I knew I wanted to do something else, something different, but they wouldn't let me. I was asked to do a play, but I wasn't allowed. I think one of the questions they asked me in the office is, 'are you getting fed up?' 'I am, I really am', I answered.

It was great at the time, I had a beautiful house, cars and plenty of holidays abroad, but you can't go anywhere, wherever you go there's always someone trying to put you down. The newspapers write whatever they want about you. When I left *Corrie*, I felt free.

Despite leaving over a decade ago, he's still often referred to as Les. "Les' character will never go," he says, "I made Les the way the people wanted to see him. I made him to last. If I thought the lines were something Les wouldn't say, I'd have my own suggestions, ask the bosses and writers and they'd say, 'let him do it, that was the beauty of Les.'"

Bruce certainly established Les



Bruce and the cast of Aladdin

Battersby's character in the hearts of the nation, love him or hate him, we could all relate to him, so much so, that to this day some folk still insist on calling him Les.

"I sometimes say, my name's not Les, it's Bruce. Especially just someone shouting it across the room, it really gets on my nerves. I just ignore it. My name's not Les!"

He's had many trades including being a fireman but acting has and will continue to be his true passion. It was Sir William Shakespeare (along with his school's drama teacher) who enticed him into the acting arena which in turn led to a string of impressive roles.

"I'm one of the most wanted actors now," he grins. I've just signed up to 24 horror films and I'm up for a big lead role in a big film. It never stops!"

It's difficult to believe that it wasn't so long ago that he contemplated taking his own life.

"I remember years ago sitting in my house thinking, 'I could just put that gas fire on and go to sleep. And it would be over.' I don't know why or what stopped me doing it?"

Thankfully, Bruce managed to turn his depression into success when he and a friend wrote and performed

*Talk* - a one man play.

"It's all about depression and it starts with me sitting in a chair wearing pyjamas and a dressing gown. The same chair I always sit in, just staring out at the audience, not moving. Completely quiet and still. "As soon as I get a reaction I go into the play, where I mention big names like Winston Churchill, he called his depression his black dog. The purpose of the play was to highlight the issues surrounding depression," he continues, "believe it or not, from day one even Jesus Christ was a depressive. He was depressed with the world, depressed with the people.

"One guy in the audience got up on the first night and left the theatre. He hadn't even got to the interval, he just stormed out. His wife brought him back the following night. He was taking drugs, drinking, in fact he was doing anything he could to get rid of his depression. This time he managed to watch it all the way through, and the very same evening he went straight into rehab. His wife came up, hugged me and said, 'thank you. It took me years to get him there.' He was in a terrible way.

"Due to the play, I went to the assembly in Cardiff and gave a talk to

people from different rehab units. I spoke about depression. I had it bad."

The 'black dog' has stalked him most of his adult life, hardly surprising, when you consider that Bruce discovered The Yorkshire Ripper's first ever victim. The roots of his long-term depression are firmly rooted in the allotment in Chorlton, Manchester, where he found the mutilated and disembowelled body of Jean Jordan back in October 1977.

"He'd really took his frustration out on Jean, and that day he was there."

Jean had been brutally murdered on the 1st October 1977, and her body hidden in bushes. Peter Sutcliffe had returned fearing he had left evidence behind, when he couldn't find it, he had continued to take his frustration out on her corpse and had attempted to behead her.

"I'd gone over her five times with a wheelbarrow. He must have seen me uncover her. The police locked me up in a cell for 10 hours, I wasn't able to even contact anyone, nobody knew where I was or what had happened.

"I saw him in the bushes, he was standing just a few feet away. I remember his black hair, a black beard and the blackest of eyes. At the time I didn't take any notice of him and then six months later I was at work and suddenly the realisation of who he was hit me!

"At the time I just glanced at him, I was in shock and too busy looking at Jean. I believe one person did commit suicide after finding a body, they just couldn't live with it."

It's plain to see that Bruce is still haunted by that day. Growing up in Keighley I remember my parents allowing me to only play out on the back street where I'd be safe. All us kids grew up under Peter Sutcliffe's shadow, I remember a young neighbour of mine, John Hamble chasing us around lampposts yelling, 'watch out, watch out the Ripper's about!'. We had no concept, no real grasp of the truly brutal horror of his deeds until we grew older. Sitting there listening to Bruce sharing his experience is heart breaking, you can see the pain in his eyes and 42 years on he admits how he can 'still see her.'

"I've just done a documentary for

Netflix on the Ripper, he continues, "when I went, I had to look at all the pictures again, big pictures. I didn't want to see them ever again.

"I got in trouble off *Coronation Street* for this, because I'd been on the street for three years and then the *Daily Mirror* ran a front-page headline: 'Bruce Jones has Dark Secret.'" I found the worst Yorkshire Ripper body that he killed."

After unearthing Jean, his life was never to be the same again and he turned to alcohol to numb the pain.

## "I REMEMBER HIS BLACK HAIR, A BLACK BEARD AND THE BLACKEST OF EYES"

"I didn't go out a lot, I started to drink - I never drank, but I started to," he shrugs.

But luckily Bruce was dragged out of the pit of despair by his second wife, Sandra. Married for 35 years, the pair have had their ups and downs, but it's plain to see that the two are very much in love, despite them living in different countries.

"I live in Wales and Sandra is in Stoke. I love Wales, I could never leave. Sandra's up every weekend and

then I stay with her." The couple obviously have a lot in common, Sandra loves to go to the cinema, however Bruce is no fan of Meatloaf - because he won't do that!

"I work in the thing. I know how it all works. I watch films at home more than anything else. We'll be watching a film and she'll say, 'That's good isn't it?' and I say, 'Nah, do you know how they do that?'"

As our chat draws to a close, there's one burning question I have for him...

If the genie of the lamp could grant him three wishes, what would they be?

"I'd wish for my life back, to get completely back to normal and two, I'd wish all my kids and grandkids were okay, and three, happiness on the world," he smiles.

And you know what, it's lovely to see him smile. The past few years have been tough for Bruce, but despite the challenges he's faced, in true northern style, he's fighting back. 🍻

**Be sure not to miss out and book your tickets now... Aladdin runs from the Friday 3rd January until Sunday 19th January. To book your tickets go to [themuni.co.uk](http://themuni.co.uk) or call 01282 661234.**



He's behind you!