

Summer of love

What's in the water in Ambridge? As romance blossoms all across *The Archers*, RT heads to Dorsetshire to catch up with Pip and Stella, Mia and Brad and Tracy and Jazzer to find out what's making this everyday story of country folk so hot

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PHOTOGRAPHED EXCLUSIVELY FOR RADIO TIMES BY
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PIP & STELLA

Pip Archer, played by Daisy Badger (33), works on the family farm, Brookfield. She is no longer with Toby Fairbrother, the father of her child, Rosie. Stella Pryor, played by Lucy Speed (47), is the manager of Home Farm.

What has brought Stella and Pip together?

LUCY On an everyday level, it's because they're both career farmers. Their shared commitment is important. Their timings fit. **DAISY** They find farming funny and each other so entertaining. It's exciting to meet someone who's into something as much as you are.

How would you describe Stella?

LUCY She's quite calm – not overly emotional. She's not to be messed with workwise. As a female in a male-driven environment, she's put romance on the back burner.

Pip is at a different stage in her life, isn't she?

DAISY Pip was on the cusp of embracing her own independence. Now that Toby's moved on, it feels like the start of a new life.

Does a same-sex relationship appear to be a natural progression for both characters?

DAISY Absolutely. It seems obvious and normal, the stuff that's been happening between Pip and Stella. Nobody is trying too hard with it. **LUCY** Yes. Stella is grown-up enough to say to herself, "Look, don't overthink it and just go with it." But also, I think she's had same-sex relationships in the past. As a female, you reach a certain stage in life where you go, "Everything can change."

It's the first lesbian relationship in *The Archers*. Is that an exciting thing to be part of?

LUCY It is for me! **DAISY** It should have happened sooner! Well, maybe not *should* have... **LUCY** I have an 11-year-old daughter. And what I've noticed is that young people are in this lovely space where they're allowed to choose and be free, and learn about their sexuality. That's something I really embrace. What I've enjoyed about this storyline is that it hasn't been a big coming out. **DAISY** To me the question of Pip's sexuality is more a matter of, "Well, we'll figure that bit out

later." That's really nice. It's just about the connection between her and Stella.

Lucy, you were in *EastEnders* on and off for a decade. How does *The Archers* compare?

LUCY *The Archers* is obviously different, but what's the same is the sense of family in the cast, where the comedy is brilliant, the support is brilliant, and you get to know each other's lives. But on radio it's totally anonymous, no pressure. Nobody goes, "Oh, she looks rough this morning." It's a real playground for actors. **DAISY** It's brilliant. It's the first time I've really looked forward to going into the studio.

'What I've enjoyed about this storyline is that it hasn't been a big coming out'

LUCY SPEED





MIA & BRAD

Mia Grundy, played by Molly Pipe (25), and Brad Horrobin, played by Taylor Uttley (23), are both 17. Mia came to Ambridge in 2007 via her mother Nic Hanson's relationship with Will Grundy. Brad and his sister Chelsea are the children of Tracy (opposite).

What's the key to Mia and Brad's romance?

MOLLY Well, it's young love – that beautiful, instant young love, before you've experienced too much heartbreak.

TAYLOR They've both struggled to find people their own age that they get on with – Mia because of her eco-warrior shenanigans, and Brad due to his complete lack of social acumen.

Brad's very churned up, isn't he?

TAYLOR He's a maths person and struggles to understand that socialising is not a maths equation.

And what about Mia. Have you met young people like her?

MOLLY Well, the character reminds me of my younger self and all the embarrassing things I did

as a teenager. Just being really ideological and annoying, but I would never have the confidence to ask someone to kiss me, whereas Mia seems to have that. **TAYLOR** Yes, I remember at 12 or 13 thinking, "Oh God, what's the right thing to say? I have to be cool. So how are people cool? How do they do that?" But by the time I was 15, 16, I cared way less – less than Brad does.

'My teacher said if you can get into *The Archers*, you'll be sorted'

TAYLOR UTTLEY

Are your own lives a bit less complicated?

TAYLOR I can't imagine having a life as chaotic as Brad's. **MOLLY** Yes, mine is. However, I know what it's like to live in a really small community. I lived on one of the Scilly Isles, with a population of 120, so it was very like Ambridge. The rumour mill was constantly grinding. You could sneeze at one end

of the island and they'd know about it at the other.

TAYLOR I grew up in Dudley, but at weekends I'd visit my grandmother who lives on a farm in Lancashire. It was lovely until I got to be 15, 16, and realised I hadn't seen anyone my age for maybe four days.

Archers listeners tend to be older than you – how did the series come into your lives?

MOLLY I started with the first Helen and Rob storyline seven or eight years ago, when I would have been about 17 or 18. I was like, "Oh, that's interesting. And that's not just about cows!" It had some great storylines. Then you get really into it, and you start to think that they're real people in a way, and you're chatting to your mates about it. And it's weird now because obviously I'm in it, which is cool.

TAYLOR I've a memory of Chelsea having driving lessons. But when I was at drama school in Bristol, we did radio plays and a teacher there turned out to have taught half the cast. I remember her saying, if you can get into *The Archers*, you'll be sorted. And we were all like, "Oh, God, that'd be the dream!" And now it's happened.



'Ryan is very good at lightening the mood'

SUSIE RIDDELL

TRACY & JAZZER

Tracy Horrobin, played by Susie Riddell (45), is the mother of Chelsea and Brad and a member of the Bull's bar staff. Jazzer McCreary, played by Ryan Kelly (48), is a pigman at Berrow Farm.

Tell us about Tracy and Jazzer.

SUSIE Well, they're fab! **RYAN** Jazzer is a reformed bad boy. Early on, he was stealing cars. I love the idea of being a blind car thief! [The actor has been blind since birth.] He's a kind of laughter-maker. Tracy is the same.

SUSIE They bring comedy and light and joy to the show but, with their relationship, the characters have become more in-depth. Both of their lives have been full of quite intense challenges. That means they're up for anything.

Where does the chemistry lie?

SUSIE They both like to have fun and laugh. Having a shared sense of humour is a major boon to their relationship. They're both quite self-assured and not afraid. **RYAN** They're not bothered about what the neighbours think. **SUSIE** Yes, I always describe

Tracy as having no filter, and I think Jazzer's the same.

RYAN The only thing that has made those two mellow is age. And they've not mellowed that much! **SUSIE** I remember, in our first proper scenes, there was an argument that really kicked off the relationship. But when I saw the way Jazzer and Tracy butted up against each other, I thought, "Hmm, yes, I think they might get together one day."

In real life do you have other halves who make you laugh?

SUSIE Yes, definitely. That's the first thing I'd say about my

husband – he really makes me laugh. When I've been doing argument scenes with Ryan, it feels like I'm having a row with my real-life husband.

RYAN I make my wife mad when she doesn't want to laugh. But I can make her laugh usually. **SUSIE** That's true in the green room as well. Ryan is an extremely astute reader of mood. He's very good at lightening it.

Are Brad and Jazzer similar?

SUSIE No, but they're both very sweet. Jazzer has come into the family as an older brother/stepfather figure who doesn't

overstep the mark. It's lovely for a step-parent to be shown that way, rather than as a negative change.

So you rate their chances?

SUSIE Oh yes, definitely. It's been a bit up and down, but essentially they love each other to their core. Jazzer and Tracy's first attempt at a wedding went disastrously wrong.

What about attempt number two?

SUSIE It doesn't go smoothly, either! I don't think anything's going to go smoothly for them. And I love that. I'd hate it for it to go smoothly, because the comedy and the joy come from that.