

# Scene Extra: David Walliams on Cinderella: After Ever After



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LOOKING resplendent in velvet cloak, gold brocade, breeches and wig, David Walliams is contemplating marriage. To be specific, the marriage of Cinderella to Prince Charming, thrown together in a fairy-tale ending but left to struggle as young newlyweds in a hilarious what-happened-next script by Walliams and comedy writing trio the Dawson Bros.

The star-studded cast for Sky's Christmas Eve special *Cinderella: After Ever After* includes Walliams as the big-headed Prince Charming, acting legend Sir Tom Courtenay as The King and Sian Gibson (Car Share) as Cinders herself.



Slushy: Walliams loves *The Snowman*

'We wanted to start where the original story stops because it felt like there was more story to tell,' says Walliams when I find him filming on location in the fairy-tale-like old town of Sofia.

'The wicked stepmother hasn't got what she wants for her daughters and there's the question of what's going to happen in the marriage of Prince Charming and Cinderella.'

The answer, since the newlyweds have only known each other one day, is that it's all going disastrously. 'Charmo', as he calls himself, is more interested in dancing to MC Hammer with his fawning entourage, while Cinders quickly realises she's picked a dud and prefers the company of her best pal, Buttons, a talking mouse voiced by Kevin Bishop.

Walliams, who first met Gibson through their mutual friend Peter Kay, is a lot more appreciative of her talents than his princely alter ego.

'When Sian's name was suggested everyone got very excited because we knew she wouldn't just be a simpering Cinderella,' says Walliams. 'Sian's also got a warmth about her. You want her to do well.'



The king: Sir Tom Courtenay

The juiciest role is the villain of the piece, Madame Blackheart, which Celia Imrie (Malevolent, *Acorn Antiques*) embraces with relish. She eliminates her rivals with the help of a bespoke poison-filled ring, which for low comedy purposes induces victims to fart themselves to death. To Imrie's relief, the show's contemporary take on the fairy tale doesn't downgrade the villainy for the sake of political correctness.

'Please don't start making fairy tales soft with no such thing as a Wicked Stepmother,' pleads Imrie. 'Firstly, I'd be out of a job and also I think kids love it when bad things happen in stories.'



Prince Charming: David Walliams

There may be more *After Ever Afters* to follow *Cinderella*. Walliams and the Dawson Bros already have an idea for *Jack And The Beanstalk*. Curiously, despite the adaptations of his bestsellers such as *Ratburger*, *Gangsta Granny* and *Mr Stink* becoming Christmas TV favourites, the children's author has never been tempted to write a festive story.

'No, I haven't, because I worry about the sales on December 27th!' laughs Walliams. 'You must have a great run-up to Christmas if you call your book *Santa's Wish* or whatever but then there must be a very sharp drop-off after the 25th.'

There is one animated Christmas tale that he admits he can never hope to match.



Cinderella: Sian Gibson

'*The Snowman* is the greatest,' says Walliams. 'It's so poetic. It's one of those things that as a children's author you watch and realise you are never going to write anything that's one per cent as good as that. The image of the snowman flying in the air with the boy.'

'The whole thing is the most perfect story. I have communicated with [its author] Raymond Briggs because I wanted him to illustrate something for me. I'm such a fan of his so I was just delighted to have got an email from him.'

The last time 82-year-old Courtenay acted in a TV adaptation of one of Walliams' books, he won a children's Bafta for his funny, tender and moving turn as a World War II RAF hero now suffering from Alzheimer's in *Grandpa's Great Escape*. Now, despite facing 30-degree heat in Bulgaria, he's enjoying every moment.



Madame Blackheart: Celia Imrie

'I laughed a lot when I read the script,' says Courtenay. 'It was funny and sweet and unusual.'

'I said to David, "How can somebody as awful as you write such a sweet and tender piece?"' says the celebrated knight with a twinkle in his eye. 'He said he didn't know either!'

So will the cast be tuning in at Christmas?

'There is no way I will not be watching with our seven year-old daughter Gracie,' says Gibson. 'She couldn't come out to Bulgaria because she was in school but I kind of didn't want to show her anything until it comes on TV. It looks so magical that my photos wouldn't have done it justice.'

'I think I will find it irresistible,' says Imrie. 'It looks a million dollars.'

'I might have a look,' says Courtenay. 'Usually it's sport for me.'

■ *Cinderella: After Ever After* is on Sky One and Now TV this Christmas Eve