

THE BIRTHDAY GIRL INVITES US TO HER PARTY

'LIFE REALLY DOES BEGIN AT 40 - I'M IN A GREAT PLACE'

'CORONATION STREET' STAR **KYM MARSH** TELLS **OK!**'S ANNABEL ZAMMIT SHE'S LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT PHASE IN HER LIFE AS SHE CELEBRATES HER MILESTONE BIRTHDAY WITH HER SON DAVID

Stilt walkers, magicians and a jazz band greeted 250 guests on a sunny Manchester evening as they arrived at a party to celebrate Kym Marsh's 40th birthday and her son David's 21st. The actress's *Coronation Street* co-stars – including Simon Gregson, Antony Cotton, Mikey North, Daniel Brocklebank and Sair Khan – were among those in attendance at the bash at private members' lounge On The 7th, which is a stone's throw from the *Corrie* studio in Manchester's Media City.

The lavish venue, which was decorated with gold, silver and white balloons, also had a cinema and play room for guests' younger children and several games rooms for adults, including a graffiti room and a beer pong room, where *Real Housewives Of Cheshire* star and Kym's close friend Dawn Ward could later be found alongside Kym taking up the challenge with fellow guests!

A happy Kym, who looked stunning in a black prom dress by Forever Unique, told *OK!* she had no qualms about turning 40. 'I've got a really good idea of what my life looks like for the foreseeable future and I think that's comforting. I'm happy with work and I'm comfortable and happy in my personal life too. Bring it on! I'm ready to face my forties.'

And who can blame the actress, who plays Michelle Connor on the ITV soap, for feeling chipper. Kym celebrated her ten-year anniversary on the show in April and is excited about what's in store for her character after recently having her contract renewed. She's also finally sold the marital home she bought with Jamie Lomas, her former husband and father of her daughter Polly, five, and is looking forward to starting a 'new chapter of her life' in a new home with her children and boyfriend Matt Baker, who she's been dating for nearly a year and who she credits as 'being a great influence' on her.

Plus, she's in great shape, due to following a strict exercise regime and a Paleo diet. Personal trainer Matt, 27, was by Kym's side at the party and told *OK!*: 'Kym looks gorgeous tonight,



Kym holds aloft her birthday balloons as she celebrates with her boyfriend Matt Baker

but she always does!' Adding of his bond with her children: 'We all get on great and I'm really looking forward to celebrating tonight with Kym and David.'

When the party was in full swing, Kym took to the mic to say a few words about David, who turned 21 last month. Mother and son were joined for the speech by 18-year-old daughter Emilie and Dave Cunliffe, the children's father. Kym told guests: 'I couldn't be more proud of David. He's never ever given me one minute's problem – unlike that one there [points at Emilie and laughs]. Unfortunately for me, she takes

after me,' a line which had the room laughing, before adding: 'He's the most beautiful person ever and I want to wish him a very happy 21st birthday and to say I love you, son.'

Next up was Antony Cotton, who recited a poem Kym's friend Dawn Wright had written especially for Kym, who's actual birthday is next month, which included the lines: 'As we celebrate the 40th of our friend, the lovely Kym, let's recap on those 40

years, a life full to the brim. She really made an entrance on that 13th day of June, entered the world screaming her head off arriving just like a typhoon. So dramatic as a little girl she was destined for the stage, with a truly natural talent from a very early age.'

The poem ended with the line: 'Sometimes when people become famous they go all arrogant and cold, but that will never be our Kym because she has a heart of gold.'

Later *OK!* caught up with Antony who said of his co-star and friend: 'Kym's my best mate, we've been by each other's side through a lot so I wouldn't miss her party for the world. She looks absolutely stunning tonight but then I wouldn't expect anything less!' The 40-year-old actor, who plays Sean Tully on the cobbles, added with a smile: 'I'm furious that Kym is younger than me, I was 40 last August so she'll always have that over me. Age is nothing but a number, though, and me and Kym behave like 18 year olds, I think that's why we get on so well. We're soulmates.'

After the speeches, singer Emilie took to the mic to perform three songs. Two Adele tracks, *One And Only* and *I Found A Boy* and Ella Eyre's version of *We Don't Have To Take Our Clothes Off*. A proud Kym looked on with tears in her eyes while her daughter sang flawlessly. Next up it was David's turn to have a share of the



Above: Kym's cake. Left: Their 61st birthday party invite



Kym poses for a family photograph at the party with her son David, daughter Emilie and boyfriend Matt



limelight. As a 21st birthday surprise, Kym arranged for two dancers to perform a feather dance for a seated David, much to a slightly red-faced David's delight!

We also caught up with Simon Gregson, who plays Steve McDonald, who spoke about his on-screen wife. 'Kym's my best mate at work, we have a great laugh,' he said. Revealing his gift to her, Simon continued: 'I've bought her some posh vodka and a bottle of absinthe. I know her too well! I'm kind of hoping she never opens the absinthe, I don't want to be to blame for whatever happens to her after drinking it!'

The 41-year-old actor, who has starred in the soap for 27 years and has just returned to

work after dislocating his shoulder after falling off a toy scooter at home, told us he was on the mend. 'My shoulder's getting better, I've still got a couple of months of physio left, then it should be fine,' he said. 'It wasn't pleasant, we had to gaffer tape it up at home after it happened to keep it in place. It wasn't ideal when I have young kids, and I couldn't hold my baby for a month.'

Adding of being back on the set, the actor said: 'It's great to be back at *Corrie*. It's been nice catching up with all the gang and getting stuck back into work. To be honest, after the first day back, it was like I'd never been away.'

Simon attended the party with his wife Emma, who later wowed on the karaoke with

her rendition of Adele's *Hello*, and their two eldest children – Alfie, eight, and Harry, six. Simon opened up about the newest member of the family, six-month-old Henry, who was at home with grandparents: 'He's ace, he just smiles and poos on rotation. He's sleeping right through, he goes for about 12 hours a night. It's amazing, it's like they made him in a lab and out came the perfect baby!'

Mikey North, who plays Gary Windass on the show, cheekily told *OK!*: 'I've worked with Kym for nearly six years so it's nice to be here celebrating the fact she's getting old!' The star, who tied the knot with wife Rachael four months ago, also opened up about married >



Kym and Polly with a couple of stilt walkers at the party

life, saying: 'It's going well, we're still together and I've not had to sleep on the sofa yet so I suppose that's a good sign!'

At around 10pm, guests congregated around the impressive sweet table to watch mother and son cut their matching five-tier birthday cakes, before the karaoke began! Kym was first up and sang a few hits, including her party favourite, the Vanilla Ice classic *Ice Ice Baby*. Then Emilie joined her for a duet of Adele's *Someone Like You*.

The party went on into the small hours, with DJ Damon Noone keeping the dancefloor packed. A happy Kym and David both told *OK!* what an amazing time they'd had. 'I'm dead proud of David, so to share his birthday is an honour. I've had such a great time – now bring on my forties!' said Kym.

Here Kym opens up about why she's so excited and happy about the next phase of her life and how she's hoping for a little less heartache in her forties...

You and your son David shared milestone birthday celebrations. Were you excited?

Yes! David turned 21 last month and I'm 40 on June 13, so we thought we'd have a big party between our birthdays. We were excited to share the celebrations as there's less pressure if there's two of you and David hates being in the limelight anyway.

How did you feel about David turning 21?

It's gone scarily quickly. He's my baby boy and I'm so proud of the man he's become. Although when I was his age I had two children and that's quite an alarming thought, as he still seems so young in many ways. When I think about David I get tears in my eyes because he's the nicest man you've ever met. He's polite, thoughtful, generous and kind. I'm very proud of David and Emilie and to share David's birthday is an honour.

Tell us about your party outfit...

I went for trusty black, but it's a different look for me as I'm usually in something slinky and it's a '50s-style prom dress with netting and



Kym with her rather honest friend Dawn Ward, who said Kym needed Botox!

a black lace overlay. It does show off a bit of cleavage, though. I love it!

What do you want for your 40th?

I'm not materialistic at all so I'll be grateful for perfume or make-up. I'm into sentimental things, anything thoughtful, like a poem that's written with me in mind, like my friend Dawn wrote. Although, I know what Polly will get me – she'll wrap up some sweets or one of her teddy bears!

How do you feel about turning 40?

I feel fine about it. I've just accepted I'm old now [laughs]. Going from my twenties to my thirties seemed worse for me. I'm in a good place now as I've been at *Corrie* for ten years, but back then I'd just joined and I was wondering where my career was heading. Also, I was married to Jack [Ryder] when I was 30 and we split when I was 32, so it was a time of change, whereas now I feel very settled. I have three children and my little angel, Archie, who looks over us all. [Kym's son with Jamie Lomas, who passed away after being born 18 weeks prematurely.] I've finished having kids now, so I feel like I've got a really good idea of what my life looks like for the foreseeable future and I think that's comforting. I'm happy with work and I'm happy in my personal life, too.

In the past you've spoken about adopting. Is that not something you'd consider now?

No. I've made the decision that I don't want to have any more children. My life feels complete in that respect. Having children is all about being selfless and, actually, I want to start having a bit of time for me soon. I think I've done enough for motherhood [laughs]!

How are things with Matt?

I'm very happy. You really don't know what the future holds but I'm so chilled about everything so I feel happier than ever really. Matt and I are coming up to our one-year anniversary and the time's flown by. In the past, I've made the mistake of rushing into relationships, but neither of us has put any pressure on this relationship and I'm happier because of it. He's wonderful – I'm very lucky. Matt and I have just moved in to a new



Coronation Street co-stars Daniel Brocklebank, Sair Khan and Mikey North with the birthday girl



Antony Cotton says his pal Kym is his 'soulmate'

home together so I feel like we've taken the next step in our relationship now. It's going well.

Congratulations! Where have you moved to?

We've found a place to rent on a short-term lease. We're going to stay in the same area, as we're not sure where we want to live yet. I'm reluctant to move Polly's school and then change my mind about where I want to live. I don't want to disrupt her. Matt and I went on a minibreak to Italy following the party and moved in as soon as we got back!

So you've sold the Manchester home you bought with Jamie?

Yes, at last we've sold it! We've been busy packing up boxes recently. I did have a panic the other day as everything's happening at once –

I'm turning 40 and I'm moving house! Part of me will miss it as it was my home for six years and Polly grew up there. It's the end of an era, but there's something quite exciting about the idea of a new beginning.

Are you and Matt going to eventually buy a place together?

We haven't made a decision on that yet. We're happy living together for now and Matt's still renovating his own house. We're happy with things as they are at the moment.

Where would you like to buy?

I enjoy living in the countryside. When I first moved back from London, when I got the job at *Corrie*, David, Emilie, Jack [Ryder] and I moved to Appleton in Warrington and it was just beautiful as



Simon Gregson with his wife Emma



Kym and David had their names up in lights

it was really green and surrounded by countryside. It's further from work so would mean more travel, but I'd rather travel and be in the countryside.

What have you and Matt got planned for your first anniversary?

Nothing yet. We're dead chilled about it – we might not end up doing anything!

Would you get married again?

I'd never say never. We've spoken about our future together and we're just seeing how it goes. We get on really well and we're enjoying things as they are at the moment. I think in the past I've hurried into things and I've learned from that.

So, if Matt got down on one knee on your anniversary, what would your answer be?

[Laughs] I'm not even going there! Who knows! Polly's the one talking about marriage at the moment! She's interested to know when she's going to get married – she's only five! She's got an imaginary boyfriend at the moment. His name is Dan D'vo. He's all she talks about!

Polly's coming up to the end of her reception year at school. How's she doing?

She's doing really well. She's writing a lot and her reading's coming on. She's got a nice circle of friends, too. She's grown up a lot this past year and really enjoys school. Although, she does like the weekends when she has time with Mummy!

What does she want to be when she's older?

It changes all the time. Last time I asked she wanted to be a builder. [Turns to Polly who has run over to sit on Kym's lap]. What do you want to be when you grow up, Pol?

Polly: I want to trump in people's faces, Mummy!

Kym: She's obsessed with bodily functions at the moment [laughs]! ▶



Matt and Kym enjoy a game of beer pong!



Kym says she is very proud of the man David has become



Above: David's kiss from Mum, and his birthday cake (left)

Do David or Emilie show signs of flying the nest yet?

No, and they're not going anywhere [laughs]! Saying that, Emilie's hardly ever here as she stays at her mates' houses a lot. She just comes home, throws a grenade into her bedroom and then goes again. I know they'll get partners and move out at some stage, although I don't worry too much about David as he's a good judge of character. I just hope he meets someone worthy of him. Whoever gets David is getting a really good guy.

And Emilie?

She'll be like me and make the wrong choices [laughs]! No, she's a sensible girl and I'm sure she'll be just fine.

What do you want out of life in the next decade?

Kym: More of the same please! The past ten years weren't always the best, what with losing Archie and getting divorced, but it's made me stronger. I've not had the easiest ride but I've learned something from everything that's happened. I've experienced tragedy in my thirties and I've made mistakes but I've also learned lessons. I've also found out who my friends are. It's been a real learning curve. I've also had a wonderful ten years at *Coronation Street*. I'm extremely proud of everything I've done there. So there have been some sad times and some great times, as I imagine will happen in the next ten years, too. Hopefully with less tragedy!

How are things with Jamie now?

We get on well. He sees Polly regularly and we're both good parents. Everything is about doing the right thing by Polly. We're committed to being her parents and she's a happy child.

Ahead of your party, did you go on a diet?

I generally eat healthily and exercise regularly so I didn't need to. I go to the gym three times a week and if I don't have time to go the gym I'll go for a run. It's part of my life and if I don't do it I feel terrible. It clears my head and makes me feel good about myself. Plus, I know it's keeping me fit and prolonging my life. I'm still a size 8. If I feel like I'm putting a bit of weight on, I step everything up and watch what I'm eating. I tend not to weigh myself as muscle weighs more than fat.

What's a cheat day like for you?

I'll have toast in the morning or some cereal, instead of eggs. I don't cheat all day as I'd feel too bad for that. If I was going to cheat in the evening then I'll eat well for the first half of the day and then have something like pasta and red wine in the evening, which is my favourite cheat meal.

You've spoken about possibly wanting surgery or Botox in your forties...



Emilie and David with their dad Dave Cunliffe

The make-up girls at work tell me I don't need to have it. I'm still toying with the idea. Once you start, you kind of have to keep it up. Dawn Ward told me I 'needed some Botox'. Dawn speaks her mind! But it's different for her as she's not an actress. I'm undecided!

Emilie's keen to make it in the music business. Do you worry about her?

I don't worry about Emilie – she's a tough cookie and takes everything on the chin. She has the same attitude towards life as me in many ways – that's probably why we sometimes argue, as we're quite alike. She's got a lot of determination but she's not putting pressure on herself at the moment. She's got a dance tune coming out in June, so she's excited about that. It's something she wants to do and everyone's ambitions should be encouraged. Although if she was a rubbish singer I wouldn't encourage her, but I'm not being biased when I say she's got a beautiful voice.

Is it good to have your work husband Simon Gregson back on the *Corrie* set?

It's great. I love Simon. We laugh all the time at work. Even when we're meant to be doing serious scenes, we'll just break into laughter as we're good mates and enjoy working together. Equally if one of us is having a bad day, we'll pick each other up. You get to know someone well when you have an on-screen partnership as it's like having a relationship without the intimate stuff!

Is there generally that camaraderie between the cast on the show?

Yes, we're like a family. We talk to each other about personal things because ▶



Kym celebrates with former *Corrie* co-star Shobna Gulati

sometimes you have to do a scene and you're having a bad day or you're in a bad way and you have to tell people why you're not feeling great. People are so supportive at *Corrie*. When Polly's been ill or when I went through my break-up with Jamie, people were there for me. We spend a lot of time there so you can't help but be involved in each other's lives.

What's in store for your character, Michelle? I think this could be a good year for me. I'm told I have some good things coming up and I'm pleased to be given that opportunity. I think Kate [Oates, *Coronation Street's* new producer] is going to be brilliant, as she was brilliant at *Emmerdale*.

Your pal Alison King has spread her wings and left the show. Would you like to try your hand at other roles?



The birthday pair don some props and pose for photos

Possibly – it would be nice to play other parts. But I'm in a good place at *Coronation Street* at the moment and I'm excited about what lies ahead for my character. If I'm still enjoying it as much as I am now, I'll be happy to still be on the show when I'm celebrating my 50th birthday.

What's the public reaction to you when you go out?

I get called Michelle all the time! In fact, even the crew at *Corrie* call me Michelle! I answer to anything these days, though, and anyway, Michelle isn't the worst thing I've been called [laughs]! I do get recognised and that's fine as most of the time people just want to say hello. The only time I get irritated is when I'm eating with my family and people come up then. I think that's rude. I don't turn anyone away as I do get it – people get excited when they see someone off the telly.

What's the downside to fame?

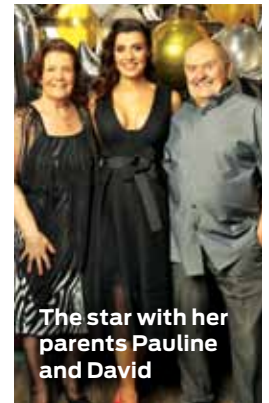
My stalker last year, who pretended to be me for seven years on social media, was really scary. No one should feel scared in their home and I was. And a while ago I was sent porn hate mail to my house. Some bloke was sending photographs of my face put on pornographic images. Trolling on Twitter is a big thing. People occasionally make disgusting comments about the death of my baby. I used to rise to things like that on Twitter but now I just block those horrible, twisted people. They must have such a rubbish life sitting behind a computer screen thinking the biggest high they're going to get all night is knowing they've hurt someone.



A mother and daughter duet took place on the karaoke



Kym with OK!'s Annabel Zammit



The star with her parents Pauline and David

Your good friend David Gest passed away recently. Was he missed from the celebrations?

Very much so. We spoke about my birthday before he passed away and he would have definitely been there, as he loved a good party. He loved David too, so he would have wanted to celebrate with him as well.

What's been your biggest achievement in your thirties?

Landing my job at *Corrie* was amazing and winning Most Popular Newcomer at the National Television Awards shortly after I joined the show was a real buzz. In my personal life, having Polly after losing Archie was the icing on the cake. She's been a massive highlight of the past ten years. She's so close to David. Emilie's amazing with her too. David's around a bit more as Emilie's going through a party time at the moment and is out a lot...

Well, she is 18 years old...

Exactly! When I was 18 I had David and, really, I should have been partying. I'm glad I had my kids when I did because they're an amazing part of my life and we all grew up together, but it's not ideal or easy having kids that young. I grew up very quickly. I did miss those years when you go out with your mates and go off travelling, so I encourage my children to do those things, as I didn't get the chance.

Do you feel you missed out?

No, I have no regrets and I'm the person I am because of them. I look at my kids and think me and their dads obviously did something right as they've all turned out really well. I've finished having my kids and I'm still only 40. Life does begin now. I really am in a great place. **OK!**

WITH THANKS TO WWW.ENTERTAINMENTTODAY.CO.UK.

THANKS ALSO TO WWW.BOOTHTIQUE.CO.UK; WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/BEWITCHINGENTERTAINMENT; WWW.THEFACEPAINTERS.ORG.UK; WWW.GOODMANGREENMAGIC.CO.UK; WWW.LOVELIGHTSTHEWAY.CO.UK; WWW.THE-CAKE-BOX.NET; WWW.ICECREATIONS.CO.UK; WWW.OLIVERSCHOCOLATEPARTIES.CO.UK; WWW.COCOAFLAVOUR.CO.UK; WWW.SUNSHINEEVENTS.CO.UK; WWW.ZARACAKES.COM; WWW.BALLOON-UR-ROOM.NET; AND WWW.POLKAPOPS.CO.UK.

TURN TO PAGE 95 FOR KYM'S COLUMN.

INTERVIEW BY ANNABEL ZAMMIT. ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY LAURA HILLS. PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY WARD. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIKE PETCH @ MPHOTOGRAPHIC