



Musician Tasmin Archer on life as an 'adopted Mackem' and her dreams of recording a Sunderland cup final song.

Words by Andy Greeves

Tasmin Archer's musical career has mirrored the fortunes of her beloved Sunderland AFC, with plenty of highs and a number of lows over the years.

The powerful vocalist enjoyed instant success with the release of her first single *Sleeping Satellite*, which went to number one in the UK chart in August 1992. A year later she also won a BRIT Award for the Best British Breakthrough Act, on the back of her excellent first album *Great Expectations*. The early momentum which shot Archer to stardom slowed in the years that followed however although perhaps appropriately for a Sunderland supporter she reached the top 40 in 1994 with a recording of the haunting Elvis Costello song 'Shipbuilding.' Her follow-up album *Bloom* wasn't released until 1996. Eighteen months ago, album number three, *ON*, went on sale and has received positive feedback.

Between *Sleeping Satellite* and *ON*, there have been two major constants in Tasmin's life. There's her partner and fellow musician John Hughes, who she met in the mid-1980s and Sunderland AFC, who John introduced her to shortly after they got together.

"My passion for Sunderland AFC began with John," says Tasmin, who is originally from Bradford and still lives in the West Yorkshire area. "John took me to a local away game at Leeds and that was where it all started. His enthusiasm for football and Sunderland was infectious and it didn't take long after my first match to get hooked too."

Despite never having lived in the North East, Tasmin claims to have become "an adopted Mackem" due to the affiliation the City of Sunderland and its football club. She recalls the weekends where she would take a break from her busy music schedule during the 1990's to dash up the motorway to watch the team play. She has massively fond memories of her visits to Roker Park back then.

"You were so close to the pitch at Roker Park, you felt as if you were part of the game itself," recalls Tasmin. "For us to progress as a football club, we had to leave Roker Park and the Stadium of Light has taken us into the 21st century. I can't help but reminisce about Roker Park though.

Old stadiums have nostalgia and an atmosphere about them which is unique, especially when you compare them to the modern 'bowl' like arenas. Some of my favourite away games nowadays are at the traditional homes of football like Goodison Park, Fratton Park and Craven Cottage for this very reason."

Tasmin may have a penchant for old football grounds, but her happiest memories of the beautiful game and Sunderland are far more recent.

"Two of my favourite Sunderland games come from our promotion season in 2006-07 when Roy Keane the boss," smiles Tasmin. "I remember a match against Burnley which we won 3-2 and that was a fabulous occasion at the Stadium of Light. I can still picture Carlos Edwards' winner, an absolute belter and if I think back hard enough, I can still hear the noise that greeted the shot as it hit the back of the net.

"If that wasn't good enough, there was the away game at Luton a few weeks later. We hammered them 5-0, which secured our status as winners of the Coca-Cola League Championship. The feeling leaving Kenilworth Road what amazing, knowing we had won promotion back to the Premier League. Everyone was in full voice and I felt as if I was floating along, I was so happy. I knew we were far better equipped for the top flight compared to other promotions too which added to my joy."



Another favourite period of supporting Sunderland for Tasmin was between 1999 and 2001, when the club achieved two seventh placed finishes in the Premier League. The vast majority of her all-time Black Cats' heroes were wearing the red and white stripes at the time too, as she recalls.

"Kevin Phillips and Niall Quinn rank as my favourite all-time Sunderland players and they were unstoppable those two seasons. Nicky Summerbee / Chris Makin and 'Magic' Johnston / Michael Gray were very underrated as wing-partnerships too. I really enjoyed watching them bomb up and down the touchline and I'd have them in my 'best-ever' Sunderland team if I was ever to put one together."

As the years since 2001 have proven to Sunderland supporters, achieving a top ten finish in the Premier League is no mean feat. Given the significant levels of investment over the summer, coupled with a decent start to the season, Tasmin is confident the Black Cats can push towards that spot this season.

"The Premier League is pretty much a three tiered division," she says. "You have the big four and maybe Manchester City now vying for the title. Then there's around six teams all fighting it out to stay in the league and the other nine teams are all after a European place. It really is dog-eat-dog. I like to think we have cemented ourselves in the top flight now and the next step is to start moving towards Europe now in my opinion. A top ten finish this season would be great, accompanied by a good run in one of the cups. Then who knows, a Europa League place the following campaign? I know I shouldn't get too carried away too soon."

Tasmin was a big fan of Roy Keane as manager of Sunderland and believes his former Manchester United team-mate Steve Bruce can do an even better job at the Stadium of Light. Could Bruce be the man to steer us towards Europe in the future? Tasmin thinks so.

"Steve Bruce's attitude has impressed me from day one. He seems to be a fairly quiet and methodical kind of guy from what I see. He has a good understanding of the direction the fans want to see the club move in and I think he can take us there. I've been very pleased with the signings he's made, addressing areas of the park we needed strengthening in. He's also an excellent organiser and tactician. I think he will be around for quite some time and we can go places with him in charge. Sunny places abroad hopefully."

The proud 'adopted Mackem' Tasmin is hoping that in addition to getting Sunderland into Europe in the future, Bruce may also be able to lead the club to a cup final appearance. If that is the case, Tasmin says she has a surprise up her sleeve...

"I wrote a Sunderland cup final song a number of years ago," she laughs.

"The song was greeted with a deal of scepticism from John but I don't care. In fact, I still sing it to myself. It's a fairly complex song, so I don't know whether it would catch on, but of course, the ultimate dream would be 40,000 Sunderland fans singing my song at Wembley."

Here's hoping!



On Song