



CHANGING ENDS 2

itv1 | itvX



After its success last year, becoming the biggest comedy ever on ITVX with 7 million streams, Alan Carr's semi autobiographical comedy is back for series two.

The 6 x 30 min second series will again be made by multi award winning Baby Cow Productions (Gavin & Stacey, Alan Partridge).

The show will simultaneously drop as a full series box set on ITVX and air weekly on ITV1 primetime.

Reprising their roles as the Carr family for a new run of episodes are Oliver Savell (young Alan), Shaun Dooley (Graham Carr), Nancy Sullivan (Christine Carr) and Taylor Fay (Gary Carr).

Also returning are the Carr's neighbours, the Hudsons, played by Gabby Best (Angela Hudson), Harry Peacock (Nigel Hudson) and Rourke Mooney (Charlie Hudson).

Changing Ends is based on Alan's own life in Northampton in the 1980s growing up as the son of a fourth division football manager.

The second season picks up shortly after the first, as young Alan contends with impending puberty and feeling sidelined by his family. With Graham Carr distracted by Northampton Town FC who are battling for promotion can he be there for his son when he most needs him?

The series is produced by Baby Cow Productions, written by Alan Carr, co-written by Gabby Best and was co-created by the late Simon Carlyle. The director is Dave Lambert and the producer is Mollie Freedman Berthoud. The Executive producers are Baby Cow's Sarah Monteith and Rupert Majendie, Alan Carr and Danny Julian.

Baby Cow is one of BBC Studios owned production labels. BBC Studios are handling the international distribution of both series

S1 Reviews

The Guardian - *Alan Carr's childhood makes for a relentlessly funny comedy. (4 out of 5 stars)*

Heat Magazine - *Very funny and deeply poignant (4 stars)*

The Independent - *Changing Ends will make the comedian a national treasure and Oliver Savell, who plays him a star. (5 out of 5 stars)*

Radio Times - *Oliver Savell is an absolute delight as a young Alan Carr.*

British Comedy Guide - *Changing Ends has made a clear success of turning 1980's bigotry into a funny, feelgood half hour. And it will make a star of young Oliver Savell. (4 out of 5 stars)*



Interview with Alan Carr

How did you feel about the brilliant reaction to series one?

Really good – I was so nervous because this is such a personal story for me on so many levels. If people had slagged off the show I would have taken it really personally because not only did I co-write it, but it's based on my life – there's no dodging a bad reaction or blaming anyone else because it's all about me! So, I was really, really pleased that viewers enjoyed it.

Does that give you more confidence going into series two?

Yes, we've become a bit more focused because we know what works and what doesn't. When you get good reviews it gives you the confidence to push the boundaries, not in a crazy way, but it does feel like a green light from the public and the critics, especially being the most watched comedy on ITVX. I think it means that series two will be even better because it's got added va va voom, we've really gone for it.

On series one I was so concerned about everything being perfect, I came down to set a bit more to check on things, because this series had to show what my life was like. But then when we were doing this second series I knew I was in such safe hands and we were all singing from the same hymn sheet, so I didn't get involved as much. I just turned up to do my bits knowing that everything was going to be fine.

It must have been nice writing the script with Ollie [Savell] in mind this time too, rather than having to hunt for the perfect Alan?

Yes, absolutely – Ollie is amazing and he just gets better. But of course, the elephant in the room was that we were wondering how tall he would have got and how much his voice had dropped – you have to be able to hit those high notes when you play Alan Carr, I'm like Mariah Carey! But he's just so professional and funny. Even though he was a little bit taller for series two, he's still just as talented and wonderful in the role as he was in the first series. If we get recommissioned I might have to do a time jump for series three!

How much of what we see in the series happened to you in real life?

Everything you see on screen starts with at least a kernel of truth and then sometimes we embroider a little, but if I started just making things up I think we'd lose something special about the series. People stop me in the street to ask me if things they've seen really happened, and lots of it really did, which makes the moments funnier. Honestly, the stuff that happens to me on a daily basis means I've still got enough stories up my sleeve to take us through to series nine if we ever get that far! We'll take something that really happened, like our family caravan holiday in Yarmouth or my dad forcing me to be a mascot, but let's be honest, life is stranger than fiction, so we have to make all the ends meet in 22 minutes. Sometimes I wish life was a bit more like a sitcom, where everything gets solved at the end!

In series two, the Cobblers are on the cusp of going up and I'm on the cusp of going through puberty so it's all a bit of a knife edge with these two push-pulls going on – success for the Cobblers and Alan growing up and turning into a young man. It's electric, you can feel that battle going on.

The series feels very celebratory, and shows young Alan rising above his bullies at school – how reflective is that of your real-life experience?

My experience of growing up was not always celebratory, but I deliberately wanted the series to be pre-watershed because I'd love someone who is being bullied at school right now to watch the show with their family, and to be inspired to know it's all going to be alright, and that being a bit different is absolutely fine. All the things I got bullied for at school are now my trademarks – the glasses, the teeth, the voice, being camp, all of it, and I wanted that to be celebrated in the show.

How did your parents react to series one?

I was so nervous about what they would think, but mum and dad love it, they watch it over and over again! My dad has been so sweet about the show. He never really rings me and if I call the house he immediately puts mum on, but since series one went out he keeps calling me asking about what's happening in series two, he's desperate for more details. I filmed a little bit on my phone secretly and sent the video to him, just to get him off my back, but he wants more and I keep telling him he has to wait until it comes out on ITV. He's like my biggest fan, it's really sweet, but strange because honestly he never usually rings me!

Do you feel quite protective of your parents, putting them in a sitcom on national TV?

I do, I didn't want a hatchet job on them because they're absolutely the best and I love them to bits. Growing up I think a lot of gay men do have odd relationships with their dad – my dad was the best dad in the world, but I was like an alien in that house. I do feel bad because when I started out in stand up I didn't know all this was going to happen, and I talked about dad in my act. Then as my popularity grew and I got bigger and bigger, it got a bit out of hand. I remember getting a letter from a fan saying “Your parents might not love you, Alan, but we love you!”. But like Ken Dodd said, comedians have two childhoods – the real one and the one they talk about on stage. My dad's not an arsehole, he's just an 80s Northern football manager, who wanted his son to play football. I don't want anyone to think badly of him, I got so much love as a child. So I was a little bit worried about that, but the way Shaun and Nancy play mum and dad is so sympathetic and lovely, it's probably what endears people to the show. There's no side to Changing Ends, it's just joyous.

We're going to meet your nan in this series, what can you tell us about that?

Well she's an amalgamation of both my nans really. I was at my parents' house for Christmas dinner and I took a big gulp of wine and told them nan was going to be in the show, but not to worry because it's both nans! So they can't be offended, because they will see glimpses of both their mums.

My nan was very stern but had a heart of gold, so there's a bit of that in there. I loved her, we used to sit watching black and white films together from Bette Davis movies to Westerns, sharing a packet of ginger nuts and some peppermints. Maggie Steed was absolutely amazing in the role, I couldn't believe it when we got her. Wait till you see it – what takes place in that episode with my nan actually did happen, so there's truth to it.

Do you ever give Ollie any guidance on his scenes?

The main thing is I feel like I'm asking him to speak another language – he's 13 and the show is about a 1980s child who spoke like an old woman! I've explained to him that we didn't have iPads or X Boxes, and you would just sit with your nan watching a John Wayne film, even if it was boring. Sometimes I feel like a caveman when I'm explaining things to him – the other day I told him that when the ice cream van would come, you'd grab 20p out of your mum's purse and even if she said no or the van was driving away, you'd just run up the street chasing it.

Sadly, you had to write this series without your co-writer Simon Carlyle, who passed away in August. Was that an intimidating prospect?

Oh God it really worried me. Luckily Gabby Best [who plays Ange] helped us out with a couple of episodes, but it's hard because you have to work with someone who gets you and someone you can be completely honest with. Me and Simon had that – he could tell me if a joke was rubbish and you need that kind of honesty. It was amazing to find someone like that and Simon was a one-off, we instantly hit it off. It was tough writing series two without him and it still makes me quite emotional to think about it.

Writing a script is a very different muscle to writing a stand-up set. With stand-up, the jokes are fast and furious and the punchline is chief, so as long as that punchline works you've got a good show. But with sitcom you've got the luxury of developing different characters and creating something more nuanced.

Do you enjoy filming your scenes as present-day Alan?

They find more and more ways to humiliate me in series two, I think people are going to be shocked where I pop out from in the story! Those bits are always fun to film but to be honest I didn't want to be in the show at all at first, I just thought I'd be the weakest link because the cast is so strong. It wasn't false modesty, I just didn't know why anyone would want to see my ugly face pop up. But actually, I was pleasantly surprised when I saw the episodes, and it does work. I think it adds another layer to the show, because I can talk about how I felt in the 80s.

What is it like going to set and stepping into a version of your childhood home?

The props team and the costume designers have just gone above and beyond, I couldn't believe all the details they put in. The bedroom isn't identical to my room of course, but the ornaments are the same, the layout is the same and they've even got my notice board with exact copies of the ABC cinema tickets I had up there. The camera is never ever going to see that detail, but it's tickets for films I went to see like Beaches and Turner & Hooch, and the bird books on the shelf are identical, my binoculars are exactly where they were in the room and even the duvet is the same. I don't know where they got this Superman duvet cover from, but it's so nostalgic, and they've got the football one I had as well. It's like an Alan Carr museum... a bit like when the V&A did an exhibition of Bowie looks!

What has the reaction been like in Northampton?

My mum, dad and brother still live up there, so I'm always going back for Sunday lunch, and Northampton people are so proud of the show. It's really lovely because Northampton never gets in the news and nobody ever mentions the place, so this is my love letter to the town. My dad is still loved there for getting the football club up to Division 3, and of course the fun thing is the players keep ringing him up to take the mick and remember things with him. Shaun [Dooley] just inhabits him, he looks like my dad in the show and me and my brother just can't believe it.

What does it feel like for you watching the finished episodes?

We were all crying when we finished filming, it's a weird thing, but this show is very emotional for me. It's a good thing and if we've captured even a little squidge of that emotion then I think people are going to enjoy series two even more than the first

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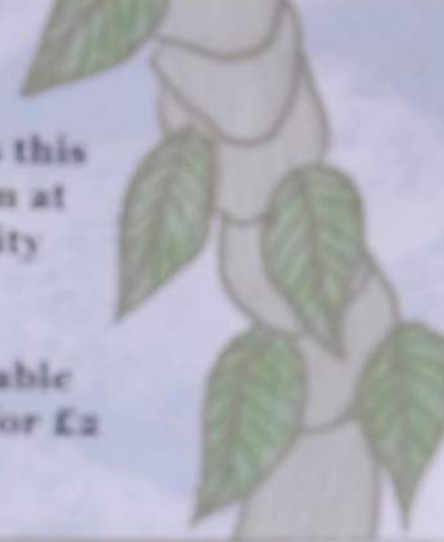
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Oliver Savell is Young Alan

How does it feel to come back to play Alan for a second series?

Well, my voice has gotten a bit deeper, so I was a bit worried when we started filming that I didn't sound as much like Alan as I did before. But, of course Alan is growing older in the story too, he's starting to develop and there's lots in store for the character, so it's OK, and it's actually a lot easier to play him now that I know there has been a good response to the character. I was so happy with the reaction to series one, it's gone so well and the comments have been so heart-warming.

Having played him in series one, it made it easier this time because I feel like the character is already there. Putting the glasses on does really help me feel more like Alan, especially when I add in the teeth and the 1980s costume, although half the time people don't notice I'm wearing the teeth, which is quite funny!

Was it like going into school the day after the series aired?

Lots of my friends were quite surprised, because I hadn't told everyone it was coming out, but quite a few people had watched it. Now lots of them call me Alan when they see me!

My friends and family absolutely loved the show – the day after the series came out on ITVX we had lots of people round to our house for a screening and it was just so nice seeing their reactions, especially when something funny happened and they laughed. It was just really nice that they enjoyed it.

What can we expect from series two of Changing Ends?

Series two picks up a couple of months after series one, and it's just as heartfelt. Alan has grown up a bit, he has drifted apart from his friend Charlie now, and he's really good friends with Kay instead. He's still getting bullied but he's got his mum, his brother and Kay around him, so it doesn't affect him too much, and his mum is just so supportive. Alan is beginning to find himself a bit more this time. He's still close to his dad, but Graham is at the football quite a lot this series, so they don't have much time together, it's more about Alan and Christine. His mum gets him a lot more anyway, she sees him for who he is.

Overall, series two is just as heart-warming and funny as series one, and I'm still playing the same Alan. That's what's so lovely about it, the fact that he's just himself and doesn't care what people think. He doesn't change what he likes to please others, so he still likes birdwatching and Murder She Wrote – even though people at school don't like those things, and take the mickey out of them, it doesn't change the fact that these are things he enjoys and he's just himself. There are still loads of 80s references in the show too, from the snow white jeans to the He-Man figurines, which I know are very nostalgic for people that grew up in the 80s.

It sounds like you all have a wonderful time on set?

This show is so much fun to film because all the cast and crew just feel like a big family, everyone is just so nice and encouraging. Dave is such a good director, and he's really supportive of how I'm portraying the character and what I'm doing in the scenes, which makes the job easier for me. A lot of the time loads of people will be laughing during scenes and I'll just be sitting there giggling because the writing is so funny!

Some days can be tiring because once we finish the scene most people can sit down, but I have to go to tutoring. It's nice to be able to do it with my friends though and our tutor, Laura lets us play football for our P.E. lesson which is always fun – it feels a lot more easy-going than school!



Shaun Dooley is Graham Carr

How did you feel about returning for series two?

I was really chuffed about coming back and so excited. I love the job, and more importantly than that, I really love the people that work on this show, so the idea of spending some more time with them was exciting. I had been keeping my fingers crossed that we would get recommissioned – you never know if it will happen in this day and age, but there was such a warm reaction to series one. What's great about this show is that it feels like an old school comedy, the kind of show we grew up on. It's the kind of comedy where you're laughing with someone, not at them all the time, it's got so much heart. Quite a lot of comedy shows have gone towards just laughing *at* people these days, but at the core of Changing Ends there's just so much love, and I think that's why it appeals to people. There aren't that many things on telly with that kind of feel – it's a bit like Ted Lasso in that way, which is brilliant.

How did you find the process of getting back into character as Graham?

I try to immerse myself – I've got lots of pictures of Graham in my trailer, my script has his photo on the front cover and I do this thing where I wear a different aftershave for every character I play. So as soon as I sprayed Aramis on me again – which was the real Graham's smell in the 1980s – he was back with me straight away. It was lovely on set as well, because I would put it on and people would say, "Oh there he is, he's back!" Smells take you back to a particular place in an instant, whether it's coconut sun tanning lotion from a holiday, or your granddad's pipe and tobacco, it's a great memory jogger.

I also use music to help me and I create playlists for all of my characters. I lined up a lot of 1970s tracks for Graham, which I would listen to as I travelled into work, just to immerse myself in his world. Fortunately, I like '70s music, so having David Bowie on repeat was very much up my street! I also listened to the audio book of Alan's autobiography.

It's a lovely relationship to explore between Graham and Alan isn't it?

Yes, it's really lovely and it's also very firmly set in its time. We're not trying to hammer anything home, but you do really get the feeling that life just wasn't as easy back in the 1980s. It's not necessarily easy to be gay now, but it's certainly not an avenue that's even discussed or talked about at that time, and a lot of parents like Graham probably just brushed it off as being young and going through a phase. We seem more ready to accept difference now. Graham and Alan struggle to really connect all the way through both series one and two, they just keep missing each other. Graham is probably going to be the very last in the family to realise and accept the truth about Alan's sexuality. But underlying all of that is this love they have for each other, and there are still lots of lovely father and son moments.

What else can we expect from Graham in series two?

Overall, series two is the same playing field as series one, to use a football analogy, and the team is exactly the same, we're just getting a bit deeper into the characters, and watching Alan grow, working out who he actually is. Graham is quite absent from the family because it's all happening at work – it's a big season for Northampton Town, and everything is pushed towards trying to win the league, it just takes up every single moment of his time. Unfortunately, his head is not with the family as much as it was in season one.

The family goes on a caravan holiday in Great Yarmouth, against Graham's will, which doesn't go particularly brilliantly. It was a lot of fun to film, even though we were shooting in really difficult cramped circumstances. Our director, Dave Lambert, kept us all smiling with his energy and enthusiasm. We knew about the caravan holiday already, because we'd spoken to Alan about it during season one, so we were quite excited about the idea of this episode. He was on set with us, just laughing, and there's an incredibly funny moment with the real Alan in the caravan, which took a lot of work to keep a straight face for!

Have you had much opportunity to speak to Graham?

We haven't spoken ahead of series two, but before series one we had a meal with me, Nancy Sullivan, Graham and Alan's mum Christine, which was just lovely. We really felt they gave us permission to do whatever we needed for the characters, which was really lovely.

Do you have any interest in football, or is it a leap for you playing a football manager?

I'm a season ticket holder at Barnsley Football Club, who are currently in the same league as Northampton Town. So, Northampton are kind of becoming my second club, unless they play Barnsley, in which case not at all! People often ask me if it's hard playing a football manager, but I think pretty much every football fan thinks they're a manager when they're watching the match from their seat in the stands – I've been a football manager for 30 years now, shouting at the manager, telling him who he should be subbing on and what positions he should be playing people in! So playing a manager is very easy for me.

What is your relationship like with Oliver Savell, who plays Young Alan?

During series two, I've been filming every day and then acting in a play at night, so I feel like I've been a bit of an absent TV dad to Ollie this year! But he is just amazing. This series he's matured by those few months, and having kids myself you do notice what a difference a year makes. Also, he's probably seen himself on telly by now, so he has seen that what he's doing playing Alan really works, which means there's a bit more confidence about him now. It's amazing working with him because he's so unpredictable, but in a beautiful way, he's always up for trying new things in a scene, which is great.

Acting with Ollie has actually changed a lot about work for me. Usually I'm very focused on set, and if I feel I'm not quite in the zone I will walk away and put my headphones on to listen to my character playlist. Normally I'm very quiet before a take, but on this show Ollie will be there saying, "Shaun, listen to my Jar Jar Binks impression!" and I'm thinking, "How do I get into character now?!" But I've got kids myself and I always want to play, so I'm up for doing voices and being daft. My instinct when there's kids around is to make up games and be dad, so I can't not be that person, and I want Ollie and the other kids to be relaxed and have fun. If I start taking myself off, it changes the mood and that's no fun. So I realised I just had to be there, be in the moment and play the scene, and it was really refreshing to be honest. I'm trying to take that approach into other work I do more and more, I'm really glad it happened that way. I've still got the Aramis to hang onto for Graham!

How does it feel stepping back into the 1980s on this set?

Well, I'm roughly the same age as Alan, we were both born in the mid-1970s, so in a daft way I'm Ollie's age on set, I feel the same age as young Alan. It just brings everything back when you see the toys they've dressed the set with – there are chopper bikes lying around outside and all the toys from your childhood, you just want to play with everything! And the outfits take you back too. The brilliant thing now is that quite a lot of the clothes are fashionable again. Mostly not Graham's, unfortunately, but he's got Gola trainers and everybody's wearing those now!

Changing Ends is such a warm show – can you feel that atmosphere on set too?

It's amazing. It's pretty much unheard of for crews to stay the same between series, but that happened on this show because everyone was desperate to come back – series two just felt like a continuation of season one, which was lovely. There's such a warmth on set, and I do think that comes across on screen, you can tell that there's lots of love and people are enjoying it. You'll do a take and then suddenly you hear Keith the sound man laughing in the distance, so you know it's a good scene!



Nancy Sullivan is Christine Carr

How did you feel about the warm reception to series one?

It was absolutely brilliant – I've always loved the show, but you never know how the concept is going to be received, especially as the series is quite different to anything else out there, with the real Alan Carr popping up in scenes. I can't believe how many people watched it on ITVX before it even reached ITV1, I'm so pleased.

What can we expect from series two?

It's all about Alan starting to feel changes happening within him, and his eyes being opened to various parts of life, with Christine right there supporting him. Alan's dad is quite absent in season two, because as the Cobblers got more successful and reached the top of the league Graham wasn't around as much. So their relationship is more fractious, while Alan is going through this period of discovery. Christine remains Alan's loyal ally always.

We see lots more of the neighbours as well, which is lovely. Gabby [Best] is brilliant as Ange, and Harry [Peacock] is in the show much more this time as Nigel, which is brilliant – we were robbed by him only being in a little bit of series one! It's fun to see lots more of those two and Alan's Nan comes to visit too, played by Maggie Steed, which is a fantastic episode. She plays Graham's mum, so I get to explore that mother-in-law relationship, and it's fun to play because they don't get on at all. Maggie's performance is so brilliant, she just decides not to look at me at all during the whole episode, even when I'm talking to her!

I really hope that the audience enjoys series two, I think we've gone up a gear and we're just meeting young Alan a little bit further along – even a couple of months feels like such a big jump at that age, so it does feel like he's moved on emotionally.

What is Christine and Graham's relationship like this series?

Christine's priority is just Alan and making sure he's alright. Graham's not around as much because he's busy at work trying to win the league, so that means she's busier at home, and it's nice because we see her out and about much more, at places like the hairdresser's and the football stadium. I missed Shaun [Dooley] on this season, a bit like Christine would have missed Graham!

Are there more showdowns with the neighbours this series?

It's gone to a whole new level with Ange, that woman! Gabby is fantastic but I cannot bear Ange when I'm playing those scenes, she's just so rude – I genuinely get annoyed with her in those moments! For Christine it's infuriating that this woman keeps turning up at her door, giving her loads of abuse and being offensive towards her son. There's brilliant comedy value in Ange though, and it's really fun to play opposite Gabby, I feel like we have the licence to go even further with the comedy in this series, and there's a lot more physical stuff, which is amazing. There's also a fun storyline with a peeping tom on the street, which Christine finds herself forced to deal with. Ange keeps turning up to talk about it and Alan also becomes obsessed with playing detective, so Christine has to be the voice of reason!

Do you have any shortcuts to help you get into character as Christine?

Yes, it's all about the wig! As soon as the wig goes on it really shifts everything for me, because it's just such a tidy, neat little do. A woman's hair is everything and it often tells you a lot about how she's feeling, whether she's bothered doing her hair or not. So with Christine, when that wig goes on and it's so well kept and precise that it really helps me get into that neat, organised mode and get into her character.

Christine is also a very high energy character, so you have to get yourself going when you're doing long 13-hour days on set, five days a week. I have to go outside and go for a really brisk power walk around the area we're filming in just to get myself into that high energy mode again, because she's a very active woman.

Did the character come flooding back when you started on series two?

I think she came back relatively quickly once I had the wig and the 1980s costume on, but I found it tricky at the beginning when I was reading the scripts. I had to go back to season one and watch a few clips just to see where we pitched her and make sure my performance was in line with that and I was hitting the right tone. We had a year's gap between the two series and I had my first baby in that time, so things changed in my life, and you feel slightly different in yourself – you're wondering if you're holding yourself differently, or if you still look the same. But doing a bit of research and actually saying some of the lines from season one out loud really helped me.

Congratulations on becoming a mum! Did you bring your son to set with you?

We have such a happy atmosphere on set, which is led by Alan [Carr] and our director Dave [Lambert], who are two of the most positive, optimistic people you could meet, nothing is a problem to them. So when I said that I would have a six month old baby when series two started filming, they said to just bring him along and they would make it work, no problem. It's a really lovely thing to have a baby and then know you've got a lovely job lined up to come back to, it meant I could really enjoy my maternity leave and relax.

Did becoming a mother change how you felt about the role in any way?

I didn't think it would, I just couldn't imagine how it would change anything, but then when I had my son I felt this limitless outpouring of love and it made me much more open. I just didn't feel as scared to lean into that maternal emotion this time – beforehand I worried that it was a bit much for me to play Christine as being so open with Alan, but now I've had a baby I understand it, and Ollie can have all of the love! That was really nice to discover.

My favourite scenes to play are always the ones with Ollie [Savell], because they're just so honest and warm, and I can feel our chemistry. There are times when he'll come up to me on set and give me a cuddle if he's tired, it's just so lovely, and we get our scenes done so quickly because we have such a shorthand and a trust now. Our relationship just feels so honest and heartfelt this series.

You met Christine before filming the first series, how much does that meeting still inform the way you play her?

Oh a lot, because she was much stronger than I first imagined – she's a very firm woman and I didn't pick that up initially. Alan did say to me that his mum is quite tough and very strong, but it wasn't until I met her and saw the family at dinner that I realised she is the matriarch, she leads the four of them. It is interesting meeting someone in their 60s and thinking about what she would have been like in her 30s, because you grow into yourself as you age, but some elements of your personality are always there.

How has the real Alan Carr's role evolved this year?

In season one we were constantly checking details with him, asking for permission a lot, but there was less of that in series two – I feel there was a lot more trust both ways as we all knew each other better. He would turn up on set and say “Alright Mum!” to me! There was so much openness at every stage of the process and I know now that he accepts I'm just bringing a version of his mum to the story. It is hard to hold it together when he's on set though – I'll be about to say my line and he's hiding behind the kitchen door, delivering crackers, it's so tough to keep a straight face! There was a lot of laughing on set this time, even more than during season one.

Why do you think the series has struck such a chord with viewers?

It's such a special show. Despite the challenges he faces, young Alan never becomes a victim and each episode ends on a high. It's a really empowering series for young kids to watch – I met a 10-year old boy, who said he didn't know that much about Alan, but he watched Changing Ends and it gave him the confidence to go and get his perm done. That's so cool. I wasn't even making the show with that in mind initially, but then you realise being a kid is hard, and if you feel a little bit different and see Young Alan on TV, a boy who isn't the norm, who isn't the cool version of anything, but who is just celebrating himself, then that's just wonderful.



Interview with Actor and Writer Gabby Best

How did you feel about returning to play Ange?

It was so nice to come back to this job and it's so much fun playing a bitch, especially one like Ange, who people somehow still quite like, that is the dream. It was a bit more nerve-racking this time in a way, because you're trying to recreate what people liked about series one and you don't want to lose that, but you also don't want to be too self-aware. I did some writing on this series, so I had talked about these plots for so long before we started filming, and then I felt the pressure to get the scenes right!

We were all so happy that the audience took to series one the way that they did. I'm not surprised because Alan [Carr] is so inherently lovable as a person, and the series always had that on its side, but you never quite know how shows are going to hit. People seem to really love the series. Ollie [Savell] is so brilliant as Young Alan, I think that he impressed everyone and sort of dazzled people, so that's been a big part of the success too.

What can we expect from Ange this series?

She's not going to mellow! It's not like she's found a soul, although I'd argue that she has one, it's just deeply hidden beneath insecurity. I think you gradually get a tiny glimpse of why she is the way she is, but generally it's more of the same, she's as arrogant and catty as always – we might have even ramped it up more this time. There's lots of clashing with Christine, even though I think she's secretly desperate to be her friend. They have a proper physical fight this time, which was fun to film, although we had to be really careful with the wigs because they're worth a lot of money and we didn't want to get in trouble with the hair and costume departments!

There's more of Ange and Nigel this series too, which we wanted to include because Harry [Peacock] is so extraordinary. That was really fun to play. Ange is also quite excited by a peeping tom that turns up on the street – she's so desperate for people to think that she's attractive, so even though she is pretending to be outraged by this man, she's secretly chuffed. It's a huge moment for her and she leans into that in a horrifying way!

Do you ever struggle to keep a straight face when playing Ange?

Yes, embarrassingly so – it's shameful the number of times I appear on the bloopers reel! This time I lost it to an unprofessional level in one scene, just because of Harry's physical comedy, his face just gets me! Everyone in the cast is so funny, so you could crack up at any scene, and that makes it quite hard to keep a straight face. It was even harder this series, because we were all pushing it slightly further and trying to make each other laugh.

What has Alan told you about the real Ange?

She is an amalgamation of a couple of people – various frenemies rolled into one – but there's stuff Alan has told me that is so incredible, it beggars belief. There are a few things that would be brilliant to include in the series, but they seem so far-fetched – I mean, they're totally real, but no-one would believe them if you put them in the show! We had to tone certain things down because the true stories are so amazing!

How do you get into character?

The wig and make-up process is so long that gradually Ange just comes to life in the make-up chair. It takes about an hour and 45 minutes every day because she wears about eight layers of slap. Martine, who does my hair and make-up, is a genius and so is Heather who is in charge of costume – the minute I step into those clothes it helps me find Ange, and most of the time I need scaffolding to climb into it all, so it's quite elaborate! I can leave Ange behind when I take the wig off, but it's interesting that I find her walk lingers on a little bit, because she moves very differently to me.

What was it like co-writing with Alan on this series?

It was lovely. I have written for existing shows before, but it's amazing when you know all of the actors so well, and you can revel in imagining them being great in certain scenes, or knowing they'll love particular storylines.

It was a lovely job last time, so to be even more involved for series two felt quite special, but of course it was really intimidating as well, knowing how much everyone loved the show and that Alan's family would be watching. Writing about Alan's actual life is quite a delicate thing and although the tone is obviously light, it's moving too, so to be trusted with getting that right felt like a big deal. Also, there's obviously an incredibly sad reason why they needed another writer on the job this time after Simon passed away, so I had mixed feelings at the beginning, but everyone was incredibly welcoming and it was great fun.

What was the writing process like?

Initially I was brought in to be a sounding board and maybe give some notes, and then my role grew a bit. We went to Alan's house to chat through ideas and have writers' room days and then we would do the actual writing separately, before meeting up on Zoom, so it was a mix of in-person and online and we would knock ideas back and forth. Alan's cup runneth over when it comes to anecdotes, which is why he's so funny to be around, so he's got enough material for about three more series without even having to sit down and properly think about it. There are facets of his life and childhood that we just haven't got the time to explore because the episodes are so short, we could fill hours... which is why we need another series!

Will the real Alan be popping up in the show again this time?

Yes he does, we have built Alan into the episodes more this year, which I think he was up for – he's so brilliant that you just want to include him as much as you can really, it's such a lovely blast of energy and comedy every time he comes on. We've only got very short episodes to work with, but we pepper him through as much as we can.

Puberty is a big theme of this series – how much do you explore Alan's growing understanding of sexuality?

It's an interesting thing, because everyone knows Alan and the person he becomes, so the audience is sort of watching and waiting for him to realise certain things about himself, or for other people to clock things. It's just a case of working out how much you give away per series – you don't want to accelerate anything or race through it, we want to be quite true to the actual timeline of when Alan started to discover things about himself. He's definitely right at that age when school starts talking to you about puberty, so it felt like it sort of wrote itself.

I can't imagine how hard it would have been to realise you're gay in the 80s, especially in that football environment, but certainly all of us can identify with feeling awkward at a school disco. At the same time, Alan remains so unapologetically himself – even in the face of various difficulties, there's just a joy to him. He loves to entertain and make people laugh, he's so warm and you can't dampen that. He'll always bounce back no matter what happens, and that's what keeps the show feeling so upbeat.

Do you enjoy the 1980s nostalgia of the series?

Oh yes, there are so many things you see on set, where you think, "I had one of these!" or you remember one from your nan's house, all the little details feel preserved in time and our set dressers are amazing. We tried to get lots more fun, nostalgic references into the series this time, including some board games we remember well.

It sounds like a really fun show to work on? It's the nicest job I've ever had, to the point that we joke about how saccharine we all are, and how well everyone gets on. It's not like I've been on dodgy sets before, the atmosphere has always been nice, but this is on another level. It just feels like a big family across the entire cast and crew. We've all become very good friends and Dave our director is like a positive, energetic Labrador!



Harry Peacock is Nigel

How did you feel about returning for a second series?

I was really excited about coming back to Changing Ends because the first series was so much fun, and also I think we learned a lot from it about how to tell this story. It's been really enjoyable filming series two and I've got more to do this time, which is obviously a great compliment.

What can we expect from Nigel this time?

Nigel is such a fun part to play.

I love the 1980s costumes, they really help me get into character. It's not hard to find Nigel though, his accent isn't too far away from mine, just a little bit more Essex, and when I'm wearing clothes that are so of the time, it's just a case of getting into the material with the other actors and feeling your way a little bit. It's not too hard when everyone's really fun like our cast, and so good in their roles.

Do you ever find it hard not to laugh when you're filming these scenes?

I don't think there's been a scene I have been involved with where I haven't wanted to laugh, only because the material that comes my way is usually a bit more extreme and I have to be very earnest with it, saying quite ridiculous things in a very serious way. But it has been really nice to be involved in scenes like that. Nancy Sullivan, who plays Christine, got to the point where she couldn't look at me at all when we were trying to shoot. I had to look elsewhere so as not to make her laugh – I thought I must be doing something right! Any show I've done in the past that has really made me laugh when it airs has involved us all crying with laughter when we were trying to make it – it's a good sign when you're making a funny show.

How would you describe Nigel's marriage to Ange?

I think they've both got an idea of what their lives should be, it's that suburban dream and the sense of keeping up with the Joneses. They both look the part, so they're drawn to each other, but really they probably secretly despise each other. I love working with Gabby Best, who plays Ange, our scenes are really funny and she's just brilliant. As soon as I met her we had that chemistry and I knew we would work well together.

What is Nigel's relationship with Alan like this series?

Obviously Changing Ends is a really funny show, and I have lots of brilliant comic scenes that I'm involved with, but there's another side to it too. Alan grew up around football, with lots of machismo in the air. It would have been an environment in which coming out was very complex. We are showing that experience, which I think is quite a cathartic process for Alan, and Nigel does represent the man of his time. He's constantly saying, "There's something not right with that boy", which is awful, and must have been so difficult, isolating and strange for Alan at that time. Nigel represents that side of the story – he's just constantly looking and commenting about Alan.

Why do you think the series has struck such a chord with viewers?

It reminds me of The Wonder Years, it has that same sort of atmosphere. It's also really nostalgic and funny, and it's a true story, which is a great cocktail of things for an audience to enjoy. The props and design team have really tapped into that period, which makes it so much fun. Fingers crossed this second series will go down just as well and we get to make more episodes.



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Interview with Producer Mollie Freedman Berthoud and Director Dave Lambert

How did you feel about the wonderful reaction to series one?

Mollie: It was amazing. Changing Ends is such an incredible project to work on, everybody is so joyful and Alan is so generous with his story, so to get to a point at the end where the audience really appreciated what we'd done was so rewarding. It was such a nice feeling.

Dave: The reaction blew us away and I know Alan was over the moon with it. When you're working on a project you always have such faith in it, and we knew Changing Ends had the potential to be so funny and touching. But even so, when we started reading tweets from people saying they saw their own lives in Alan's story, that really got me. Things were very different in the 1980s, and I think people of Alan's generation really remember that time when people weren't so accepting. Being able to reflect that while making people laugh was really great.

What were your priorities for the second series?

Mollie: We wanted to continue honouring that feeling that viewers had got from series one, that sense that they felt seen – we wanted to carry on celebrating people being different. In sitcom land it's quite complicated to make people laugh but keep that real depth, while also reflecting the real story of someone's life, but we wanted to keep things as similar as possible while also moving the story along.

Dave: I always go back to Alan's first autobiography, which I had with me all the time during filming. It's only the first couple of chapters that are about his childhood, but they are so full of detail. For example, there's just one line about there being a peeping tom on the street, and it's just the seed of a story in the book, but it felt like a really funny idea for an episode. Alan just has the best anecdotes – he remembers so much about his friends and family, it never felt too hard to find the stories.

How did you cope after the devastating loss of Alan's co-writer, Simon Carlyle?

Mollie: It was so hard, Simon was brilliant on this show, whether it was bouncing jokes around or helping with the structure of the script and he was so integral to the beginning of the process, putting Alan on the right path to tell his own story.

Dave: Simon played a huge part in finding the voice and tone of Changing Ends, and he and Alan were just brilliant together. They hit it off straight away, and their upbringings were very similar, even though Simon was up in Scotland and Alan was in Northampton. They were so funny in the room together and they would just make each other laugh so much. It was really, really sad when he died, it was really hard to cope with.

Mollie: One of the last things we spoke about was how excited he was about the episode ideas for series two, so it was quite an easy decision for us to carry on because he loved this show and he was always so supportive of Alan telling his own story. Even so, it took us months to figure out how to work without him. Alan blew us all away by writing four of the scripts himself, and he would have done all of them if it weren't for time pressures. We wanted to bring in somebody who knew the show already to help, and we knew that Gabby Best, who plays Ange, was an established writer and hilarious on screen, so she came in towards the end and she was brilliant.

What makes Ollie [Savell] so perfect as Alan?

Dave: He's just unreal, he can really nail both the comedy and the pathos. He's the most incredible kid I've ever seen at a read through, because you have a room full of adults from various departments and he just owns it, sitting there reading in Alan's voice, with impeccable timing and instincts. I think when we first started on the show, we were all concerned that there was a version of it that would just be a sketch show, or feel like a caricature of Alan, which just wouldn't have any depth to it. It was important to find someone who would resemble and speak like early Alan, but who could stay truthful to him too and Ollie had that from the very beginning.

Mollie: Sometimes he'll find reads on gags that we haven't even seen, and his comic timing is phenomenal, but he also knows when the emotional beats matter too. He's a very intelligent boy and he cares about bringing depth to the performance. Whenever you're working with kids you always have to make sure that they're being supported, and we wanted him to understand why this story was being told. We spoke to him about going back to school after playing Alan and he didn't have any concerns with that at all, he told us he was representing a real story that really matters.

It's great because we can see his confidence growing as well, he's blossoming into a real character actor – he'll play many more roles in the future, it won't just be Alan.

Were you nervous about Ollie growing up too much between series?!

Dave: Yes, it was a bit tricky because we knew he would have grown, but we didn't want to move the story on too far. I was worrying that all the kids would suddenly be really tall with beards. It's 1987 in series two, rather than 1986, and it's a legendary year for Cobblers fans, so we wanted to tell that story. Ollie had indeed grown a couple of inches, but there's just something in him – as soon as he stepped on set with the teeth in and the glasses on he didn't look that different, I could see it was all going to be fine!

Do you continue to explore the relationship between Alan and his dad, Graham, this series?

Mollie: Yes that's another element you really want to keep, their relationship is the heart of the show. Graham is a slightly more absent father this time because of work pressure, but we still explore the relationship and there's a lot of emotion that courses through the pair of them, despite them not always being together on screen.

Dave: It's such a big part of the show, and such a potent mix of heart-breaking and heart-warming moments. Shaun [Dooley] is a brilliant actor, and he inhabits this character so beautifully.

How much interaction do you have with Alan's real family when making the show?

Dave: Alan's brother Gary has visited the set and really enjoyed being there.. Christine and Graham went out for a big lunch with Shaun and Nancy [Sullivan] before we started filming the first series and they knew everything about the show, but they don't come to set. So as soon as we had finished the first episodes we were asking Alan if he'd shown his parents yet. Apparently it really makes Graham laugh, so that's great!

Mollie: Christine and Graham weren't planning on watching it but Gary kept telling them it was really good, so they gave it a look and they absolutely love it now. We do keep inviting them to the set, but I think they're just happy to see the show when it's finished.

This series we see Alan and his family go on holiday to Great Yarmouth – was it a logistical challenge filming in a caravan?

Mollie: Yes, it's a great story but my heart sank when I thought about trying to find a 1980s caravan site! We did manage to find one, it's unbelievable and it looks amazing on screen.

Normally if you're filming in a caravan set you'd take a side off, or remove a window, but this was completely real so basically we all had to fit in there –the 1st and 2nd AC's were in a bunk bed and Dave & I had to watch from the second bedroom at the end!

Was that your biggest production challenge?

Mollie: The biggest challenge was just the quantity of scenes we tried to film – we've dialled up the complexity for series two ever so slightly. We have a school disco episode, which is a complicated thing to film with that many children and supporting artists, and there's another episode where we've got eight characters stuck in one room, which is just a challenge in terms of squeezing cameras in.

Dave: We were just trying to be a little bit more ambitious this time, because we knew what the show could be. It's always really tricky when you're working with kids because they can only be on set for a certain number of hours and then they have to do tutoring, so we need to factor that into the schedule.

Are there any new characters to look out for this series?

Mollie: There are a lot of new people, we have some new kids joining us and we meet Alan's nan too, although the character is actually an amalgamation of both of Alan's real nans. Casting was easy – we all really wanted Maggie Steed to play her and we were lucky she loved the script. It's great to explore Christine's relationship with her mother-in-law too.

Dave: It's a beautifully crafted episode, which is very much set in one place, and really relies on characterisation. It's quite exposed because we don't go anywhere, it's just people talking, it's all conversation. Alan was made up that we got Maggie for the role and she's amazing. She had a very distinct idea of the character because Alan had written her so well and she was so game. The character is very, very funny – Alan describes her as a wing-nan rather than a wingman!

It sounds like it was a lovely set to film on?

Mollie: I'm devastated when we finish each series because it's the nicest job I've ever had – lots of people on the team say that, there's a special place in our hearts for this show. If we could do this job all year round we would! Alan leads that because he's so warm and generous with his story – he gave us his trust from the beginning and was so kind to every department.

Dave: We wanted to make a warm show that really touches people, and it does feel warm on set too. When you're enjoying something and pouring love into the series it really does show. To me it's a real responsibility when you've got kids at the heart of the show too, I would hate for the set to be an environment where they feel they can't play around a bit, it was so important to respect their space too. In the end, everyone works very hard but we all just love being there.

Does the real Alan continue to pop up in each episode?

Dave: He does, even more so this time. I think we were more creative with his appearances this series, although I'm always worried about breaking 'The rules of Alan'! I started off treating him like a ghost, thinking he couldn't touch anything on set, but then I've realised it can be really funny if he interacts with the set and appears from different places.

Mollie: It did feel like he was around a bit more this series as he wasn't on tour this time, and we were definitely less bogged down in working out whether there were any rules to his appearances. Second time around, he just knew where to put himself for the most comic and narrative benefit. He always nailed his lines as well, so he'd hang around for hours and then do his scene in one take!

