



Daily Mail, Monday, October 27, 2014

Page 22

life

by Alison Boshoff

THE FORMERLY wild hair is sleek and glossy, the garish make-up replaced by glossy lips and rosy cheeks, and the leopard-print hotpants ditched for elegant designer garb.

Yet the moment Mel B opens her mouth to give this year's X Factor contestants her verdict, it is clear the 39-year-old is every bit as scary as in her Spice Girl days.

With her withering put-downs, foul language — she even barked at fellow judge Cheryl Fernandez-Versini, 1***ing Julie sitting next to this one — and aggressive 'I'd have you-in-a-fight' stare, she certainly doesn't scream prime-time family-TV star.

Her life off-screen is no less pungent, including an exotic-dancer ex-husband, fashion lovers and an unseemly paternity battle with Hollywood star Eddie Murphy, who was proved to be the father of her child. Yet since Mel B — real name Melanie Brown — sat down next to Simon Cowell on The X Factor in August, it seems she can do no wrong. Against all the odds, and the stiff competition from Tiny Tears Cheryl, she's become the most popular judge on one of Britain's most popular shows.

Indeed, compared to judge Cheryl — once the nation's sweetheart — comes across as macharine and dull. And thanks to a new wardrobe created with Eve, and a new haircut by Courtney, Mel is eclipsing Cheryl in the fashion arena. At the end of each episode, viewers have taken to Twitter to praise her as a "strong, acerbic, 'iconic' and the funniest judge ever."

Pity contestant Ben Haenow, who offered up a "crisis" backstory about his sore throat two weeks ago. Mel snapped: "We all get sick and we all deal with it — this life!"

Her return to favour is all the more surprising given the dire straits her career has been in for years. Only 13 months ago she released a single that sank without trace.

Indeed, it was in 2000 when, two years after Ger Halliwell quit the Spice Girls, the band's song releases hit an "acidic hiatus." Mel had a hit with the solo album Hot — which proved anything and everything she needed to re-establish her identity of being dropped by her record label.

She started her journey back to the spotlight with stints on the Australian X Factor and then as a judge on America's Got Talent. However, after appearing on the first season of Factor — DJ Sara Cox recently revealed she was offered the job before Mel B was offered it.

AND THE announcement that Mel B was to join The X Factor wasn't greeted with rapturous approval — that was all reserved for Cheryl's return. The expectation seems to have been that Mel B would play second fiddle to the Goode.

However, Mel never going to have any of that. "My God, she is 100 per cent diva," one former colleague told me this week, reporting how Mel rolled her eyes at the parade of wannabes vying up to kiss Cheryl's hand in the audition room.

"What am I?***ing chopped liver?" Mel demanded in the first show, with a withering look at a contestant. She cut in to "Pussy" for the rest of the night — setting the tone for her master classes.

Simon Cowell says his new springer reminds him of former judge Sharon Osbourne — although he has the advantage of being a couple of decades younger. "I don't want to work her stunning physique," he says. Her manager, Jonathan Shalit, tells me he isn't surprised to see her succeed. "Despite the gitz and glamour of her showbusiness life, she resonates with the man and woman on the street because, at heart, she is a blunt-speaking working-class Yorkshire man."

But while Mel certainly retains a thick Northern accent, few Yorkshire men have romantic Vicks that include a messy love affair with Eddie Murphy and a reported lesbian liaison with a Playboy model.

Although Melanie has been married to Stephen Belafonte, a film producer, since 2007, any domestic bliss has been a long time coming.

Her first try — with Dutch backing dancer Jimmy Gutz — was a five-star disaster. They met, when he was hired for the Spice Girls' tour —



Fierce: Mel B in the Spice Girls, and, top, on The X Factor

In 1998 and got married the same year, after she fell pregnant with her first child, Phoenix.

By the summer of 1999 the couple were living in separate wings of their mansion house in Marlow, Buckinghamshire, and communicating through lawyers. And in January 2000 they announced it was all over.

Mel gave him £1 million in the divorce, and fell head taken her for a ride. Her friends called him "Gimme Puzler" and "Jimmy Goldcard". She then met mother-of-two Christa Parker, whose children were at the same school in Los Angeles as Mel had an affair from 2003 for around a year with a third woman — Elizabeth Rodriguez, a sex-toy saleswoman — sometimes joining them in bed.

Christa told a newspaper: "I'd only had sex with a woman once before but Mel was obviously very experienced. Last year, Mel confirmed a 'five-year affair' with Dutch backing dancer Jimmy Gutz — was a five-star disaster. They met, when he was hired for the Spice Girls' tour —

my bed and that's it... I have a huge libido and a great sex life." The women's affair was abruptly canned when Mel fell for Eddie Murphy in 2008. They had a wild romance but when Mel announced she was pregnant, Murphy rejected her. In less-than-chivalrous style, he told a TV interviewer: "We're not together any more. And I don't know whose child it is, until it has a blood test." The blood test confirmed that Angel is indeed his. Murphy settled £5 million on Mel to bring her up their daughter, and, to Mel's credit, she has always declined to say anything disparaging about Murphy.

There was an alleged liaison with Playboy centrefold Liam Lee in 2009. Lee said she was intimate with Mel B in a lavatory a year after her marriage to Belafonte. Lee even alleged that he was waiting outside. "She just threw me up against the wall and started kissing me," said Lee. "It was maybe a five-minute kiss and after that she started going for other areas. After about an hour, a security guard came to check if they were OK, before asking them to leave."

Yet all such dramas seem ancient history now. The new Mel B appears to be a far more considered creature, a belated reflection in her style.

She no longer looks like the screaming happy of her Spice Girl days, mainly thanks to a polished wardrobe chosen by her stylist Jason Cole. As Mel told Grazia magazine: "He wanted to give me a sleeker, more chic look, and so far he's done wonders."

Meanwhile Cheryl — always hailed as the X Factor's style queen — has been in the sartorial doldrums. Cowell even called her "Helen" one show because of her emerald-green Lanvin gown.

Such pantomime sparring between judges is all part of the format but it's clear that the once-close relationship between the pair is not what it was.

While they used to go for cigarette breaks together and quiet champagne in Simon's dressing room, X Factor insiders say that doesn't

happen now. Which means a vacant spot has opened up for the show's Queen Bee, and Mel has had no trouble filling it.

Boasting of their increasingly fiery relationship last week, she said: "Me and Simon were behind the screen, waiting to go on, and he turns to me and goes, 'I have to tell you, darling, you look cute now.' I went, 'Well, what was I before?' and he says: 'Average.' I couldn't say anything back because the doors were opening."

EL CERTAINLY sets great store by her appearance. Some years ago she declared: "To me the best form of revenge is looking ***ing hot."

Her husband, with whom she has a third daughter, Madison, also has a reputation for being abusive. One former friend of the couple said Belafonte was the roughest man she'd ever encountered — and Mel B was probably the roughest woman.

"He is her rock," the friend said. "She totally relies on him — and, on the plus side, he absolutely has her back. He is totally loyal. But I'm afraid he is also monumentally abrupt and rude. Personally, I couldn't stand him."

That friend is not alone. Mel's family fell out permanently with the star at her wedding-wow renewal in 2008.

During the event, Melanie's mother Andrea was told by Phoenix that there were tensions between the couple. Andrea said: "I took Mel to one side at the end of the holiday and told her she needed to sort it out. I didn't say to leave him, just to sort out the relationship between them."

When word got back to Stephen, he told Andrea she would never see her grandchildren again. Since then, even Christmas presents for the girls have been rejected.

Is there cause for concern? In 2003, Belafonte pleaded guilty to a count of battery against his ex-partner Nicole Contreras — the mother of his daughter Giselle, 10. He had court-ordered domestic violence counselling.

A warrant was also issued over unpaid fines for an "animal control offence." It was said that he killed a duck with a brick outside his house in New Jersey. This he denies and has said: "Sure, I got into fights and I did get drunk but I don't do it now."

Mel, though, seems to be unperturbed. Perhaps a partner as pugacious as Belafonte is just what she needs. And as for those — said to include Victoria Beckham — who find her chippy and crude, Mel claims the sniping of her critics simply makes her current triumph all the sweeter.

The tree of Hell

IT'S KNOWN as the Tree of Heaven for the way it seems to reach up to the sky, it grows rapidly and has become popular to plant in parks, along roadsides and in landscaping schemes — since 2000 numbers have increased by 115 per cent. But *Albizia julibrissis*, a tall deciduous tree with large, striking leavers, is now being dubbed the "tree of Hell". The plant, originally from China, poses a threat to



METRO

Cheryl thunders at Cole blunder

X FACTOR judge Cheryl Fernandez-Versini blasted the show's warning sign as 'ignorant' when he called her Cheryl Cole off-scene. She was fuming when Ian 'Hokey' Hokey failed to get his tongue around her new married name. "It's said phonetically. You say it how it's written," she told him. Crestfallen Hokey later beamed: "She had every right to put me in my place!"



Mel Quick to feel Jake's pain

More than a few eyebrows were raised on an emotional judge Mel B burst into tears when her first act Jake Quickenden was kicked out of The X Factor on Sunday night.

But the ex-Spice Girl tells 3am: "I wanted to go in the corner and cry for two seconds. I felt his pain."

"I am a human being. I know him. He's part of my family now, I'm properly attached. His whole entire journey I've been right there. I'm close to all my boys. I am an emotional person. I do care."

Mel, 39, insists she'll stay in touch with hunky Jake, 26, and adds: "I wouldn't say I was an emotional wreck. I wasn't throwing my chair up in the air and throwing water over people."

Now that we'd love to see...



METRO

Andrei Harmsworth's guilty

X FACTOR judge Cheryl Fernandez-Versini blasted the show's warning sign as 'ignorant' when he called her Cheryl Cole off-scene. She was fuming when Ian 'Hokey' Hokey failed to get his tongue around her new married name. "It's said phonetically. You say it how it's written," she told him. Crestfallen Hokey later beamed: "She had every right to put me in my place!"



Mel: I could have really lost it...

Emotional: Mel B after her X Factor huff

MEL B. Mel B has admitted she's the only judge to be truly honest with her feedback while Cheryl Fernandez-Versini, Louis Walsh, or Simon Cowell congratulate contestants who sing off-key. "I'm close to all my boys. I am an emotional person. I work hard, said the one-time Spice Girl, who's now on the X Factor on ITV2 after her costume designer was thrown packing in the stage-off. "I just wanted to go into into a corner and cry just for two seconds. The judge — who also mentors Pat

Andrei Harmsworth's guilty

Emotional: Mel B after her X Factor huff

Emotional: Mel B after her X Factor huff

A SPICE NIGHT IN FOR MEL B

X FACTOR judge Mel B reveals she likes to dress up in her old Spice Girls costumes with friends when they come to visit.

The singer, 39, says she kept all her old outfits and that her eldest daughter Phoenix, 15, loves filling through them.

"I keep everything so on a Friday night when my friends come round we do dress-up," she says.

"I've still got all the old costumes in storage. My daughter Phoenix gets them all out and laughs her head off," adds Mel, who also has daughters Angel, seven, with Hollywood star Eddie Murphy, and Madison, three, with husband of seven years Stephen Belafonte.

Secrets... WHICH TV star pretends to be secretly still seeing his ex?

HE has never kept his opinions to himself and Morrissey shows no signs of biting his tongue on his latest tour.

The former Smiths singer was left unperturbed by concert halls he played in Italy causing him to vent his outrage on his blog True to Me.

The 55-year-old wrote: "We were shocked by the venues in Roma and Milan — both abysmal. Milan was just a field with a roof. I have never looked out at such an unhappy, uncomfortable situation in my life."

Morrissey claims he was recently dropped by label Capitol-Harvest Records following the release of his new album, World Peace Is None Of Your Business.

SINGER Rebecca Ferguson has welcomed a baby daughter named Arabella.

The Liverpool-born singer, 28, who announced her pregnancy in April after collapsing during a performance on ITV's Loose Women weeks before, messaged with the news on Saturday.

"I don't want to sleep. I just want to look at her. Thank you for all the love and support. Will update you all tomorrow."

The singer, who has two other children, Lillie May, nine, and Karl, seven, from a previous relationship, added later: "She is so perfect. My Arabella is like a beautiful little doll."

Picture: MICHAEL LOCCASANO/Getty Images



ITITUDE





The Daily Telegraph



MEL B has explained why she stormed off THE X FACTOR on Sunday night – saying she wanted to blub away from the cameras.

Scary Spice said: "When Jake (Quickenden) got voted off, I just wanted to go into a corner and cry for two seconds. I am an emotional person. I do care. I just felt his pain.

"I know what he has been through and how hard he has worked.

"I don't know what the other judges are like with their acts, I just know what I am like with mine . . . and that is all I care about."



Mel's tears as Jake makes a Quick exit

JAKE Quickenden last night became the latest X Factor casualty after losing in the sing-off to Only The Young. And while he took the decision in his stride, his mentor Mel B was in tears. She demanded of host Dermot O'Leary: "Why are you coming to me when I'm crying?" If

you could see the work he puts in. He's been through so much." Band Only The Young scraped through, but boss Simon Cowell branded both acts' efforts "horrible". After Jake – whose brother died last year – was voted off, Mel, 39, stormed off stage, wailing "Jake, Jake" and

motivating for him to go with her. Staff dragged the 24-year-old, of Scunthorpe, Lincs, back on stage. An onlooker said: "Mel looked distraught and angry!" Meanwhile, the ratings gap between The X Factor and Strictly widened on Saturday. The BBC dance show enjoyed an average audience of 9.5 million, compared to The X Factor's 7.4 million.



LOW NOTE Jake last night



EMOTIONAL Mel B

Scary but true – two decades later, Girl Power lives on

Once upon a time, in a land called The Mid Nineties, five heroines in their late girlhood were brought together to form a crack unit to challenge the supremacy of boy bands. They did this using strategic self-stereotyping, platform trainers, and some metaphysical entity entitled "girl power".

Their ethos – fun, sisterly love, lachrymose maternal sentimentality – was rather more successful than their collective musical abilities, which ranged from "Just" to "better when miming". However, Posh, Spice, Sporty, Baby and Ginger created a global phenomenon. The Spice Girls sold over 100 million records worldwide, making them the best-selling female pop group of all time, the biggest British pop phenomenon since the Beatles, and a posse of the canniest merchandisers-cum-

merchandise the world has ever seen.

Questions were raised about their sexualising of young womanhood (questions that seem nostalgically naive given that they remained clothed and unworking).

By the time the girls hung up their crop tops in December 2000, all were wealthy enough to settle in obscurity. And, yet, the extraordinary thing about the Spice Girls is that they have not. And even more extraordinary is what they have gone on to do as women.

Foremost among the popretail high achievers is Victoria Beckham, formerly the ironically named "Posh". As the wife of footballing icon, one-man-global-brand David, and a mother-of-four, Beckham, 40, is the one who might have been thought likely to vanish into bling domesticity. Yet, the least vocally equipped Spicegirl



"Scary" Spice (above, centre right) on X Factor and with the Spicegirls; inset, Victoria Beckham

was always the most ambitious, from her Essex-girl love of designer garb to her strenuous clawing in the direction of good taste.

So successful has her reincarnation as fashion maven been that this week she was awarded head place in *Management Today's* list of Britain's top 100 entrepreneurs, beating inventor Sir James Dyson, the Poundworld supremos and

rag trade veterans Dame Vivienne Westwood and Sir Paul Smith.

Beckham is now worth £210 million. Her business has grown from a turnover of £1 million to £30 million in five years, and she now employs 100 people. Her new Dover Street emporium has proved a rip-roaring success, while her appointment as a UN goodwill ambassador in September was the icing on her global power

broker cake (not that she has any truck with such trivia as food).

Meanwhile, Scary Spice Melanie Brown – though still scary; indeed, some of us may feel she is positively loutish – has harnessed her pugnacity for good as a judge on ITV's X Factor. Her bluntness-cum-viciousness is such that she makes fellow judge Cheryl Fernandez-Versini seem insipid, Simon Cowell appear

genial and Louis Walsh look like a saint.

However, viewers have embraced Brown, 39, for her humanity (witness Sunday night's genuine tears when her act got the boot) and the wattering masses have pronounced her the show's true winner, regardless of which dot gets elected as the finale. Cowell is reported to have already asked the Scary One to return next year, complete with a hefty pay rise.

It is no coincidence, either, that Sporty Spice – also "the one who could actually sing" – is also the one who solo career actually worked. Melanie Chisholm, 40, has sold over 12 million records and is distinguished as being the only woman to reach number one in the charts as part of a quartet, quintet, duo and solo. She held her own in 2012's TV spectacular *Supertour*, in which Andrew Lloyd Webber searched for a Jesus to her Mary Magdalene, together with the UK arena tour.

Known for her philanthropic work, Sensible Spice has recently called for starlets such as Rihanna to stop promoting themselves in such a hyperbolically sexual manner. Until this happens, Chisholm's five-year-old daughter Scarlet is banned from watching *Clash of the Idols's* oeuvre. Meanwhile, "Baby" Emma Bunton, 38,

appears remarkably well-adjusted, given that she was 19 when the quintet achieved global domination. No Lohan she. Instead, mother-of-two Bunton seems happy with family life with long-term partner Jade Jones and content to chug along in continued semi-celebrity as host of Heart FM's breakfast show.

It is only the fathomingly self-promoting Ginger Spice, Geri Halliwell, 42, who is yet to enjoy a renaissance, after a commercially, if not critically successful solo career, together with stints as a children's author and yogi.

And so, 20 years after *Girl Power* ruled the world, its legacy, and indeed its stars, reign on. In another 20 years, could the spice rebels be rebranded as national treasures? Reader, they just might.

Hannah Betts

SILINES UP SCARY FOR NEXT YEAR'S X FACTOR

EXCLUSIVE BY KATIE HIND LA Editor NEW X Factor judge Mel B has impressed Simon Cowell so much he has already asked her to sign up for next year's series.

The Spice Girl – who has the boys' category on the ITV show – has been a huge hit with viewers with her one-liners, and her dedication to her acts has impressed the boss.

Sources say Simon, 54, is sure to increase

her £1 million wage next year, too. One said: "Simon thinks Mel is great, she is very popular with the viewers, which to him is so important."

"She's normal, down to earth and connects with the audience. Cowell has noticed the dedication to her acts. She gives them as much time as they need, but won't take any nonsense.

"It's exactly what is needed. That's why he wants her back." The source went on: "Mel

is having a great time, too, she's enjoying it even more than she thought she would."

Scary Spice Mel, 39, was not top of Cowell's list to join the panel, alongside him, Cheryl Fernandez-Versini, 31, and Louis Walsh, 62.

There were fears she could clash with Cheryl, but the pair are getting on famously on the live shows.

The source said: "Simon, Cheryl and Louis

have worked together before so it's great Mel has fitted in. Cheryl had her own views on who Simon should have got and Mel wasn't one of them, but they have become really close and love working together."

Staff now describe Mel as the "most respected" judge. She previously worked on America's Got Talent and Aussie X Factor.

SAM'S DRUG CONFESSION: PAGES 16&17



Popular: Judge Mel