



# TAKING FLIGHT!

TO MARK INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2020, THE LADIES OF ATA GIRL ARE BACK



"**FOLLOWING THE** success and universal acclaim for the first set," says senior producer, David Richardson, "it was only a matter of time before we would return to **ATA Girl** – and this time it's in a new format, a two-hour movie for audio."

In 2018, Louise Jameson devised **ATA Girl**, based on the lives of the women who had served in the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), playing

their part in the British war effort during World War II. As well as creating the range, Louise acted in and directed the first series, with Helen Goldwyn producing. It was very much a female-led production, appropriate for its launch date.

And now, two years later on 8 March, the stories continue.

David says: "At the time of writing I've neither read the scripts nor heard a moment of the audio, which

is very exciting because it means I get to sit down with everyone else and immerse myself in this gripping drama that Louise and Helen have woven. Their passion for the project and their creative brilliance means it's going to be unmissable."

**ATA Girl 2** contains two new stories: *The Hardest Day* by Helen Goldwyn and *Au Revoir* by Louise Jameson. Louise admits: "I was absolutely thrilled to get the phone

(l-r) Kate Copeland and Helen Goldwyn

## IT'S A BIT LIKE TENKO, IT'S WOMEN IN ADVERSITY AND HOW THEY COPE...

LOUISE JAMESON

call from David to say Big Finish wanted to do more. It's only two episodes this time so Helen and I decided to write one each; she did the first, I did the second.

"It's a bit like *Tenko*, it's women in adversity and how they cope in those circumstances. There's some rat-a-tat-tat battles going on, especially in the first episode, but it's mainly to do with the relationships – who loves who, who's helping who, where the survivors are, where the ones that give up are – telling the stories of these amazing women who didn't have their songs sung at the time. These are stories you can put anywhere, whether the Rover's Return, or during World War II."

Helen agrees: "When Louise and I first heard from David that Big Finish wanted a second series of *ATA Girl*, we were delighted and nervous in equal measure. We'd set the bar so high in the first series and it had required so much research from all of us, it was a little daunting to embark upon it all again."



Will Scolding

"But so exciting to think of all the possibilities in terms of storylines and character journeys. Having two episodes commissioned this time meant that Louise and I could share devising and writing duties (along with the ever-brilliant contribution of script editor John Dorney, of course). As it turned out, because we had done so much research last time and knew the world so well, it was surprisingly easy to slip back into it all and just wonderful to hear some of the characters in our heads again."

Louise and Helen are joined once again by a talented ensemble to portray the main characters. Kate Copeland reprises her role as Pauline Gower, the real-life engineer and pilot who initially proposed the formation of the women's branch of the ATA. She is joined by Amy Downham as Tilly, the present-day granddaughter of series one lead, Amelia, who is making a documentary about the pilots. And Holly Jackson Walters and Elinor Lawless play international third officers, Felicity Moreaux and Rhiannon Geary, respectively.

The first series of *ATA Girl* was nominated for a BBC Audio Drama award in 2019, and Claire Wyatt won Best Female Radio Drama Performance at the One Voice Awards 2019 for her portrayal of Second Officer Mina Lauderdale.



FOR THIS new series, the timescale looks towards the end of the conflict. Louise says: "We've decided to pick the darkest day, the heaviest day of the Blitz bombing, and then the very end of the war with the announcement that hostilities had ceased. I don't want to say it was the day we won, because I don't believe anybody ever wins a war. We originally called them *The Longest Day* and *The Happiest Day*, but even with *The Happiest Day*, there was still so much tragedy around, it felt like the wrong title. I changed it to *Au Revoir*, which actually means 'to the next time' and not goodbye, so we haven't closed it off completely."

Helen continues: "My script for series two was born out of a historic walk I decided to go on at Kenley airfield which is very near where I live. The Kenley Heritage Project

offers free tours around the airfield with history experts, talking about the archaeology around the site.

"I almost didn't go in as I couldn't find the entrance and there was a heatwave that day and I'd forgotten my suncream, but I'm so happy I decided to go for it. It was the most fantastic two hours of inspiration in a wonderful setting.

"As soon as our tour guide, Linda Duffield, mentioned 'The Hardest Day' I knew that was my story setting. I mean, talk about handing me the idea *and* the title on a plate!"

Moving on to her tale, Louise adds: "My script started off as the celebratory one, so we have a New Year's Eve party, an engagement party and the end of the war, but because Helen's ends on a murder mystery, we decided to use that as an umbrella over the two stories and, hopefully, our



baddie gets their comeuppance, and we'll find out whether he or she gets away with it!

"They are standalone stories but for the diehards, I'm tying up a story that started in episode one, way back, as well as the murder mystery, so there's an A and a B story as well as a C story, with a contraband story in there too, which we haven't really touched on before."

(l-r) Cory Chambers and Elinor Lowless

**WORKING WITH LOUISE AGAIN WAS ONE OF THE BIGGEST PLEASURES OF THIS WHOLE PROJECT.**

HELEN GOLDWYN

AS THE series' creator, Louise admits that she is quite particular as to how each episode is realised. She reveals: "I was thrilled with the reaction to **ATA Girl**, it got a lot of positive reviews and comments. I'm so proud of it – I'm like a lucky hen! I'm so precious of it all, I must drive our poor sound designer Iain Meadows mad! I'm asking for things like, 'Can that pause be just a second longer?', 'Can you make those footsteps a bit faster?', or 'Can you put her in heels?'. He's such a brilliant sound designer, he just says, 'Yup, no problem,' and does it.

"I've said it before, but really you can't underestimate the sound design work on this set. As we speak I've only heard the first episode, but the work he's done on Helen's story is brilliant. There are aeroplanes and gun battles, and it sounds so good. I've not heard it with music yet, so there's even more icing on the top to come."

And Helen says: "I hope **ATA Girl** 2 entertains and satisfies listeners

in the same way as **ATA Girl**. We had a challenge tying up some of the loose ends from the earlier episodes, but I think we found some really creative solutions and kept the spirit and intention of the original series. I must confess, I had a sneaky listen to an early edit of *The Hardest Day* when Iain Meadows sent it through for Louise's directing notes. I'd intended to only listen to the first few minutes just to get a flavour, but ended up listening to the whole thing. What a job he's done on the sound design! Just stunning. Hopefully the listeners will be as gripped as me... and I knew what was coming!"

FOR HELEN, collaborating with Louise was a joy. She says: "Working with Louise again was one of the biggest pleasures of this whole project. We've been friends a long time and collaborators in many different ways over the years, but this was actually the first time we were writers on the same production. As a writing team we couldn't be more perfectly suited



Elinor Lowless

as I always over-write everything and put too much detail in, and Louise has the most wonderful talent for conveying layers of information in the most succinct, economical way. We both devised the storylines then went away and wrote first drafts of scripts then, together with John, we annotated each other's scripts and adapted accordingly. Sitting in Louise's kitchen brain-storming ideas

is definitely my idea of a wonderful way to spend the day!

"The studio sessions were hectic to say the least as the casts are unusually large. We also had to work around actor availability a bit so couldn't record all of the scenes chronologically. At one point I had to ask for the context of a scene as I'd got a bit lost – in my own script! Thankfully Louise did her usual brilliant job of directing and encouraging the best out of everyone.

"I play quite a big acting role as Faith Simpson in this series so there was a lot to think about on the day: acting; making sure everyone did their interviews; laying out lunch; getting folk into costumes and directing the photo shoot at lunchtime; and dropping actors to the station afterwards. Knackered, but extremely satisfying to get to the end of the day knowing that we'd somehow got it all covered."

Helen adds: "Series one had such an amazing response – far better than we had hoped for – and I think the true passion that went

into making the series by every member of the creative team, can be felt in the finished episodes.

"The whole project had an extraordinary energy about it from the outset as we all felt that we'd been tasked with an important responsibility. Everyone, from the wonderful writers to our incredible sound designer Iain Meadows, composer Howard Carter and cover designer Tom Newsom went way over and above expectations with their attention to detail.

"Even on the recording days the atmosphere in the studio was electric and the same could be said of **ATA Girl 2**. We thought it might be a little more 'the norm' but it felt just as exciting and special as before."



FOR THOSE who haven't heard any **ATA Girl** yet, Louise says: "I think it's a series that's worthy, not just because of the amount of talent that's gone towards its conclusion but also because of the women that it's about. These are unsung heroines and very brave women – especially our main protagonist, Pauline Gower, who managed to get equal pay for equal work. This was back in 1942 and we're still fighting that battle!"

And Helen says: "Every single thing that we write is inspired by the real lives of the real women. We've been very careful about that, and I'm very proud of the end product." **VORTEX**



#### **BIG FINISH ORIGINALS:** **ATA GIRL 2**

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