

ALL BACK TOGETHER – BUT DO THEY WANNABE?

'IF IT MAKES US A FEW QUID, IT'D BE NICE'

OK! JOINS THE **SPICE GIRLS** WHERE IT ALL BEGAN TO LAUNCH THEIR NEW MUSICAL

Victoria Beckham may have said barely a word at the launch of new Spice Girls musical *Viva Forever!*, but the global fashionista still had us all talking, as we wondered why she didn't look as pleased as the others to be there.



As Mel B and Geri Halliwell filled any empty silence with their usual gift of the gab, a reticent Victoria – wearing one of her own creations – barely cracked a smile and mysteriously kept touching the tip of her nose as she looked on nonplussed.

The plush launch, which took place at the luxurious St Pancras Renaissance hotel – the very same venue the girls shot their video for *Wannabe* in 1996 – should have been a moment of pure joy for the Spice Girls and their legions of devoted fans. But, in reality, those of us in attendance were left wondering what was up with Victoria.

While her bandmates really got into the spirit of the event, having brought along their smiles and happy demeanours to announce their upcoming West End money-spinner, Victoria seemed to have left hers back in Los Angeles. Perhaps, she was still a tad jetlagged after flying into the UK from the States. Or perhaps the rumours were true – she doesn't get on with one or two of the mouthier members of the once global sensations.

If rift rumours are accurate, Mel B, in Lanvin, Mel C, in Acne, Geri, in one of her own Next creations, and Emma Bunton, in a vintage royal blue dress, managed to successfully paper over the cracks and put on an admirable show of unity, bantering with each other like they did in the good old days and even poking fun at their past fall-outs.



Above: The girls were joined by the show's producer Judy Craymer and writer Jennifer Saunders (below) at the launch

But Victoria remained pretty much silent throughout the 15-minute press conference, attended by hundreds of the world's media. Not only that, her lips remained pursed. Only once did she pipe up to say: 'We're going to introduce a whole new generation to girl power. What we do individually and collectively is empower women. We're so excited about the whole thing,' before returning to her monk-like silence.

The strange relationship between the girls was also apparent at the photo-call. During the snaps, Victoria insisted on standing at the end of the line-up and, in several shots, appears to be standing apart from the other girls, who hammed it up for the cameras, giggling and hugging like schoolgirls.

However, Victoria did admit: 'It's worth making the trip [from her home in LA] because I think the show will be something to be proud of. The Spice Girls' legacy lives on. What we did together really was quite phenomenal and we're so proud of what we achieved as a group.'

The rest of the band appeared equally excited about the musical, which opens at London's Piccadilly Theatre on December 11. 'When we wrote the line "zig-a-zig-ah" we had no idea it would end up in a West End musical,' Geri said. 'The test of a great song, though, is if it still sounds good after ten years. I feel really proud of that.'

Mel C, who has appeared in *Blood Brothers* in the West End and is about to star as Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, gushed: 'The West End is so respected around the globe. If we can fly the flag with a British musical, that's a great thing. And if it made us a few quid, it'd be nice.'

With Jennifer Saunders behind the script and *Mamma Mia!* producer Judy Craymer calling the shots, the girls can look forward to making more than just a handful of loose change as the show – if successful – stands to make in excess of £100 million. As the girls have writing credits on their songs in the show, they stand to earn a bucketload too.

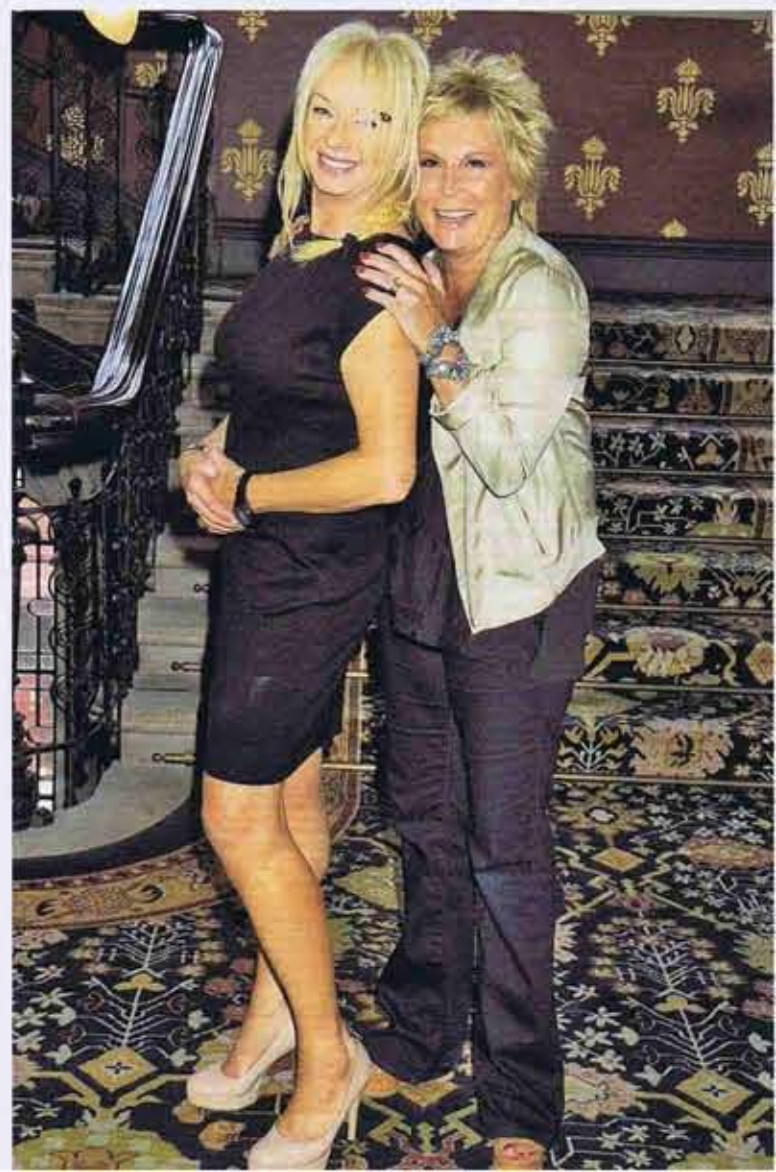
But what's the show actually about? Will it be a nitty gritty look at the girls' pre-Spice struggles? Er, no! The story will focus on a beautiful, talented girl and her best friends who get swept up in the obsession of today's TV celebrity culture. Judy explained: 'We listened to Spice Girls songs for nine months non-stop. Jennifer came up with a heart-warming family story that touches on celebrity today,' Jennifer added: 'I remember the joy, energy and positivity they brought and I wanted to bring that to the story.'

OK!

TICKETS FOR 'VIVA FOREVER!' ARE NOW ON SALE AT WWW.VIVAFOREVERTHEMUSICAL.COM

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FEATURE BY CHRISTIAN GUILTEANNE PHOTOGRAPHS BY GETTY IMAGES, PA, THE PICTURE LIBRARY



Main: Mel B, Mel C, Geri Halliwell, Emma Bunton and Victoria Beckham launched their new musical (inset) at the St Pancras Renaissance hotel, where they filmed the video to *Wannabe* (right)