

THE PRODUCER

Photographed by NEIL GAVIN

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Judy Craymer

Judy Craymer will not take no for an answer. Twenty years ago, she was a horse-mad girl from north London who wandered around, droning on about a musical she wanted to make with some kitsch Seventies tunes. That musical was *Mamma Mia!* and she is now a millionaire, many, many times over. Energetic, in-your-face and as tenacious as a teenager in Topshop, Craymer, now 55, nagged Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus for 10 years before they agreed to let her use Abba's songs. 'I worked out that a producer was the one in charge,' she says. In charge is about right: she manages her life like a military operation, with homes in London and New York (she buys two of everything). There's not much time for relaxation, apart from 'a bit of Bach in the mornings'. She's focused on her work – and getting her highlights done – and travels everywhere by taxi, as she has since she was a broke student who would spend her last fiver on a cab fare. 'I'm totally high maintenance,' she says, and her outfits, usually, say it even louder: leopard-print shirt, heaps of gold jewellery and almost hilariously blonde hair. She's not exactly a bombshell – more a zeitgeist-shaping missile. Her feelgood empire is about to reach ever more Prozacian heights with another love-it-or-hate-it-it's-coming-either-way production, this time featuring the music of the Spice Girls. Craymer says she's always admired Geri's 'chutzpah and balls', as well as the powerful brand of cheery feminism-lite that the band espoused. She personally goes for 'the Wonderbra approach to feminism – it's more uplifting'. **Violet Hudson**
Viva Forever! opens 11 December at Piccadilly Theatre, W1 (vivaforeverthemusical.com).

