

Late-night radio talkshow host Bill Buckley invites The Pulse inside his luxurious riverside apartment and tells **MARK HILL** about his enduring love affair with South London and how his mum got him started in the first place

BILL Buckley is considered by thousands as radio's best kept secret. His unique theatrical style has seen his weekend programme grow from strength to strength and now enjoys cult status. Bill's career took off in 1982 when he landed the role of co-presenting hit BBC consumer programme *That's Life!* with Esther Rantzen – reaching audiences of up to 20 million at its peak.

After *That's Life!* Bill worked as a presenter on BBC's *Breakfast Time* before going on to become a presenter for the BBC's *Holiday* programme.

Now 48, he is presenting his late-night show every weekend on LBC where he can be found participating in comical sing-alongs with callers and entertaining London with his up-beat, and often shockingly candid, banter.

So what brings the man from the West Midlands to South London?

"I found myself single at the age of 40 and I thought, 'What home would I most like to have?'," says Bill.

"I thought more than anything in the world, I would love to be as close to the centre of London as possible and with a river view.

"I spent a day walking along the riverbank and called in at various developments along the way – thinking how little you get for the money and maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all!

"Then I found this place in Vauxhall and I managed to get what I wanted – two bedrooms and a fantastic river view. It's a great location and I love the fantastic view looking west. I'm very happy here."

He says he is at his happiest "sitting on my beautiful terrace looking out over the Thames in summer and serving the best food I can cook to my friends.

"I also like the fact that when I moved in I hadn't realised that I was moving in to the heart of the Portuguese community.

"You get the most fantastic selection of Portuguese restaurants and bars in Vauxhall, which is great.

"There's a great community feel here – I love the diversity. To me, South London is vibrant, gritty and real. I think it's just great."

Back in 1986 Bill wrote the number two hit record *Starting Together* performed by *Hi-de-Hi!* star Su Pollard.

"It came about because I was working on *That's Life!* and Desmond Wilcox, Esther's late husband, was making a documentary series called *The Marriage* which followed a couple through from getting engaged to the aftermath of the big day, and they were looking for a theme song.

"So, along with many other writers, I submitted my song having already got Su Pollard on board, and it was chosen.

"It was very exciting. I've always written songs and always believed they were of a professional standard and all my friends and family said they were good, but I liked the validation of 350,000 people going into shops and buying it.

"Then I could then say I'm a song writer."

That's Life! was one of the most popular TV shows of the 1980s and Bill has his mum to thank for being involved.

"I went away for a month to Australia and my mother read in a paper the previous presenters of *That's Life!* were leaving. She thought if she waited to tell me until I returned it would have been too late to apply, which was correct, so she sent my details and that got me past the first interview.

"Five-and-a-half thousand people applied and they saw only 100 so I had to fight my way past the last 99.

"I loved doing the show, it was great fun. It was my first TV work so it was a great learning curve and I've never worked so hard in my life, before or since."

Bill has worked with, interviewed and met an array of showbiz names, but who sticks out most in his mind?

"Well, my two proudest television moments were being insulted by Terry Wogan and Les Dawson, funnily enough!" he says.

"Les was such a lovely man – one of the nicest men you could ever hope to meet. I was on *Blankety Blank*, on the panel and he came to me and I had the word wrong for about the third time in a row. He said, 'Don't worry about it, love, you're only here as ballast'," Bill admits, laughing.

Bill's guilty secret is that he has auditioned for top talent search *The X Factor* every year and gives *The Pulse* readers an insight into the show.

"It's very unfair, really, because the original judges, who are probably people from the recording industry, filter out the 'okay' people and leave in the brilliant people and the nutters!

"So, when Sharon and Louis and Simon eventually arrive, they see the very best and the very worst. And the worst have got through stage one so they don't think, 'I'm being set up to be made a freak of', they think they have a real chance! I think it's very cruel."

Back to the late-night radio show, how does he deal with the more inebriated callers?

"The producers field the calls of people who are drunk, insane or liable to swear but nobody can do that 100 per cent," he says.

"I have my finger very near the 'dump button' at all times. On the whole, I'm spared the nightmare of talking to idiots."

So what's the trick to hosting a successful late-night talk show?

"Perhaps people recognise that I'm less guarded than many other radio presenters and you really are getting the real deal. I'm not afraid of it going off in any direction so it's a fairly unpredictable listen. It can get quite serious and heated at times, but perhaps it's honestly people like," he says.

"My mother always said it was extremely fortunate that I managed to find a way of actually being paid to talk – rather than give it away for nothing."

● Bill Buckley is on LBC 97.3FM on Saturday and Sunday from 1am.



AT HOME: Bill Buckley in his riverside flat in Vauxhall

Picture by Phil Stephens