

CHOICE WORDS

Celtic Queen

Star of *Letter To Brezhnev*, **Nargi Clarke**, is currently playing Queenie in the BBC series *Making Out*. She talks to **Chris Granlund** about her life and her reading habits



I'm a print junkie, so I read *everything*. When I was a kid we didn't have any books in our house but even though we didn't read we were taken to the opera. Me uncle Bernie, he's a docker, he's obsessed with the opera and he used to drag us off to *La Boheme*, all the very romantic operas. He'd take us to the Philharmonic recitals in Liverpool and he'd cause murder because he'd be shouting for requests so invariably we'd be turfed out.

All the family are dockers and seafarers and me dad tells great romantic stories. He would say: 'You're really a Celtic queen Margi, but the Celts were socialists and that's why they got fucked off.' And I would ask: 'How do you mean dad?' and he'd say: 'Well, in the domain of the Celts the poor lived with the kings and queens; ate with them, slept under the same roof, sang songs together, got pissed together. And that's why we still say "our" Frank and "our" house; it's a socialist form of language because it's not saying "mine", it's "ours".' Me mother's more practical. She's the Labour councillor who fights for the housing and social services. She'll make sure you don't get cut off with the *leccy*. She's well loved up there and likes a game of bingo. Neither of me parents read really.

I used to love the *Bunty* and I'd do messages on a Saturday so that I could get it every Monday. And I really used to chew on it, read it about ten times, suck the bone dry. I used to go to Birkenhead market with me auntie and I'd go to the comic mart - I used to love

Superman comics - but mainly it was the people on the market I'd be really interested in. On Sundays at home me mother would put the dinner on, there were ten of us, and we used to be lashed out: 'You get out, get out and play!' We're catholic, you know, and round the corner was the Salvation Army Hall and it was blasphemous for us to go there. But we'd go in anyway and they used to ask us about religion. I was very up on all that because of me mother. Once, when I got asked about David and Goliath, I answered and I won a book. I won *The Famous Five* and that got me reading and I went on to Richmal Crompton, so I started on really middle-class material!

When I was about 18 me brother, Michael, was in London hanging around Piccadilly and that and he said: 'Look kid, if ever you go to a

party, here's the books you've read and here's the records you've listened to.' He said: 'You've listened to *Velvet Underground*, you've read Ginsberg, you've read Kerouac.' So he turned me on to all these books. I read *On The Road* and it was an opening, I read Dostoevsky. The greatest thing about books, especially when you're a teenager, is that you might think your head's done in but you can pick up a Russian classic and lo and behold, inside that text is a thought that you've had yourself and it takes away the isolation. I read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when I was about 19, that made a lasting impression. You can never tag Orwell, he's claimed by the Right and by the Left only the liberals have never had the guts to claim him!

I read everything from *Woman's Own* to *Marxism Today*, the *New Statesman*,

Tatler, *Harpers And Queen* and *Vogue*. I used to steal *Tatler* and *Vogue* back up home, buy a cheap magazine and put it down on top of the expensive one. Hide the loot under the light, that was my motto because that's the last place anyone looks! I love to go to the shops. They're the new cathedrals, no one goes to Mass any more, they go to Tescos. Well, occasionally I go to Mass but I'm more of a Jacobean catholic, I'm a Celtic-druid catholic. The druidic Celts formed an allegiance with Catholicism very early on, that's what the Holy Grail is all about. I love to read anything on King Arthur, I love the legends.

I'm writing a book, *Leaving The Twentieth Century*, it'll be considered an important book by the next centurions, not by us because we're in the midst of the pain of it all. I hate the way we are being forced to live in the past with Thatcher's Victorian-age stuff and all the mock-Georgian houses and 40s', 50s', 60s' style shit, I hate it. That's what the book is exploring, the experiences of our generation who are caught at the turnstile of the next century. In a way we have to work with what Thatcher has done, some of it might even be useful but what I find most offensive is its lack of *philosophy*. For Tories, success just means chopping the fucking rungs off the ladder as you go and I don't like that.

There was this guy in Liverpool called Roger Eagle and he was sort of our mentor, he collected people and trained them! Anyway, one day he said to me: 'Margi, have you read *Tiger, Tiger* yet?' And so I read it. It's a great science fiction book by Alfred Bester and everyone read it years ago in Liverpool. It's about the future but not about the usual technology. It's about the technology of the mind and the dawning of the aquarian age. It helps us to make quantum leaps of the mind and I think we should encourage that because they belong to us you know, our minds, they're the most god-given things. •