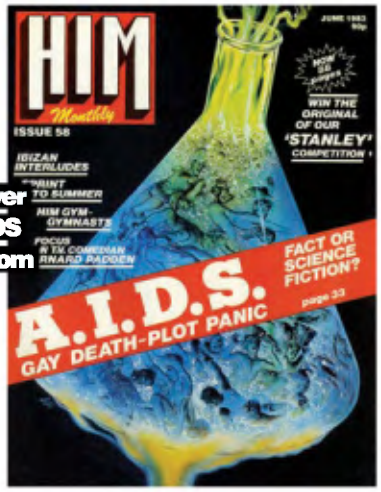
Writer, husband, artist, creator of Queer as Folk, spokesperson, award-winner, 'influential gay', OCE, icon, legend – whatever you know him for, rejoice because Russell T Davies is returning to British television. And by God, did we need him.

Every decision creates ripples – life's like that. A Gay Times cover in 1983 is, it turns out, the catalyst for the next big Russell T Davies drama. No, not the ever so eagerly awaited Cucumber and Banana coming to Channel 4 and E4 in the New Year,



The Oliver Frey AIDS cover from 1983 >

but the drama after that – his next commission for 2016.

Russell is a man on a mission, as we discover in a lengthy catch-up that goes from his early days dancing as God for Princess Diana at university – "She leaned forward and went, 'Dance dance dance!'" – to what planet the Weeping Angels came from – "Zigbod." And, of course, which other icons will make GT's special anniversary edition: "Just bump all the others out, like those shows where one guest just keeps talking, and they'll all end up with a little paragraph."

But, back to that ripple...

"I can remember the most stunning moment – my Gay Times memory, that I'm going to write about in 2016 – that Oliver Frey AIDS cover with all the men in test tubes, boiling. I was in university and it was the first thing that made AIDS absolutely real – HIV, the scale of it and the terror of it, actually. I can't remember what stage we were at or what was in the magazine, but the cover, that artwork of men just boiling and dying inside a test tube. I've never, ever forgotten that.

"I actually said to Channel 4 that I think at my age, I've probably been spending my whole life building up to write about AIDS in the 80s. That's what I'll write next. They said, 'Thank you very much, we'll have that.' I dunno what shape or form that's taking, but I don't think you can talk about that enough. It's the holocaust."

As we speak, he's quite literally just finished the last rewrites for the final two episodes of Cucumber. The first two episodes are 'locked' and, for a project that's been so long in the making, Russell is pleased.

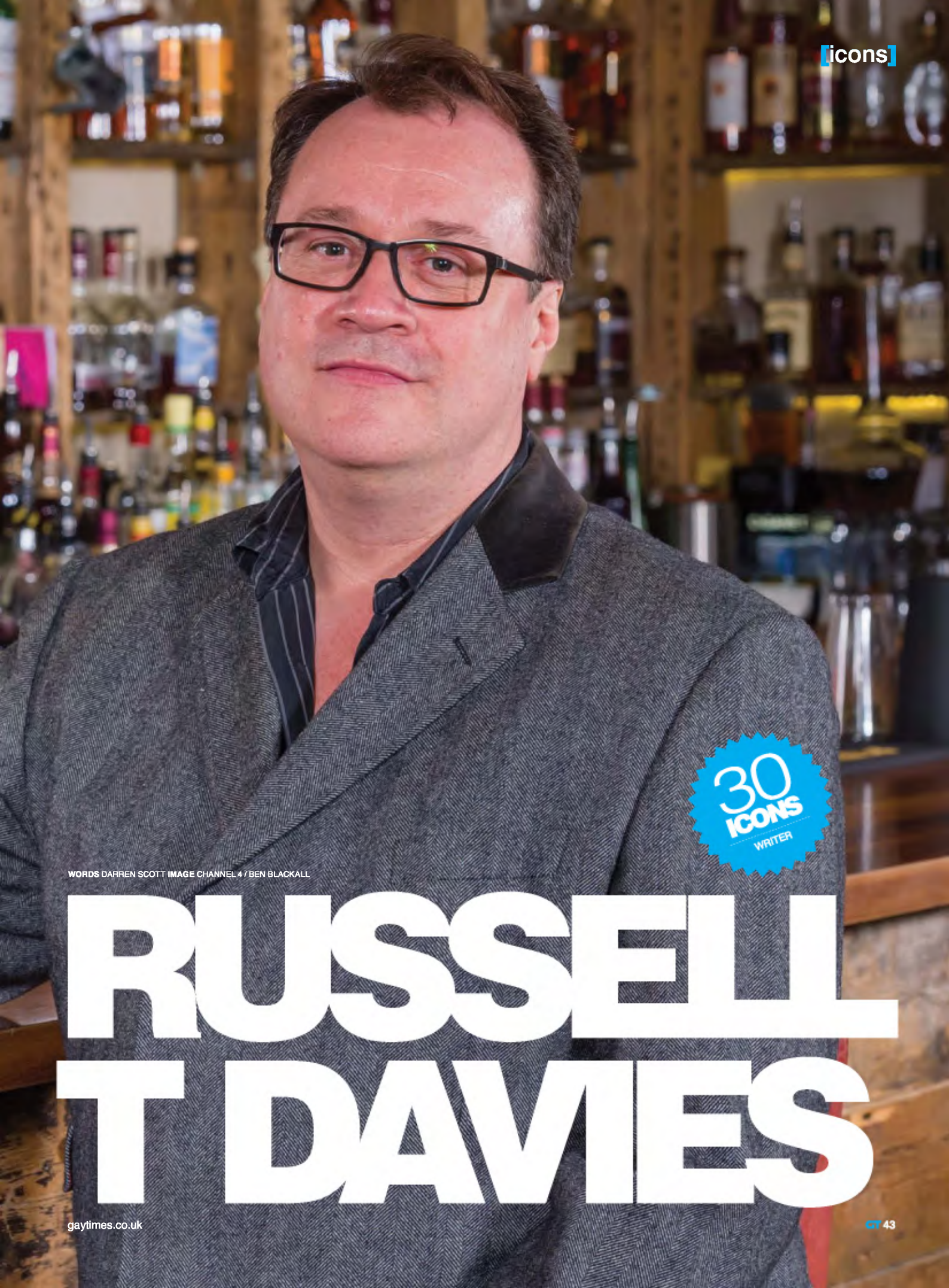
"Who knows how people will respond to it? But it certainly is exactly what I wanted it to be. I'm very, very happy with it."

He reveals there are more than 150 speaking parts across Cucumber and Banana – a collection of cast and creatives, new and established, who'll 'take your breath away.'

"The scenes of men in love, and arguing, and in bed together. It's so nice to see that. There's not such an emphasis on beauty. There's scenes that are warm and lovely and rare. You think, 'God, you just don't see this on television.' It's really nice. Banana especially ticks so many boxes – but we didn't do it to tick boxes. It's really lovely."

But that, in keeping with our non-linear interview, is a tale for another time. But it heralds a new era for RTD.

"I reached my 50s and that's when you stop running and start looking back. More and more people my age, this is when you start coming



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WRITER

WORDS DARREN SCOTT **IMAGE** CHANNEL 4 / BEN BLACKALL

RUSSELL T DAVIES

to terms with it all – and actually, for some people, that's devastating.

"I know a lot of people who reach 50 and get tired of running from their demons, but their demons don't get tired and they catch up. I don't have those sorts of demons chasing me, but I think it's time to stop and look back. Oh my goodness, the stuff I ran away from, the friends who died and the friends of friends. The world and things that were said..."

But there's something else – a question that Russell's been building up to asking...

"I always maintain that the most important thing you can do as a gay man who has any sort of public life – and I have a little bit of a public life with the stuff that I write – is be visible. Homophobia rises up when people have never seen a gay man. That's where it comes from. We never ever talk about homophobia properly. We always sort of stop at the really simple argument of going, 'Well I bet they're secretly gay.' That's not the point. Weirdly that makes homosexuality the problem. We kind of end up blaming ourselves by going, 'Homophobic people are secretly gay.' Some people are just homophobic, they're not secretly gay. They don't want any cock whatsoever, they're just genuinely homophobic.

"Hardly any work is done among us – among society, commentators, the press, academics – as to where that comes from. Where instinctively that comes from. You get these people who genuinely look at you and get a gut reaction that says you shouldn't exist. And we don't examine that enough. It's like, 'What is wrong with you?' That's the point. This is my great campaign. Maybe that's my next drama that I have to write – in 2017.

"When someone attacks us... No, let's take the word 'attack' out of it. When someone genuinely OBJECTS to our existence or wishes us to be quiet, we automatically defend homosexuality. We end up in this position where we state out right to exist. We state how the law has changed – the history – we talk about our instinct, we talk about our hearts and our soul. It's the wrong conversation. The right conversation is to say, 'What is wrong with you?'"

The man has a point. It's a simple question, yet powerful.

"We never do that, you never see someone sit there on Question Time when someone has a pop saying, 'I don't think you should be allowed marriage. I don't think you should be allowed to adopt.' Don't argue about marriage, don't argue about adoption. That's not what the question is. The question has suddenly become, 'What is wrong with you?' Literally. What is there in your heart and your soul and your guts that actually hates us? Hates us to the point of saying we shouldn't exist. Not only do you hate us, but you then think you have the right to stand up in public and change the law to guarantee we don't exist!

"There's all sorts of things I hate: lots of people I hate, lots of clothes I hate, loads of shops that I hate. I don't actually stand up in public and say, 'They should be destroyed!' That's an extraordinary leap to make. It's ABSOLUTELY extraordinary. And literally we should have t-shirts saying 'What is wrong with you?' Placards saying 'What is wrong with you?'

"When people pipe up with their genuine beliefs in which they genuinely dislike us and genuinely object to us – what is wrong with you? That's our response. We never do that. We talk about ourselves and we make ourselves the problem. We're not the problem. Way past that now. What is wrong with you. I'm going to make a line of clothing, RTD clothing, no, RTDC. It's just going to have a big slogan on it saying 'What is wrong with you?' In big Katharine Hamnett lettering. WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU? Because what's the answer to that? It's fascinating."

Queer as Folk on the cover of Gay Times in 1999 >

BBC

The question has become, 'What's wrong with you?' What is there in your heart, soul and guts that actually hates us? Hates us to the point of saying we shouldn't exist?

And that's before we even tackle the arguments in our own community...

"I sit there thinking, 'gays are not about representation and we must move on.' And then I watch telly and some awful gay flounces on and I go, 'that's not me!' It's visibility again. We're not seeing enough. This is another Cucumber and Banana argument which is, it's not about representation, because people talk as though once you get equal representation and equal laws that therefore, 'why are you writing a gay drama? We've solved all these problems.' You're not writing the drama for equality and representation, that's the law.

"Straight people don't do that. Straight people have been writing dramas for thousands of years about themselves. We've barely begun to look at who we are and why we react in the way we do. Our social structures, our friendships and our loves and our hates as gay people. It's barely been touched on, there's a million miles to go. We're just starting now."

Talk of there being a lack of role models and icons for him when younger – "I thought Larry Grayson was hilarious. I loved all that. I'm sorry that they're the first lemmings over the cliff. They get torn apart in hindsight" – then turns to modern day gay culture turning on the likes of Gimme Gimme Gimme and, more recently, Vicious.

"I thought it was hilarious," says Russell. "I laughed and laughed. Alright, I'm focusing on gays for the rest of my life, I think. And the drama I'll write in – I'm up to 2018 now – I'll write a drama about our war on camp. Because we are. This is very obvious, with every Grindr message saying 'straight acting' as though camp is offensive.

"I think it's very, very rare to meet a gay man without a little bit of camp in them. When they're at their quietest, when they're at their most intimate, if you get them alone just a

little bit – I argue with friends about this. I have friends of mine who just say I'm talking shit, which is fair enough, but I genuinely think that. I think there are little moments of grace in us that are quite beautiful, when we can all have a bit of camp. I can be as loud and camp as anyone."

Really?

"I know you've never seen this! I've hidden it from you in case you get," Russell drops to a whisper, "turned on."

Back, back, back! And hopefully, never going away again. With new dramas that will no doubt be just as iconic to future generations as Queer as Folk was to older ones. But not looking back, in certain areas – namely writing for Peter Capaldi's Doctor Who...

"With Andrew [Smith, Russell's partner] being ill, it's really kind of shown me mortality. It's made me realise we're only on this Earth for a while and all the ideas that I have in my head, I have to write. And actually, not even going projects that last more than one year anymore.

"Cucumber will just finish after episode eight – and that's the end. There won't be a Cucumber 2. That's my life right now – one project a year – because I can't work as hard as I used to. I need to look after Andrew, which is fine, that's a privilege to look after someone. Thank God he's here. But it kind of gets your priorities sorted, and looking back to an old show isn't one of them, really.

"Literally, I can plan out the next five years of things that I'll write, and I'm lucky in that people will still make them. A lot of these projects I'm talking about are gay projects. It's getting older. When you're in your 30s, you get called a gay writer and you think, 'Well, I'll show you. I'll show you I can write anything.' And I did! I wrote things like The Second Coming, I wrote Doctor Who, all sorts of non-gay stuff. But as you get older, you stop running so hard and you think, 'Actually, I don't care if I am a gay writer. I have a million, million gay stories to write – and I'm going to write them! So hooray.

"We're barely beginning to explore this stuff. It's brilliant, there's so much to write about. And if they stop commissioning me, then I'll start writing books, because I'll just go and write it on scraps of paper and scattering them to the wind.

"It just has to be written. There's a lot of work to do."

And if there's anyone up to the task, dear readers, it's Russell T Davies. Thank the gay gods he's back. ■

Cucumber and Banana are due to air in early 2015 on Channel 4 and E4 respectively, @cucumber

Russell on set with the cast of Banana >