



# Backstage with Meera Syal

The talented actress, who stars in a new Sky Arts series, invites us into her dressing room...

**HD FIRST LOVE**  
Wednesdays from Wed 11,  
8pm, Sky Arts 1 (258 HD/256)

## A dressing room is just a room

until you make it your own. It's home for however long the run is, and the only place you can get your head and nerves together before a performance. At the moment, I'm in a one-woman production of *Shirley Valentine* in the West End. But this room is backstage at London jazz club Ronnie Scott's, where filming *First Love* for Sky Arts gave me the opportunity to revisit something in my life that I loved and lost.

I sang in a jazz band in my early twenties when I first came to London, and it was one of the happiest periods of my life. I loved the experience, but then I got

married and had a kid – and you can't traipse around jazz clubs with a baby. Other than a couple of small musicals I haven't really sung in my acting career. I missed the camaraderie of singing in a band so I jumped at the chance to do it again for *First Love*.

The excellent singer Jacqui Dankworth (daughter of Cleo Lane and the late Johnny Dankworth) mentored me for a gig for the show at Ronnie Scott's, where I saw my idol Nina Simone perform some years ago. I was full of nerves and completely overwhelmed about singing to one of the toughest audiences anywhere – the people who come to Ronnie's really know their jazz. How did I do? Well, you'll just have to tune in to the show and judge for yourself!

### 1 Vinyl and CDs

Music is important as it gets me in the mood for a role. I've got Willy Russell reading *Shirley Valentine*, *The Essence of Jazz* and my *Jackie* compilation for '70s cheese.

### 2 Stage make-up

You have to do your own make-up in theatre, so I know which products hold up under the lights.

### 3 Scented candle

Because a lot of dressing rooms smell of armpits!

### 4 Ganesh picture

I always take a picture of Ganesh, the Hindu god, into my dressing room. On film sets in India people break

a coconut and say a prayer to Ganesh – actors follow him because he's the god of new beginnings.

### 5 Throat lozenges

There are two lozenges I swear by: Vocalzones to get rid of phlegm that sits in your throat; and Jakemans Throat and Chest Sweets, which magically open out your chest cavity.

### 6 Trail mix

For a quick energy boost during the interval.

### 7 Good luck cards

Actors are a superstitious lot. We put up the cards on the opening night and don't take them down until the end of the run.