

Sir Bobby Charlton

Video Interview Transcript

This interview is from a Channel 4 TV series called 'In Your Face' (available on DVD), made by Christopher Swayne and Bruno Wollheim, produced by Coluga Pictures.

What were the sittings for the portrait like?

I was quite relaxed, it was up in the studio, it was cool, it was nice, cup of tea when you needed it. I just sat there but I realised that it might take a long time, so I had sort of left the whole day free, just in case. Generally speaking the sessions were only about 2 or 3 hours, then he would put the hood back over it and push it to one side so I couldn't see it. And he had this tiny little 18 inches that he was painting and I thought 'well that's it, that's the size of the painting'. I was sitting there talking to him all the time and then when I got down to London for the opening, and they drew this back and there was this gigantic painting and all the old players came - I think most of the old players came - Bobby Moore and George Cohen etc. It was just lovely. I got Bobby Moore to open it because I thought that was very appropriate and it just knocked me back, I really can't remember saying anything, in fact I can remember all the other people saying things but I was gob-smacked I think.

Do you think that it is a halo above your head?

It was just George Cohen mentioned it, that's all, in a football type way - the way they talk you know, 'bloody hell, people always had said he'd been a saint or something and but now look at that, he's got his halo on' and it took me quite back - I'd never given it a thought you know. It was a ball because that was what Peter told me afterwards 'no, that's just a ball to get it related to football and the movement, the blur of your feet is that you've just come in you see and you keep moving around, that's all'. The little halo there, but that's just movement, and when you look at it like that and if people could actually look at the picture expecting to see a little bit of movement - you know it does - you think yeah, 'his head's moving, his foot's moving'. It's really clever.

Has Peter Edwards caught you well?

I would think that if any of my friends or anybody who knows me well went to see the picture they would say 'yeah, you captured him'. Because I'm not an outgoing person, I'm quite quiet most of the time, I'm not always smiling and laughing, although I do enjoy my lifestyle but I think Peter captured it really. Probably the amount of time that he used to spend with me probably worked out, that this was the look on my face that really explained my general day, it wasn't all laughing and joking and running I wasn't being totally miserable either and he just captured a nice blend, but I think my pals would say 'yeah, that's just about right, that's normal'.

How were the pose and setting selected?

He didn't know whether he'd do it indoors, he didn't know whether he'd do it outdoors, he didn't know whether he'd have me sitting down, he didn't know whether he'd have me in action, you know, doing some action shots or whatever so everywhere he went he took pictures, I think he was trying to make his mind up which was the best that suited him, and at the end of the day he came to the conclusion that the best was to have a feeling of outdoors but not necessarily an action picture. So I'm sitting there, it's related to the action because I've got all my tracksuit on and the wind is there and the garden is outside, the outdoor part of it was there. He's caught me maybe a little bit breathless, I've just finished some activity, I've come in and I've sat down and that's where I am at the moment, you know, that was the time when I was not physically running all over the place, I actually had to relax after because I was tired. I was in my early fifties when it was taken, so he worked it all out and decided that's the way that he saw me the way and I must be honest if I'm thinking of that picture being in the Portrait Gallery forever, I would like people to think of me like that, I had done a bit of activity, I was a bit relaxed about it, I looked quite pleased with the way things were going, it was what I had hoped the picture would be.

What do you think about being part of the National Portrait Gallery's collection?

I think that football was always seen as the working class sport and I think that it's never been recognised. The gentleman's sports always been - cricket, racing, we always see paintings of horses, jockeys etc and cricketers but never footballers. I think that we have to expect that we deserve our place. At the end of the day all these people are going to come forever maybe and keep looking at this picture and thinking 'bye, he must have been good player, he must have been good at his job' and if people think I've been good at my job for the rest of time even after I've gone, that's a fantastic thing, isn't it?