

## 'Botox gave me back my voice'

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Pic: Mark Large

Linda Thompson: back on stage

At the Cambridge Folk Festival on Sunday Linda Thompson will do something she never thought she would do again - sing in front of a live audience.

For the past 30 years the London-born folk pioneer has battled with a throat affliction that forced her to retire from recording nearly two decades ago.

Her quest for a cure took her around the world and used up most of her savings. But two years ago, Linda finally found an unlikely remedy - Botox injections directly into her throat.

Last year she released an acclaimed comeback album, aptly titled *Fashionably Late*. And this weekend she returns to the folk festival circuit, aged 55.

Hysterical dysphonia is a stress-related condition affecting women aged between 30 and 50 that makes it difficult - and sometimes impossible - to sing or even talk because of involuntary muscle spasms that close up the vocal cords.

Most specialists believe the condition is psychosomatic, treatable by psychotherapy. But some American doctors have begun to use Botox injections, which calm the spasms by preventing nerves from communicating with the muscles.

In the early Eighties, when Linda's musician husband Richard Thompson left her only a week after she had given birth to their third child, she was so upset she couldn't speak for an entire year.

At the Chelsea townhouse she shares with her second husband, talent agency owner Steve Kenis, Linda oozes the self-confidence that eluded her for so many years.

"It began in 1973 when I was pregnant with my first child, Muna. I would go to get a note out and there would be a delay: like a constriction. I put it down to pregnancy.

"Then, when Richard left me in 1982, I was literally struck dumb. I had just had a third child, Kamila, a week earlier and I couldn't speak or even make a sound.

I later found out Richard was having an affair, too. I had three small children, a new baby, no husband, no voice, no career and I was heartbroken - about Richard, not about the voice really, but I had to stay positive."

Linda went to a psychiatrist, who suggested speech therapy, and also tried psychotherapy, "But neither of them worked for me."

Her voice came back intermittently, but she found it difficult to stretch herself, especially on stage.

Instead, she devoted herself to raising her three children, Muna, Teddy and Kamila, and writing songs for the likes of Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt.

When her speaking voice returned, she tried acting, and opened an antique jewellery shop in Bond Street. She remarried and accompanied her husband to film sets abroad, enjoying a lifestyle far removed from her council-estate upbringing in north London and, from the age of six, Glasgow.

By the late Nineties she again had the urge to sing. "My mum had died and I was thinking, 'I'm getting old, I'm in my fifties and I must try to do something before I die.'"

That's when she heard about Botox injections given by New York throat specialist Dr Andrew Blitzer.

She consulted him for the first time two years ago. "I thought it was all hokum. I mean, how could a cosmetic injection work?"

Her pessimism was not helped by leaving his 5th Avenue surgery with her throat paralysed by Botox. "I thought I'd never talk again. Then, slowly, my voice came back.

"About four weeks after the injection I went to a radio studio in New York to sing with my son Teddy. We sat down and sang this fast song and I sang like a bird! We did one take. It was a miracle!"

The resulting album, on which she is joined by musicians including a family reunion of Teddy, Kamila and - for the first time since they split - ex-husband Richard, won widespread plaudits.

"I certainly wouldn't consider Botox to make me look younger, but a once-a-month injection into my throat has given me the chance to sing again. It feels as if I'm starting out all over."

• *The Cambridge Folk Festival runs from Thursday to Sunday at Cherry Hinton Hall Grounds. Linda Thompson plays on Sunday.*