

ISLAMIC SCHOOL RATED FAILURE BY OFSTED AFTER 'FAILING TO PROMOTE BRITISH VALUES'

'I was trying to do it with Jackie Clune at one point, and other people too, even Orlando Bloom's sister Sam': Ivan Massow on why he's having a baby with a lesbian couple he met online

He's a self-made millionaire, gay rights campaigner, Tory mayor hopeful – and now Ivan Massow is set to be a dad too. Here he tells Katie Law why he chose co-parenting over adoption and how Joan Collins would love to be godmother



Back to top: Ivan Massow (Picture: Matt Spencer)

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KATIE LAW

Ivan Massow is nervous. It's his baby's 12-week scan on Monday, and the anticipation of seeing the embryo for the first time shows in the way he is fidgeting with his iPhone. Obviously he would have preferred to wait until this traditional deadline had passed before making an announcement, but the news that a gay 41-year-old Tory millionaire is expecting a baby with a lesbian couple was hard to keep quiet. "It broke on Sunday," he says, adding that he was surprised. "But I'd completely missed this being of any topical interest."

Massow, a leading gay rights campaigner and London mayor hopeful, is one of a growing number of high-profile gay men who don't want to miss out on the joys of parenthood. He follows Elton John and David Furnish (who have two boys), actor Charlie Condou with Cameron Laux, and 'totem' Ottolenghi with Karl Allen.

The difference is that while Massow is blissfully happy with his "absolutely adorable" new partner Henry Winter, the relationship is less than a year old, so both need to be acutely aware of the possibility of a split. "I've been in a relationship with Henry since we met in 2012, but we haven't been together for a year yet," says Winter, a 19-year-old triathlete, is, nonetheless, "very relaxed about it, and knows he's not being relied upon as a parent."

We meet at Massow's home in Bloomsbury, an elegant Georgian townhouse, and sip tea in his warm, expansive, open-plan kitchen – all exposed brickwork, bare floorboards and an enormous white Aga. One of his three parrots shrieks, while Jasper, his spaniel, sleeps at his feet.

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He learned before Christmas that he was to become a dad via a WhatsApp message from the lesbian couple that showed a photograph of the positive blue line on the pregnancy test. He is coy about the mechanics of the process up until that point, but says that it happened here in the house, with the couple waiting in the comfort of a self-contained apartment he has in the basement, while his "best damn mate" – his dog, Jasper. "I was terribly embarrassed. I couldn't handle it and asked my partner to deliver it to the women waiting downstairs. When he learned that their combined efforts had been successful, his first reaction was immense relief, "that I wouldn't have to do it all again a month later."

The decision to go down this route was not taken lightly. "I'd looked at every other option. I'd been to meetings in LA with the clinic where Elton did his surrogacy and even had a Facebook messenger chat with David about it but decided it wasn't for me."

The main obstacle, he says, was how much time he would have had to spend in my and my firm in LA, when he needed to be in London pursuing his political career.

Single female friends had also offered to help. "I was trying to do it with Jackie Clune at one point," he says, "and she's gone on to have four of her own and a family. I'd spoken to other people too, even Orlando Bloom's sister, Sam."

We never got as far as a hospital or a fertility clinic. Just talking about the pros and cons.



So close: Ivan Massow with Joan Collins, who he describes as his "second mum" (Picture: Steve Everett)

Adoption proved trickier still. As a longstanding mentor for the charity Action for Children, Massow has fostered three children in the past – boys aged seven, nine and 11, but, he says, "Adoption is a very long process and a complicated business, because the system requires the family a very ordinary family." After his application appeared to have been successful, he was surprised to learn yet more questions and evaluations were required. "I went to the meeting with my mum and we sat there laughing and just assumed it would be fine because it was a glowing report. Then one of the panel coogles you in more detail. Often the stuff isn't even true, it's just articles. I don't know specifically what they were looking at but they found all sorts of bits and pieces."

Does he think his sexuality was an issue? "I genuinely don't. I think they would have liked to have said yes on that count."

A quick Google search of my own brings up several potentially sensitive articles, including one he wrote himself about attempting suicide twice – first by taking an overdose of pills, then by "fall headfirst" jumping his wife after a financially disastrous business deal with insurance company Zurich Life in 2004 left him nearly bankrupt. Two years earlier he was sacked as chairman of the ICA and he had had a string of financial failures – alongside some spectacular successes. In 2005 he fled to Barcelona and turned to alcohol instead. "I wasn't the gutter drunk, I was late for work a few times. My relationship with my mum wasn't at its best and I was struggling to be a standard, sane human being," he admits. "What they [the adoption charity] want to see – and I admire this – is that you're capable of identifying a problem, picking yourself up, dealing with it and moving on." When he hit 40, Massow went into rehab and then to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), with the support of his close friend and "second mum", Joan Collins. He hasn't drunk since and attends meetings once every couple of months. "To remind myself and to show a bit of gratitude. It's very levelling and I go for much bigger reasons than just stopping drinking."

He and Collins are still close and she was delighted with his news. "She wants to be godmother," he says, adding diplomatically that ultimately this will be for the child's mother to decide. "Their god reaction was yes, they were happy, but I told them, "If you're feeling sensitive about the press, that will be a christening and a ball."



Changed man: Ivan Massow (Picture: Steve Everett)

Throughout the interview, Massow is careful to respect the mothers' right to privacy, and says he wants to give them complete control of how the child should be brought up. He says that so far they seem in perfect accord and that he's thrilled to have found them.

The plan is that the baby will live with the mothers in south London, but the doors to Massow's comfortable home, with its separate basement flat, will always be open. He hopes, if all goes well, to father a second child with them. Surprisingly, he withers his decision to draw up any formal legal contract at the last minute, "because they're such decent, thoughtful, meticulous and caring people," he says.

The only area where he has strong opinions is education. "This has made me focus on whether London needs its own schooling policy," he says. "The child, when it reaches school age, will start, preferably with a really good state primary. One thing I want is just not to have a pushy kid."

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