

Paul Donnelley talks food with **Erika North**

The gorgeous Erika North is the female half of the Morning Crew on Heart 106.2's breakfast show. Erika's music career began at a PR company abandoning her A Levels. By the age of 19 Erika was the youngest record label manager in Britain. She joined Heart in February 1995 before the station's launch. In June 1999 she joined the Morning Crew where her ready wit, sparkling personality and banter with Jono Coleman made her an instant hit with the listeners.

What was your favourite sweetie as a child?

Minstrels. I remember when we used to go and see my Grandma my Mum would buy me a packet of minstrels and *The Beano* every week. I used to get really excited about it. Very happy memories even now when I eat Minstrels.

What is it now?

I like chewy cola bottles but the ones without sugar on, or cola cubes.

What, and how, do you dunk?

Any type of biscuit. In fact anything I'm very big on dunking. Dunking is the way forward, I am convinced. Any sort of biscuit, any chocolate bar, in fact anything that will fit into my cup of tea. If a food tastes good, it tastes even better dunked.

Under what circumstances did you last eat caviar?

Probably at some launch party because that's the only place I can imagine anyone actually serving it. Jono and I are occasionally invited to launches and there you get the caviar garnish. I like caviar. If it wasn't so expensive I think I could probably acquire a taste for it.

Has anyone ever eaten anything off your body?

Yes, yoghurt. Quite recently. I don't want to expand on that too much... but it was with my ex-boyfriend Simon. So Simon if you ever get to read this, you will know what I am talking about.

A meteor is about to zap the earth for good. What will your last meal be?

Definitely chocolate, chocolate and then more chocolate. I would rush to the sweet shop and then buy every chocolate bar they had. I am a complete chocoholic.

Is there one particular food or drink that you loathe?

Not really. I am quite sweet-toothed but I have never understood the appeal of marzipan and my mum is a big marzipan fan. I love trying new things, if I go to a far off land and I'm offered the speciality I will always try it and taste it before saying "And what is that I have just put in my mouth?"

What is the most romantic memory that you associate with food?

Probably shopping in Salfeways with someone and for some reason they got all overcome with emotion at the frozen food bit and told me that they loved me. For that reason food shopping has never been the same again.

What was your worst culinary disaster?

My life is full of culinary disasters. I am the world's worst cook. I am really terrible. If it doesn't microwave I don't even attempt to cook it unless I have people coming round and I want to try and impress them. I suppose my worst nightmare was when I invited 12 people around for a dinner party. I got loads of microwave pasta from Marks & Spencer. I pretended that I had made it but I didn't do a very good job of hiding the boxes and someone walked into the kitchen and went to throw something in the bin and found all these packets. They took them back into the dining room and I had spent the last hour telling them how I had been slaving in the kitchen.

Confess your most loathsome kitchen hygiene story.

I am very boringly clean so I clear up after myself. When it comes to kitcheny stuff I never let the kitchen get in a mess so



it's never that bad. It's never nice to find things going mouldy in the fridge.

Are you a cheesy football or a Japanese rice cracker sort of gal?

Both. It depends where I am and who I'm with but I do quite like those Japanese cracker things. I like the ones that look like big pasta shapes.

What was your weirdest craving/thing you've ever eaten and why?

I do have a passion for those little jars of cockles and mussels that you get in supermarkets. I have to be in the right mood.

Name your all-time favourite takeaway dish.

Definitely Chinese.

Aagh! Sudden guests! What's your standby meal?

A takeaway, are you kidding? I take them out or they arrive with food.

What's the oldest thing in your cupboard or freezer?

Some rice. I used to be very friendly with this American guy who lived in London and when he moved back to London he had loads of boxes of this minute rice. He didn't want to throw it away and I said, "I'll have that" because that sounds really good. He also gave me his kitchen table and chairs and goodness knows what but I thought "Minute rice. That sounds fantastic." That was probably six or seven years ago but I can't bring myself to throw it away because it reminds me of him.

Tell me a school dinner story.

I loved school dinners. School dinners were great. On the show I was going on about loving school dinners that a school in south London invited me to be a dinner lady for the day. I must admit that they weren't quite as yummy as I remember them. Maybe it's something to do with being a little bit bigger now. They did jam sponge and custard – that one with the desiccated coconut on top.

What's the most useless kitchen gadget you possess?

A lemon zester which was bought for me by a bloke who was trying to encourage me to get more into cooking. I really couldn't tell him how much that didn't float my boat. I'm not a kitcheny type but I've still kept it because it's one of the most romantic gifts I have ever been given.

Anything you've always wanted to eat but never had the chance?

No, not really because if there was something I wanted to eat I'd just go out and track it down. I love trying new things. Last weekend I went to South Africa for a day and was taken to a restaurant in Soweto and had an absolutely amazing lunch there. It was a big buffet and I had no idea what I was eating but it was absolutely delicious. I have no ambition to eat specific foods. There are places I have ambition to eat in.

Fried, poached, boiled, coddled or scrambled?

Poached, always.

Ever done a runner from a restaurant?

Yes, but unintentionally. It was at Casper's that telephone bar and grill that isn't there anymore. I was in the Sixth Form at school at the time and with one of my best girlfriends. I stood up at the end of the meal and said, "I've got a real headache. I'll meet you outside." She said that she was going off to the ladies and would see me outside. In the cab going home she turned to me and said, "You must remind me to give you the money for that meal." I said, "I didn't pay. I thought you paid." She said, "I thought you were paying when you went to the door." We didn't pay and I must admit, to my eternal shame, I didn't call them up on Monday morning and tell them. I am really sorry. I have felt guilty ever since and that was about ten years ago.