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**Boy George in Concert**  
Hall One, The Sage Gateshead.  
Tonight, 7.30pm. Tel: (0191) 443-4661.  
The former Culture Club frontman marks his return to live concerts with a mix of new songs and old hits, such as Karma Chameleon and Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?

**Daniel De Borah**  
Darlington Civic Theatre.  
Tonight, 7.30pm.  
Tel: (01325) 486555.  
A musical feast from Daniel who performs a programme of Beethoven, Prokofiev, Scriabin, Takemitsu and Chopin.

# Fame serves up a change for Niki



ARENA DATE: Niki Evans stars in The X Factor 2008 Live Tour at Metro Radio Arena on February 16.

She may not have won The X Factor but life has certainly changed for former dinner lady Niki Evans, as **Daniel Thomson** discovers.

NIKI Evans is a busy woman.

The mum-of-two, who was serving school dinners in Tamworth, near Birmingham, just six months ago, is now performing in front of thousands of people on a regular basis.

But has the hard-working 34-year-old changed after finding fame on *The X Factor*?

"I don't know where I am half the time," she says. "I've been singing live almost every night since coming out of the competition."

"I was in Bourne-mouth recently and I fell flat on my face on stage. It was so embarrassing. I just jumped up and said 'so for my next trick...'"

"It's been a great few months though," she adds. "I've been all over the UK and even performed in Dubai. I think I've been the busiest out of all of us."

And the next few months show no signs of letting up.

Niki and her fellow contestants will be performing at packed-out venues across the UK as part of The X Factor Live Tour 2008, which comes to Newcastle's Metro Radio Arena on February 16.

"We start rehearsing soon and it will be great to see everyone again although we've all kept in touch since the show ended."

Niki reached the semi-finals of the show, but was arguably the most consistent singer during the series and was unlucky not to reach the final, which was contested between Leon Jackson, Rhydian Roberts, and Same Difference.

"I wanted Leon to win all along and I was so glad that he did," Niki says. "Rhydian is just Rhydian and was going to be successful, but Leon is just such an extraordinary young talent."

"I used to get so frustrated with him because he didn't always show how good he was on the live shows, but trust me he has a phenomenal voice and I think he will really surprise people this year. He's also a really wonderful son to his mum and just a gorgeous, sweet boy all round. We got on really well."

Niki entered the show after finding an application form in her father's belongings after he died. He had been the driving force behind her early musical career, which saw her signed up at 16.

Unfortunately, she didn't have any chart success as a teenager and lost confidence in her singing ability. After her father died she vowed to enter *The X Factor* and have one last go at achieving her dream.

Thankfully her gamble paid off and the singer is now looking forward to a life-changing 2008.

"It's just been incredible. People come up to me in the street all the time and talk to me as if they know me."

"My boys, Morgan and Jonah, think it's amazing, but my husband gets a bit worried for me sometimes, especially when men come up and put their arms around me, which has happened a couple

of times. I'm just a totally normal person, so I've never experienced anything like that in my whole life, but it's part of the price you pay for doing something you love and that's fine by me."

"One girl came up to me who had just lost her mum and we ended up going for a coffee to talk about it. Obviously I can't do that with everyone, but it's so nice to be able to do something positive."

"That's why I've been doing a lot of charity work since the show finished."

Niki recently gave up her job as a dinner lady at Polesworth International College in Tamworth to concentrate on her singing career, but admits it was a hard thing to do.

"It was tough," she says. "I loved working there and I loved all of the kids and staff, so I held onto the job for as long as I could. But if January is anything to go by I've got a very busy year ahead of me."

While she may go on to do even bigger things, Niki will never forget her experiences on *The X Factor*.

"There were so many lovely people and we all got on. The judges are pretty much just like you see on TV too. Simon Cowell is just as you would imagine. Louis is great and we text all the time, and Sharon is an absolute scream. She's a mum like me, she's really down to earth, and she's got real balls."

During the live arena tour, Niki will be performing some of the songs that got her to the semi-finals of the hit show, such as *Songbird*, and *One Moment in Time*, and says she can't wait to get going.

"The tour is going to be great. I think fans of *The X Factor* will be in for a real treat and it is a fantastic opportunity for us to play some great venues around the country."

So what's next for Niki?

"Well, I've got a few irons in the fire for after the tour, so hopefully something will come up," she says. "There has been talk of a possible album, but we'll have to wait and see."

"One thing I'm definitely going to do is get some cosmetic surgery. Seeing myself on TV made me feel like a big fat heifer, so I'm getting liposuction done soon."

"It's going to be with a company called MYA who have a clinic on the Quayside in Newcastle actually, so maybe I'll get it done when I'm up there."

Niki seems realistic about her newfound fame and it is certainly refreshing to speak to a celebrity (even a new one) who is so honest.

She says: "It's been completely life-changing, but while we're performing on *The X Factor* tour a new set of contestants will be auditioning and in a few months we'll be last year's news."

"So it's really important to make the most of it and work hard to have a long-term career as a performer beyond *The X Factor*."

● Niki stars in The X Factor 2008 Live Tour at Metro Radio Arena on February 16. Visit [www.bookingsdirect.co](http://www.bookingsdirect.co)