

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sunderland comedian's decade-long labour of love hits the shelves: Justine Sless announces third book, *Before I Sing You This Song*

Historical fiction inspired by Sunderland legend Bobby Thompson explores class, gender and misogyny through the eyes of a woman who dared to be funny.

Sunderland, UK, October 2026 – Comedian, author and producer Justine Sless, who was born and raised in Sunderland but has lived in Australia for many years, is returning home to launch her third book, *Before I Sing You This Song*, this October. Published by Crear Publishing, the novel is a decade in the making and marks a genuine homecoming, both literary and literal, for the Melbourne-based writer.

Set in Sunderland in 1978, the novel draws inspiration from local comedy legend Bobby Thompson, so beloved in the region that, as Sless puts it, “some would say he’s like royalty.” Extracts from Thompson’s original material are woven throughout the story, used with the blessing of his family.

At the heart of the book is Elsie Bishop, a Hendon born woman whose diaries and newspaper cuttings form the backbone of the narrative. Elsie is an ordinary woman with an extraordinary ambition: to perform stand-up comedy at a time when women were permitted to sing in working men’s clubs, but never to tell jokes. Through Elsie’s story, *Before I Sing You This Song* examines class, gender and misogyny with warmth, wit and unflinching honesty. The novel is meticulously researched and written in authentic pitmatic dialect.

About the author

Justine Sless is a comedian and author whose recent solo show, *BRAVO*, played at the 2026 Melbourne International Comedy Festival to high praise, described as “a delicious show, supremely hilarious, intelligent, cheeky and insightful.”

Alongside her writing and performing, Sless teaches stand-up comedy and creative writing in schools, workplaces and libraries, with a particular focus on people at risk of homelessness and those living with complex mental health conditions.

Despite leaving school having struggled academically and later being diagnosed as dyslexic, Sless went on to complete a master’s by research in creative writing, publish two previous books and perform numerous one-woman comedy shows. “It’s about surrounding yourself with a great team,” she says. “Writing and performing is never a solo pursuit.”

A ten-year journey home

Before I Sing You This Song has taken ten years to reach publication, brought to life by the small but mighty team at Crear Publishing, an independent press based in County Durham. The striking cover artwork is the work of local artist and author Fe Duncan, lead singer of Slalom D, and features Bobby Thompson’s famous gansey jumper. Like many in Sunderland, Fe is a devoted fan of Bobby’s.

Sless left Sunderland three decades ago and has been based in Melbourne, Australia, ever since. She will be travelling back to Sunderland especially for the launch, and cannot wait to return home to celebrate the book’s release in the city where it is set. Throughout the project she has been driven by a desire to walk back through the doors of her old school, Southmoor Academy, and tell today’s students: “If I can do it, then so can you.” In keeping with that mission, Sless will be donating copies of the book to her former school to encourage pupils to tell their own stories.

Sless is available for interview and to deliver comedy and creative writing workshops. She is happy to speak about creativity, comedy, and how embracing her working-class roots has become a genuine source of pride.

As Sless says herself: although she has made her home on the other side of the world, *Before I Sing You This Song* is proof that you can take the girl out of Sunderland, but you can’t take Sunderland out of the girl.

ENDS

Media contact and bookings

Justine Sless Email: justinesless@gmail.com

Wasap/Mobile: +61 405 329 633 Web: JUSTINESLESS.COM

Ryan Crear, Director, Crear Publishing Email: contact@crearpublishing.com

EVENTS:

Oct 3 Book Launch North East Indie Book Festival

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/north-east-indie-book-fest-2026-tickets-1994148837855>

Oct 6 Sunderland University Guest Lecture

Oct 7 Southmoor Academy Comedy Workshop and Author talk

Oct 8 Diego's Joint Sunderland Comedy Workshop & Bobby Thompson Comedy Tribute Night 6pm till late

Oct 15 Chapter 13 Sunderland Author Talk Phil & Lit Society 12-1pm

OCT 16 Electric Beacon Books South Shields Book Signing 12 -1pm

OCT 17 Bridge Street Books Amble Book Signing 12 -1pm

Notes to editors

Before I Sing You This Song by Justine Sless is published by Crear Publishing, with a release date of 3rd October 2026. Review copies are available on request.

About Crear Publishing

Crear Publishing is an independent press based in County Durham, dedicated to championing authentic northern voices and stories rooted in working-class life. Led by Directors Karen and Ryan Crear, the small but mighty team is committed to publishing bold, meticulously crafted fiction and non-fiction that might otherwise go untold. *Before I Sing You This Song* is among the press's flagship releases for 2026.

Praise for *Before I Sing You This Song*

"As the son of Bobby Thompson, the Little Waster, I was fortunate enough to read the book prior to its release. Being just a daft Geordie myself, I found it a most engaging read. Justine has captured the moment and is quite clearly a gifted author."

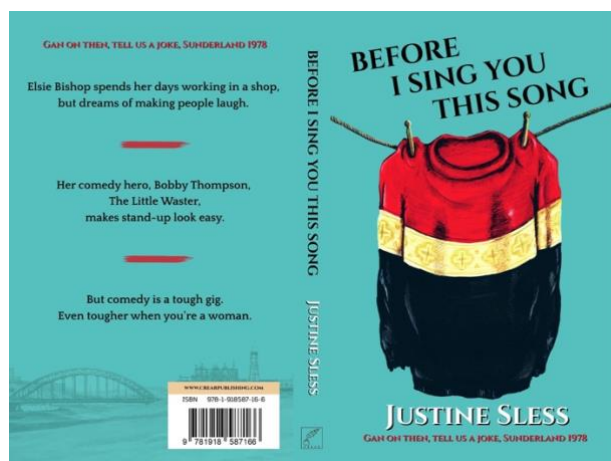
— Keith Thompson

"Justine's work explores social class, gender and northern identity in the 1970s through one woman's determination to forge a path for herself. In a time of increasing polarisation, it is more necessary than ever to hear the stories of places like Sunderland."

— Jessica Andrews, author of *Saltwater* and *Milk Teeth*

"Before I Sing You This Song is a gorgeously funny novel that doesn't shy away from the difficult truths of life. Elsie is a sparkling heroine whose wit and humour pull us deep into the vibrant heart of working-class northern life. You'll laugh, you'll cry, but you'll never regret a second spent reading this delightful book."

— Jen Bowden, host of the Northern Voices Podcast



Cover *Before I Sing You This Song*



Justine Sless Melbourne International Comedy Festival