From London’s footlights, the monarchs of British theater rule the cultural seas. Broadway and Hollywood bow before their talents; JOHN HEILPERN explores their method and their madness

EMPIRE OF THE STAGE

Photographs by SNOWDON

Sir John Gielgud
Actor, director, producer, writer; aged 91; 60 plays (Love’s King Lear); 45 films (Arthur); 25 television roles; 200 appearances; Knighted in 1953.
Photographed July 11, 1993, in his garden.

Famous for his gaffes or "Gielgudia", actor Clive Morton once knocked on his dressing-room door after weeks of being ignored when they appeared together in a play. "Thank God it's you!" said Gielgud as Morton put his head around the door. "For one dreadful moment I thought it was going to be that ghastly old bore Clive Morton!"

T
he rector of St. Giles-in-the-Fields, London, his pink, kind face almost unlined though he's 80, peered at me hopefully. "Excuse me," he asked, "are you Alan Bates?"

Now, what was doubly sweet about this is that I'm afraid I look nothing like Alan Bates. I wish. "Oh dear," the stagestruck Reverend Gordon Taylor sighed. "I was longing to meet him."

The rehearsal for the memorial service of John Osborne, which would take place the next day, was under way. Osborne, glorious voice of protest and un-English passion, had revolutionized British theater in 1956 with his Look Back in Anger at the Royal Court Theatre. (Alan Bates was in the original production.) "I have been blessed with God's two greatest gifts—to be born English and heterosexual," the famous dramatist declared in outrageous mischief. He aimed his Swiftian fusillades, John Mortimer wrote admiringly in The New York Times,
at "all those who would turn the world gray in the name of political correctness." And now we had come to celebrate his turbulent, memorable life in the little church that was founded in the 12th century.

At the memorial rehearsal, the rector was the director. Peter Brook, arguably the greatest theater director that England has produced, once defined the mysterious art of directing as "getting people on- and offstage." The rector of St. Giles-in-the-Fields understood this in his bones. "You need to be out of your pew before the Elgar music has stopped. Otherwise it doesn't flow," he was saying to Dame Maggie Smith. "Then it's back to your pew for the hymn."

She nodded respectfully. She would be reading "Mr. Valiant-for-Truth" from John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress. A born worrier, she makes you laugh on sight. She can fill any theater on either side of the Atlantic. She's a peculiarly English mix of the suburban and the glamorous.

Dirk Bogarde, another of Osborne's friends, was at the rehearsal, looking dapper. He would be reading a moving passage from Holy Dying, by Jeremy Taylor. "Oooh," said Maggie Smith when Sir Dirk told her that she could park her car in the churchyard. "I don't think I want to park there yet."

Not everyone at the rehearsal was a knight or a dame. They just have to wait their turn. Michael Ball, the young star of Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber's Aspects of Love, strode into the church. He would be singing "If You Were the Only Girl in the World," for Osborne loved the romance and sentiment of the Edwardian music hall. There seemed no urgency, flippancy under pressure—very British. And no one troubled to rehearse his piece—actorly one-upmanship that grew collectively.

David Hare, one of the foremost playwrights in England, would give the address. "Of course," said Bogarde, "you'll have to give the address from the pulpit." "I'm too terrified," Hare replied, and looked it. "Oh, I couldn't. I would have to be ordained." "Frightful coward," said Bogarde.

"Is it getting ugly?" Helen Osborne asked, giggling. She was John's fifth wife. It was a happy, 17-year marriage. She used to be a drama critic.

Trumpeters from the English Chamber Orchestra could be heard rehearsing in the church balcony. "Good luck!" they wished one another. "Good luck tomorrow."

I had gone to London—"This earth, this realm, this England," as the United Airlines commercial goes—to celebrate British theater itself. England may soldier on stoically, but its theater still rules the English-speaking world like the last colonial outpost of an Anglophile empire. Few would deny, at least, that the American War of Independence has been lost on that oldest established, permanent floating crap game in New York known as Broadway. How come "little" England still rules the waves—but only in theater? Who are they? Come to think of it, how dare they?

Shakespeare, like God, is an Englishman. Therefore, the English believe, all theater began in England. They tend to overlook the Greeks. But classical Greek dramatists didn't write in English. The historical continuity of England's theater tradition accounts for the national pride (and prejudice). "We have been doing it longer than anyone else," I was often told. Too often! But, after all, Shakespeare has been continuously performed in England for 300 years.

Prestigious British imports dominate the long since Lloyd Webberized Broadway. Look at just a few facts from the contemporary scene:

There were 141 productions in the West End last season. There were 52 on Broadway—and a quarter of those were British. Those massive nonprofit theater corporations and power bases the Royal National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company between them produced 53 plays. There were a mere 8 new plays on Broadway last season; the Royal Court Theatre (George Bernard Shaw's old theater) alone premiered 19 plays, and has more than 30 new dramatists under commission. The nonprofit theaters in England are the formidable tributaries to the commercial West End and Broadway. Four recent transfers to Broadway were from the National Theatre—Arcadia, Carousel, Les Parents Terribles (renamed Indications), and An Inspector Calls. Two more were
The common language that unites and divides us, the ambivalent sentimentalities that bind us, make for the complex "special relationship" between America and Britain. We're like a split personality of cultural opposites. In acting terms and style, you could list some of the differing aspects of our national identities in parallel columns as the late Kenneth Tynan listed the qualities of Laurence Olivier (Burgundy wine) versus those of John Gielgud (claret):

**U.K.**  
Theater  
Olivier  
Shakespeare  
Lyricism  
Tea  
Rhetoric  
Anthony Hopkins  
Jeremy Irons  
Emma Thompson  
Lloyd Webber  

**U.S.A.**  
Film  
Brando  
Method  
Psychology  
Emotion  
Dustin Hoffman  
John Malkovich  
Meryl Streep  
Lloyd Webber  

The differences blur—no young British stage actor in his right mind isn't influenced by the film naturalism and awesome Method of, say, Pacino—but the division is in the heritage. England is built on a theater culture; America, though it has its great theater, is a film culture. "Theater is our primary way of self-definition, like movies in America," said Stephen Daldry, the punk theater evangelist who runs "the chorus of dissent" at the Royal Court Theatre. Daldry's Hitchcockian production of J. B. Priestley's 1946 warhorse, _An Inspector Calls_, won him a Tony Award on Broadway.

"But every time I went through customs, I was stopped," he told me amusingly. "I'd tell them I worked in theater. They'd search my bags as if I were involved in some illicit pornographic activity. I've given up now. I say I work in movies. No problem! Welcome to the U.S.A. Good luck!"

There is no real British film industry, least of all in the Hollywood

There were 141 productions in the West End last season. There were 52 on Broadway—and a quarter of those were British.

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**Jonathan Pryce**  
actor, singer  
*Inherit the Wind*  
*Fourteen plays (Noss Naiq, Oliver);*  
25 films (Brats); five major awards.  
Won best actor at Cannes for his performance as Jefferson Smith in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington.*

In Carrington, to be released next month.
The British are stage actors first, and last.

The biggest annual film budget in Britain would scarcely make a single Hollywood movie. TV's Channel 4's 1985 budget of £16 million helps to finance 18 small films; among its past productions are *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *The Crying Game*, *Howard's End*, and *The Madness of King George*. The successful producer behind them, David Aukin, worked in theater for 20 years and was the National Theatre's executive director. Sooner or later in Britain, everything comes back to theater.

Aukin pointed out, "it is to say, 'Why on earth would you want to do theater when you can be a movie star?' But here, theater is the actor's credibility and calling card. It tells the film world, 'We're not totally beholden to you.' It marks them out as different and special, because Johnny Depp couldn't do that."

The British are stage actors first, and last. (Not like Johnny Depp.) Olivier virtually abandoned his Hollywood career to spend a decade founding the National Theatre. A succeeding generation of leading stage actresses—Vanessa Redgrave, Maggie Smith, Glenda Jackson—won five Academy Awards among them. And today the roots and heart of almost every British actor who has made it in Hollywood are in the theater—from Kenneth Branagh and Emma Thompson ("Ken and Em," as they're known in England, cozily curdling the crème de la crème) to Anthony Hopkins, Ben Kingsley, Jeremy Irons, Miranda Richardson, Daniel Day-Lewis, Gary Oldman, Ralph Fiennes, et al.

When the British stage actor looks in the mirror, he is likely to see a character actor; his American counterpart sees a hero, or antihero (or the next Tom Hanks). At center the British are great character actors—transferring with effortless superiority from stage to screen. In addition to the native Room with a View genre, they have a useful sideline supplying Hollywood with, for example, its school of beguilingly charming, sometimes camp villains: Anthony Hopkins's cannibalistic Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* and his Richard Nixon in Oliver Stone's forthcoming movie; Alan Rickman's Sheriff of Nottingham in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* and terrorist-æsthetic in *Die Hard*. Jeremy Irons's pseudo-cultivated alleged wife murderer Claus von Bülow, his treachersonously languard Scar in *The Lion King*, and his own terrorist-æsthetic in *Die Hard with a Vengeance*. They earn these born stage actors an honest mill or three.

The reserved and witty British need their theater like oxygen—or a fix—to loosen up, to understand who they really are behind the masks. I went to meet Michael Gambon, in his 50S perhaps the finest actor in England, though virtually unknown in America (he was last seen here on PBS in the dark, brilliant mini-series *The Singing Detective*—a dangerous actor, "the Great Gambon," as Sir Ralph Richardson dubbed him. Albert Finney calls acting "farting about in makeup"; Gambon calls it "shouting in the evenings." He was taking a break from rehearsing his Volpone at the National, looking like a tall, podgy Everyman and smoking like a chimney. I asked him why theater is so essential here."

"I suppose it's because we're so fucked up, really," he replied. "We're a complex people, putting on disguises and fronts, sidestepping. It's just my instinctive response. But that's why we have a real need for theater."

Or as Declan Donnellan, co-director of the internationally known Cheek by Jowl company (whose *Malfi* comes to New York this fall), put it, "Sex, murder, betrayal, politics, poison, kings, damnation and salvation—all the things we really love! A good night out!"

The English also love pomp and circumstance. They own the copyright. It was Alan Bennett, an unapologetic monarchist, who neverthe
Fiona Shaw

Actress. Twenty-one plays;
nine films (Three Men and a Little Lady);
eight television roles; three major awards.

Photographed July 6, 1995,
at the National Theatre in costume
for her sensational
Richard II, which she has been
starring in since June.

"Being called the
next Vanessa Redgrave
drives me bananas."

The best of
English life is a play,
a show,
a pageant even
before God.

less showed how the royals are real
actors. "Wave! Smile at the people!"
The king commands his wayward fami-
ly in Bennett's The Madness of King
George, the film version of his origi-
nal play. "Let them see that we're
happy! That is why we're here!"

I met Alan Bennett for tea amid
the faux-Versailles splendor of the Palm
Court in the Ritz Hotel in London.
Bennett is one of England's national
treasures along with, of course, the
Queen Mother. He is nicely idiosyn-

cratic, wry, unpretentious, and among
the funniest writers in England.
He was recognized almost immediately.

A representative of the National Sum-
mer Fruits Association wanted him
to join its annual strawberry tea par-
ty in the adjoining room. "Oh, no. I
couldn't, I couldn't," he apologized,
turning pink. "Thank you very much,
though."

It was as if we were in one of his
plays. What does he appreciate more
than anything? "Siliness," he replied,
and began to laugh. "It's the saving
grace. That's why Mrs. Thatcher is
so un-English. There's not an ounce
of silliness in her. Americans have
got much more gravity. They get things
done more than we do. But they
aren't silly. It's not to be confused
with foolishness. But I couldn't live
without a silly streak."

It was silly, really: even the Osborne
memorial made scandalous front-
page news. Unknown to the rector-
naughty! -- a notice by the church steps
had barred entrance to four public fig-
ures. "The undermentioned will not
be admitted," the notice read, like a
Lutheran pronunciation. The banned
were listed as "Fu Manchu," Osborne's
nickname for Sir Peter Hall, the
former director of both the Royal Shakes-
peare Company and the National
Theater; "The Bard of Hay on Wye,"
who is playwright Arnold Wesker (who
lives in Hay on Wye); Albert Finney,
with whom Osborne had feuded over
royalties for the movie Tom Jones, which
he scripted; and Nicholas de Jongh, an
extremely self-important drama critic.

The fuss: "As to the note on the
door excluding four people," Lord
Classie, chairman of the Arts Council
(the equivalent of the National En-
dowment for the Arts, without the death
warrant), wrote in the letters
pages of The Times in reply to those
who found the incident un-Christian,
"who says the Almighty has no sense
of humor?"

Vanessa Redgrave

Actress, former card-carrying
member of the
Workers Revolutionary Party;
special representative for YWCIA.
Sixty-one plays
(Vita and Virginia), 40 film
(Howards End),
13 television roles (Playing for Time);
eight major awards.

Photographed July 6, 1995
at Eton College, near Windsor, for the
river Thames on the set of
The Wind in the Willows.
Defining role: defender of Vegas Arenal.

Forthcoming projects:
co-starring with Tom Cruise in Mandatory
Impossible, will star with her
brother, Corin, in Antony and Cleopatra,
which will come to the U.S.
this February.

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The traditional Shakespearean voice can stop ships at sea.

Alan and Benedict Bates
Actors, father and son. Alan, 27 plays
(Look Back in Anger; the upcoming Master Builder,
directed by Sir Peter Hall; 41 films; An Unmarried Woman; more than 50 television roles;
four major awards.
Benedict: nine plays, one film.
Founded Tristan Bates Theatre in London in memory of Benedict’s twin brother.

Sign in Hyde Park: “Please refrain from any leisure activity on this site until the grass has established itself.”
Sign in theater lobby: “Due to the indisposition of Miss Stacy Francis the role of Doris Winter will be played by Miss Priscilla Mae Jones.”
Music-hall expression: “Don’t clap too loud—it’s a very old building.”
The verbal felicities—“Please refrain from”—keep up appearances the British way, the old-fashioned way, like West End theater managers in evening dress. The theaters are old.
The West End theater district began in the 17th century on the site of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane (now home to the Cameron Mackintosh production of Miss Saigon). West End theaters are basically Victorian, unless they’re Edwardian. Anything later is considered new. The air-conditioning within them could melt an iceberg, but never mind. It’s for show. The Python-esque culture clash comes with the different approaches to waiting on line. In the lobbies of New York theaters, there’s a sense of tumult and rush to get the tickets that only adds to the pre-show excitement. The English wait on line, silent, uncomplaining, obedient—ever when another box office which is open for business has no line. They join the line. They love the line. “Ladies and gentlemen,” goes the polite announcement, “this evening’s performance will begin in two minutes.” We are waiting on line. “So that will be two tickets for Saturday night, will it, dear?” the box office lady is saying. “Let me have a look—see. I think you’ll do better Wednesday matinee . . .”
“Ladies and gentlemen, the curtain is about to rise. The curtain is about to rise.” No rush. We’ll all get there in the end. But one night I broke the line—it seemed reasonable at the time—going to a queueless box office. “You can’t do that! There’s a queue,” protested an indignant gentleman waiting on line.

We in America see the best of British theater. During my monthlong visit to London so pleasant, I saw 15 productions, for which I shall be receiving an honorary knighthood shortly. The reality of the West End is rather like a pupa puppet—unlike Broadway, there’s a little bit of everything for everyone. Some of the marquises might convince you that time stopped in London circa 1949. One half expects to see Shaftesbury Avenue shrouded in fog. There’s the revival (or re-evaluation) of the stubby gentility and class-critical English reticence of the Terence Rattigan oeuvre that Osborne and the new playwrights of social realism were thought to have swept away. There’s the ritual fare, such as Don’t Dress for Dinner, the jolly farce about double adultery and gourmet cooking; the murder, She Wrote thriller genre; and the trusty old Mousetrap, now in its 43rd glorious year. The oldest theater joke actually happened to me. As the cabdriver dropped me outside the St. Martin’s theater to see The Mousetrap, he called after me cheerfully, “Enjoy the show, girl! The butler done it!” I’m not saying the butler done it, but that’s what the cabdriver said.

As always, appearances are deceptive. If there’s more pabulum in the West End than on Broadway, there’s also more choice. Among many new and classic dramas to see were Tom Stoppard’s memory play, Indian Ink; young Patrick Marber’s poker-playing morality play, Dealer’s Choice; Arthur Miller’s A View from the Bridge; Sean O’Casey’s The Plough and the Stars; John Webster’s Jacobean favorite, The Duchess of Malfi; and Ronald Harwood’s Taking Sides, his conscience drama of the life of the Berlin Philharmonic’s genius conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, directed by Harold Pinter.

Maggie Smith
Dame Maggie Smith and her sons, Toby Stephens and Chris Larkin, whose father is Sir Robert Stephens.

Actors, more than 50 plays
(Three Tall Women; 30 films; The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, A Room with a View; 16 television roles; 13 major awards. Made a dame in 1989.
Steps: eight plays
(A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Coriolanus; one film; two television roles.
Larkin: five plays; two film; two television roles.
Photographed June 20, 1995.

Here’s the Andrew Lloyd Webber empire and the Cameron Mackintosh empire—and there’s the rest. Mackintosh’s personal fortune is estimated at half a billion dollars. The global earnings of Lloyd Webber’s production company, the Really Useful Group, now approach $3 billion. Lloyd Webber holds court at his 4,000-plus-acre (Continued on page 20?)
The Highbrows

Adrian Noble, artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company (21 productions for 1994–96 season); Richard Eyre, director of the Royal National Theatre (23 productions in 1995).

Photographed June 12, 1995, in the paint room of the National Theatre in front of the backdrop for La Grande Magie.

The global earnings of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s production company now approach $3 billion.

The Middlebrows

The People Who Brought You Cats (and, in various partnerships and collaborations: Jesus Christ Superstar, Evita, Les Misérables, The Phantom of the Opera, Miss Saigon, Starlight Express, and Sunset Boulevard).

Left to right: producer Cameron Mackintosh, choreographer Gillian Lynne, composer Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, director Trevor Nunn, and production designer John Napier.

Paul Scofield
Actor, aged 73; 76 plays (including the acclaimed 1962 Peter Brook production of King Lear); 17 films (King Lear, Quiz Show); seven major awards, including an Oscar for A Man for All Seasons. Only British actor to turn down a knighthood. Currently shooting The Crucible, in which he plays Governor Danforth opposite Daniel Day-Lewis.

Sir Alec Guinness
Actor, master of disguise. Aged 81; 66 plays (John Mortimer's A Voyage Round My Father); 48 films (Kind Hearts and Coronets, Star Wars); eight television roles (Smiley's People); one memoir, 10 major awards. Knighted in 1959.

"There are three ways, I suggest, for a determined actor to deal with critics. The first, most sensational, slightly dangerous but highly successful if carried out with sincerity, is to hit them."

Sir Derek Jacobi

Photographed July 25, 1995, in the cloisters of Chichester Cathedral in costume for Hadrian VII.

"Stage fright" is too mild a word for it; it is absolute stark terror.

Sir Ian McKellen
Actor. One hundred two plays; 16 films; 28 television roles; eight major awards. Knighted in 1991.

Photographed August 17, 1995, at Syon House with a statue of Bacchus.

Coming soon to a multiplex near you: Restoration, Jack & Sarah, Richard III.

"I've no fear of standing up in front of 3,000 people and showing off and taking my clothes off... But could I tell anyone I was gay? No."

Sir Anthony Hopkins
Actor, director, reformed wild man, self-described "Amerophobe."

Twenty-five plays (Pravda); 32 films (The Silence of the Lambs, The Remains of the Day); 40 television roles; seven major awards. Knighted in 1993.

Photographed at the Richmond Theatre in London.

For his National Theatre audition, he performed a scene from Othello for Olivier, who said, "You've got a bloody nerve."

Catch him in: the title role of Nixon, opening next month, and as Picasso in Merchant Ivory's Surviving Picasso.
Ben Kingsley

Actor. Born Krishna Bhanji in North Yorkshire.
Thirty-seven plays, 20 films, 28 television roles; four major awards, including one Oscar, for his portrayal of Gandhi, 1982.
Photographed June 12, 1995.
In 1963, at age 19, he was so awed by Ian Holm's Richard III that he actually passed out.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream"

Fairies surround Titania and Bottom (played by Stella Gonet and Desmond Barrit). Alex Jennings, as Oberon, is in the foreground.
Photographed March 21, 1995, on the stage of the Barbican Theatre in London, where it has been running since April 25.
The Royal Shakespeare Company production, directed by Adrian Noble, with sets by Anthony Ward, will tour this January, and opens at the Nederland Theatre on Broadway in March.
At center the British are great character actors.

RAA Class of '85

Actors and Royal Academy of
Dramatic Art graduates
Jane Horrocks (The Rise and Fall
of Little Voice, directed
by her former beau Sam Mendes; TV:
Absolutely Fabulous), Iain Glen
(Masbeth, film, Silent Scream;
marrried to actress Susannah Harker);
and Imogen Stubbs
(Othello, film, Jack & Sarah;
marrried to director Trevor Nunn).
Not pictured: classmate Ralph Fiennes.
Photographed July 12, 1995.

"There's this thing that teachers
at RADA and directors
always say to you. 'Be yourself,
darling.' And I want to say:
look, the whole reason
I'm here is so I don't have
to be me for a while."
- Imogen Stubbs

(Continued from page 199) Hampshire
estate, Sydmonton Court, with its
private chapel (where his mega-musicals
are previewed before a select audi-
ence). Andrew Lloyds Bank, as he's
known, irritates some. "Easy come, easy
go," Paul Johnson wrote in The Spec-
tator when Lloyd Webber paid $29
million for Picasso's portrait Angel
Fernandez de Soto. The British tradi-
tion known as the Tall Poppies Syndrome
likes to cut uppity success down to
size. "At least you know where you are."
explained Kenneth Branagh, who is
judged as being too ambitious, not a
gentlemanly thing—too pushy, in a
sense too American.

The egos were always big; it's the
theater world that got small. As the
world turns and spins, cats and phan-
toms and trains and helicopters and
miserable French people are circling
the globe, now and wherever. And it
all began there, in the land of Shake-
speare, Lloyd Webber and Cameron
Mackintosh, in partnership, then
separately, beat America at its own game.
They invented a new popular culture
as powerfully pervasive in its way as
Disney—the global musical.

Broadway traditionalists may not
care for Lloyd Webber, but he seized
the lightning at a time when Broad-
way was declining into remembered
dreams, backstage stories, and
uncommercial Sondheimian disenchant-
ment. Look at his early choices: Jesus
(Jesus Christ Superstar), the wife of
an Argentinean dictator (Evita), cats
(and T. S. Eliot's cats, at that).

"People hated even the name Cats,"
Cameron Mackintosh, its producer,
ponted out. "Everyone turned it down.
I was probably the last person Lloyd
Webber played it to." (Mackintosh
boldly chose a director who had nev-
er staged a major musical before-
Trevor Nunn, then the boss of the
Royal Shakespeare Company.) "Global
hits didn't exist at that time. Nobody
thought about it, including me.
I promise you."

But he saw the opportunity. And
when the aging ruling elites of Broad-
way woke up, it was too late. Mac-
kintosh, the young British impresario,
hyped, marketed, and merchandised
its musicals in ways that had never
been seen before. Cats invented the
universal musical logo—a neutral sym-
bol, a semiotic sign, a figure danc-
ing in the eyes of a cat, like the
mask (Phantom), the waif (Les Mis),
the helicopter (Miss Saigon). The lo-
gos transcend language barriers;
they're instantly recognized every-
where; they go very nicely on sou-
venir T-shirts and mugs. When was
there ever a Cameron Mackintosh
(or a Lloyd Webber) musical that
didn't have the biggest advance tick-
et sale in history? It's a spectacle!
It's a special effect! It's an event!
Barnum Mackintosh created Event
Theater.

Yet, to meet him is to be sur-
prised. His headquarters in North Lon-
don is an 18th-century house. He
comes into town two days a week from
his Somerset home, a restored 12th-
century priory. One has the impres-
sion he has always been a happy
man. Ruling the musical world is a
bonus. (Fifty-one Mackintosh pro-
ductions are currently playing round
the world.) He's a likeable man, now
49, unflamboyant, uncomplicated,
clear. He possesses the more tradi-
tionally American enthusiasm and
buoyancy—the vivid, confident belief
in what he does—that the terri-
tory of Broadway. "I'm no good at
all at coming up with an original
idea. I can recognize it. That's my
talent. Anyone who thinks they know
what the public wants is an idiot.
I'm still surprised and delighted the
public likes what I like. I produce
absolutely for myself!"

Although the global mu-
sical was born in En-
land, it has taken on
the force of a multi-
national superpower.
The unique identity of
English theater resides
in its celebrated tradition of great clas-
sical acting.

"In England, acting is a heritage
passed on through the ages," noted
a 1991 New York profile of Michael
Gammon. "From Burbage to Garrick,
from Garrick to Keen and Macready,
from them to Irving, and on to Olivier,
Gielgud, and Richardson—and Gam-
bon and McKellen. As is also true of
great down, actors learn and borrow
from their predecessors, who borrowed
from those who came before them."

As befits a king, Laurence Olivier's
ashes lie close (Continued on page 213)
Tom Stoppard

Playwright, screenwriter, former Thatcherite. Twenty-five plays (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Travesties, The Real Thing, Arcadia); eight screenplays; nine teleplays; nine radio plays; one novel; 11 major awards.


Born Thomas Straussen in Czechoslovakia in 1937; moved to England at age eight; currently living in London with his second wife Zelda, four sons.

"I like Tom Stoppard enormously... Not everyone who votes Conservative in England is representative of an evil empire."

Harold Pinter

Playwright, actor, director, agitator. Twenty-eight plays (The Birthday Party, The Homecoming, Betrayal); 18 screenplays; two teleplays; four major awards.


Married Lady Antonia Fraser in 1980; one son. Suffered from writer's block from 1978 to 1993.

Latest project: Moonlight, opening at the Roundabout Theatre in New York this month.

"There's something about Harold that makes me look under my nose to see if it says MADE IN TAIWAN."

—Tom Stoppard
**Stephen Rea**

Actor. Forty-six plays (Someone Who'll Watch over Me); 16 films (The Crying Game); 26 television roles.


"To me, theater and film are like hurling and football—different sports, but both equally great."

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**Jude Law**

Actor. Wild child. Aged 22; nine plays; three films (Shopping); two television roles.


His nude scene in Indecent Proposal caused an increase in usage of opera glasses on Broadway.

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**Patrick Stewart**

Actor. Trekkie idol. One hundred four plays (including The Tempest on Broadway this fall); 20 films; 52 television roles; three major awards.

Photographed August 7, 1995, at Heathrow Airport.

"Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant...


"Make it so."
—Captain Picard, Star Trek: The Next Generation.

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**Richard E. Grant**

Actor, diarist, no relation to Hugh. Four plays (The Importance of Being Earnest); 12 films (Withnail and I); four television roles.

Photographed August 8, 1995, in Snowdon's hall.

Born and raised in Mbabane, Swaziland; married to voice coach Joosie Washington; one daughter. Nonsmoker, non-drinker, non-caffeine imbiber, non-meat eater; loves shoes.

His Four Weddings: Jack & Sarah, opening February 2, 1996.
The reserved and witty British need their theater like oxygen.

(Continued from page 207) to where King Henry V is buried in Westminster Abbey. He knew him well. Olivier's plaque is found on the stone floor of Poets' Corner—as popular a tourist attraction as Hollywood Boulevard—placed alongside the plaques of two other great actors: David Garrick, from the 18th century, and Henry Irving, from the 19th. They face the statue of Shakespeare, national playwright.

Olivier (the son of a priest) continued the sanctified theatrical cycle when his astonishing, regal memorial service took place in Westminster Abbey in 1899, attended by 2,000 and riveting the battle of Agincourt in patriotic fervor. It was quite a production. The Abbey echoed to Sir William Walton's theme music for Olivier's film versions of Henry V and Hamlet. Paul Scofield, Ian McKellen, Derek Jacobi, Maggie Smith, Dorothy Tutin, "and also staring" walked in stately procession to the altar, carrying what The Times of London described as "Olivier's treasury"—his insignia of the Order of Merit; a model of the National Theatre and another of the Chichester Theatre, both of which he founded; his Oscar (for Hamlet); his crown from the film version of Richard III; his laurel wreath from the Stratford production of Coriolanus; his Lear crown from the television production that brought him out of retirement; and his most meaningful prop, Edmund Kean's Richard III sword, handed on to Olivier by Sir John Gielgud.

Richard Olivier, one of Olivier's four children, at 33 now making his way as a well-regarded theater director, was 27 when his father died in his early 80s after a long battle with illness. There was a strange awareness that I'd seen him die a lot of times," this gentle man told me. "In King Lear, in Henry V, the Bourbon Revisted... Unlike other children, I saw my dad acting dying. He once told me, 'I've played more than 200 parts, and I know them better than I know myself. I don't know who I am when I'm not acting.' And when I was young, I would cry at his death scenes. But when his death was real, I couldn't cry.

Almost crushed by the legacy of his father, he loved him. "I feel very grateful and proud to have spent that time with him," he said.

Sir John Gielgud is the last of that glittering triumvirate—Olivier, Gielgud, and Ralph Richardson—who, with Dame Peggy Ashcroft, led British theater into its golden age. Gielgud's acting lineage alone stretches back into the 19th century: his grandmother was a well-known actress; her sister (and Irving's acting partner) was the legendary Ellen Terry—"the most desirable woman ever created by God or man," said a swooning Swinburne.

Ninety-one and still active, Sir John is invariably sunny, talkative, and stylishly modest. He lives on a 17th-century estate deep in Buckinghamshire, where, he told me, he likes to watch any old rubbish on TV. "I can't keep away from the Simpson trial," he said, laughing. "It's rather bad theater. Too many interruptions. Still, I can't keep away! I'm sure he did it, aren't you?" He said he acts in "little bits" of films—"quite pleasant, not taxing"—and in radio plays, which he enjoys, meeting new people.

He was too diffident to mention that one radio play, which celebrated his 90th birthday, was King Lear—the fifth Lear in his magnificent career.

DAME DIANA RIGG

Actress, lecturer, diva. Twenty-three plays (Medea); 10 films; 14 television roles (including host of PBS's Mystery series); three major awards. Made a dame in 1994.

Photographed July 27, 1995, as a traditional pantomime Principal Boy. Best known for portrayal of cat-suit-wearing secret agent Emma Peel in The Avengers. Currently starring in Mother Courage and Her Children at the National Theatre, directed by Jonathan Kent.

The entire London picture changes with the power and creative volume of those nonprofit empires the Royal National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. "Do the English people want a national theatre?" George Bernard Shaw asked 50 years ago. "Of course they do not... They have got the British Museum, the National Gallery and Westminster Abbey, but they never
He's the master builder of British theater. At 30, he founded the Royal Shakespeare Company; then, succeeding Olivier, he led the National for more than a decade, into its new South Bank empire. And for good measure Hall ran the Glyndebourne Festival Opera. There's practically nothing left for him to run. Yet this impresario is close to an academic scholar in the privacy of the rehearsal room, tapping out the beat of the Shakespearean verse on a lectern like a conductor.

"What we're all bleating about, as usual," Hall told me, "is fighting against decline. In the 1960s, a young actor would have been marinated in Shakespeare. The easy solution now is the convention of the real—gritty—underplaying, as on TV. It's affected the spine of London theater—the reason it flourishes and is the envy of America—is government subsidy. It has survived cutbacks and assault, and nuclear attack through the 1980s from Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the slash-and-burn Newt Gingrich of the arts. "When can we stop giving money to awful people like Peter Hall?" she pleaded, enraged that the man who was then running the National should lead the battle against Tory philistinism and mean minds, as she saw it.

No one has done more to keep alive the heritage of British theater than the workaholic director-producer Sir Peter Hall, and few powerful figures in England fascinate more. He could be Machiavellian, Iago, Coriolanus, Don Juan, or, of late, Falstaff.

Leo McKern

Actor, bon vivant, ham. More than 200 plays; more than 40 films
(Ryan's Daughter); more than 100 television roles.

Photographed June 9, 1995, at the Chichester Festival Theatre on the set of Holinshed's Choice.

Of course, known to millions as Rumpole, the title character in the television series he starred in from 1977 till 1992. "I consider that my best performance ever was as Peer Gynt. But if I get an obit in the London Times, they will say, '... of course, known to millions as Rumpole.'"
the whole ecology. But Shakespeare’s averse to dramatics. The reason Shakespeare got longer is because actors play the words, not the line. You preserve the sanctity of the line. I reckon there are only about 50 actors left in the country who can do it.

Hall, a railwayman’s son, came out of Cambridge University. So did many of the newer generation—Richard Eyre, Nicholas Hytner, Sam Mendes, Emma Thompson, Declan Donnellan, Nick Ormerod, and Simon McBurney and Annabel Arden of London’s Theatre de Complicite. The Marlowe Society at Cambridge, under the direction of George “Dadie” Rylands, shaped the under-grad Peter Hall. The heritage was passed on when Hall handed over the Royal Shakespeare Company to Trevor Nunn (who was also at Cambridge), and continued through Hall’s years at the National, where the Marlowe torch is now carried by former society president Sir Ian McKellen.

Surprisingly, perhaps, Hall at 64 looks more hopefully to America than to Britain. I had put it to him that for too long Americans have been going down on one knee before the god of Shakespeare, when they possess all the skills of dynamic language and physicality—speed, wit, naturalism, daring—to burst through the conventions and make new. “If they could be trained to observe the form and breathe at the right places,” said Hall, “they’d knock the shit out of us.”

It is extraordinary that Arthur Miller—the dramatist of Death of a Salesman and founding father of modern American drama with Eugene O’Neill and Tennessee Williams—is now produced and celebrated more in England than in his own land.

Whereas his 1994 play, Broken Glass, closed early on Broadway, in London it was taken under the protective umbrella of the National Theatre, transferred to the West End, and went on to win the Olivier Award for best play. The spiraling cost of producing...
plays on Broadway is at least twice as high as in London, making the more commercial work the safer bet. But Arthur Miller goes further:

"Broken Glass wasn't Cats," he points out in his deep, deceptively calm American voice. "On Broadway, it's purely business. But a West End theater doesn't regard a few empty seats as a disgrace. The American system is a commercial, coked-eyed, historically determined process where success is everything. Even profit isn't enough. It has to be a big profit."

Look briefly at the route to New York of Tom Stoppard's latest success, *Arcadia*. It was first produced at the National Theatre. When it transferred to the commercial West End, four New York producers wanted it for commercial Broadway. Stoppard, the playwright of scintillating ideas, chose the nonprofit Lincoln Center Theater instead. "I wanted an axis in New York that would do my plays without picking and choosing the ones that might make money and might not," he explained. "The experience of having a play produced in New York is still unequaled. If you could smoke there, it would be perfect." He has made the nonprofit theater in New York his base, and his commercial Happgood—which no Broadway producer wanted—could therefore be produced at Lincoln Center alongside *Arcadia*.

The golden boy of British theater, 38-year-old director Nicholas Hytner, now lives in London and New York, enjoying the best of both worlds. Hytner understands popular taste, but he functions outside the mainstream. After directing the blockbuster *Miss Saigon*, he returned to the National to direct the stage version of *The Madness of King George*. In New York, he has become an associate director of the Lincoln Center Theater, site of his successful production of *Carousel*, and after all the acclaim for his film version of *King George*, when Hollywood was at his feet, he chose the route of modestly budgeted films for adults.

It is his way of keeping control of "doing good work" un忐忑 by too blatant commercial compromise. His new film is Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, with Daniel Day-Lewis, Winona Ryder, and Paul Scofield. It continues Hytner's system of alternating between films and the theater on the well-founded belief that there exist sufficient millions of movie- and theatergoers who take pleasure in the artfully "uncommercial."

The keepers of the nonprofit flame, Adrian Noble, boss of the R.S.C., and Richard Eyre of the National, have this deeply in common: they are both insomniacs. Eyre, described by Frank Rich of *The New York Times* as "the most successful producer in the English-speaking theater," wears it well. The words "community," "group," "society," pepper his conversation like a conscience—words, he said, "people who don't like the theater recall from, as if from rabid dogs."

Now 52, he has decided to leave the National in two years after more than a decade of success at the helm. "Let somebody else have the sleepless nights," he said, and laughed. Eyre has worked in the nonprofit theater all his life, and it's difficult to imagine him working anywhere else. He turned down the opportunity to direct *Les Misérables*, which is like misplacing your winning lottery ticket. It's a shame. "I don't regret it," he explained phlegmatically. "I believe the Faustian contract is a reality. The others can do musicals like *Les Misérables* in good faith. But it just won't farm out for me if I do things in bad faith. I know that sounds like a sanctimonious prick, but that's what I feel."

Eyre's counterpart at the Royal Shakespeare Company is the wired Adrian Noble. "Terrible, appalling, appalling!" he said when I asked him about his insomnia. What does he do all night? I wondered. "Worry," he answered. His body behind his desk in Stratford bent into the shape of a question mark. (Continued on page 224)
Kenneth Branagh

Actor, director, playwright, overachiever, husband of Emma Thompson. Twenty-one plays; nine films; 16 television roles; four major awards.

Photographed June 5, 1995, on a tanning bed at Shepperdon Studios during a rehearsal for the forthcoming film version of Othello, in which he plays Iago.

Frequently compared to Laurence Olivier: fingernails on a chalkboard. Score points: his Henry V reduced Prince Charles to tears. Sore points: being more popular in America than in his home country; Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein.

The Next Wave

Actors Phil Daniels (Dealers’ Choice; film: Goldwyn; Circle of Friends), Paul Rys (Design for Living; film: Chaplin), Joseph Fiennes (A View from the Bridge), Rupert Graves (Design for Living; film: The Madness of King George), and Simon Russell Beale (Richard III).

Photographed August 14, 1995, in the Virgin Upper Class departure lounge at Heathrow Airport.

Rachel Weisz

Actress, starlet: Four plays (Design for Living); four films; four television roles.


Appearing as Miranda in the film Sealing Beauty, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, to be released in spring 1996.

Rupert Everett

Actor, writer, singer, novelist, Vanity Fair contributing editor. Ten plays; 16 films (The Madness of King George); seven television roles.

Photographed August 1, 1995.

Debuted as Guy Bennett, the character based on Guy Burgess, in the acclaimed 1982 production of Julian Mitchell’s Another Country.

Forthcoming film: Dunston Checks In.

Julie Christie

Actress, animal-rights activist, enigma. Three plays (Old Times); 30 films (Doctor Zhivago, Shampoo); five television roles; two major awards. Lived on and off for seven years with Warren Beatty in the Escondido Suite of the Beverly Wilshire Hotel.

Michael Gambon

Actor, mechanic.
Forty plays (Volpone); 17 films;
13 television roles.
(The Singing Detective); five major awards.
Photographed August 2, 1995,
at Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Joined National Theatre in 1963 under Laurence Olivier, who personally selected him to be a spear-carrier.

“Role for role, pound for pound, Michael Gambon is, arguably, the finest actor in the English theater.”

Natasha Richardson

Actress, theater royalty.
Seven plays (High Society, Anna Christie);
11 films (Noble);
six television roles; one major award.

Elder daughter of Vanessa Redgrave and the late director Tony Richardson;
granddaughter of Sir Michael Redgrave;
Mrs. Liam Neeson; one son.
The unique identity of English theater resides in its celebrated tradition of great classical acting.

Richard Harris and Peter O'Toole
Actors, box-office, test-takers.
Photographed August 17, 1995, in the Oliver Messel Suite at the Dorchester Hotel.

Richard Harris: 26 plays (Camelot); 51 films (This Sporting Life); 6 television roles; Defining role: a man called Horse.
Plans to bring Pirandello's Henry IV to Broadway this season.

Peter O'Toole: 104 plays (The Merchant of Venice); 44 films (My Favorite Year); 11 television roles; Defining role: Lawrence of Arabia.

John Osborne's memorial was a crowded gathering. There were England's dramatists—among them Harold Pinter, Christopher Hampton, and John Mortimer. And there were its actors—among them that patriarch, actor, and enigmatic face of Paul Scofield, the only actor in England to have turned down a knighthood. And there was the ghost of Olivier, the only great actor in English history to have been made a lord. A recording of Laurence Olivier singing and dancing as Archie Rice in the Entertainer. Osborne's music-hall metaphor of crumbling postcolonial England, was played during the service, bringing sighs and affectionate laughter. For the most celebrated actor of the century could scarcely sing a note.

And perhaps it was all there in the secluded chapel that morning—earlier that year—in the timeless, familiar, expert English ceremony of it all, in those restrained, reedy English voices singing lusty hymns, in the prayers and English music and flawless readings from great actors—the inescapable impression that the best of English life is a play, a show, even before God.