

RADA

RADA
1904-2004

THE MAGAZINE

ATTENBOROUGH AT 80

RADA'S CENTENARY
CELEBRATIONS

FACING THE CAMERA

SINEAD'S SPOONFACE

ACTION ON DISABILITY

ISSUE 24 • 2004 • £1.50



RADA BAR

The RADA Bar – the fully-licensed foyer that greets visitors through the Malet Street entrance – is now in full swing, serving food and drinks to students, staff, Friends and the public. It is open from 9.30am to 11pm with Happy Hour between 6-7pm nightly Monday to Friday. If you haven't yet visited the RADA Bar, take the opportunity to do so as soon as possible.

During production weeks, you can pre-order theatre suppers from a delicious menu (changed each term), or choose from the range of sandwiches and snacks on sale. On matinée days pre-order a matinée tea to follow the performance. The quality is excellent, the prices competitive, the atmosphere congenial and creative.

This facility is now a venue in itself: the home, during non-production weeks, of a season of new events featuring RADA graduates and guests. It regularly hosts play-readings – including new work – open-mic nights, cabaret and video showings. Friends will find advance notice of them in the termly production brochures.

Help guarantee the success of this wonderful facility by making regular use of it throughout the term. Check with the Box Office for the dates of the RADA Tours which are available for members of the public during the production seasons; drop in for morning coffee or lunch; meet friends for a drink and a bar snack after work; enjoy a pre-theatre supper when you come in to see RADA student productions in our three in-house theatres or book this lovely space for a private party.

Bon appétit!

Please pre-order your theatre supper, to ensure seating is available, using the form in the termly production brochure sent to all Friends. If you are not yet a Friend of RADA (see page 19), please contact the Box Office Manager on 020 7908 4800.

Subject to availability, RADA's three in-house theatres, rehearsal rooms, sound studios, workshop facilities and the RADA Bar are available for private hire for presentations, productions and private parties. All enquiries should be made to Genevieve Cleghorn on 020 7908 4754.

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RADA

THE MAGAZINE

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STARRIS

ATTENBOROUGH AT 80 As RADA celebrates its President's 80th birthday, Lord Attenborough tells Peter Fiddick of his student days and of his enduring gratitude to the Academy

It all started like this. A lad of 11 or so, living in Leicester, was taken to London by his governor (who as well as being Principal of Leicester University College was also head of the city art gallery's purchasing committee) to see the National Gallery's latest purchase, a large and famous painting by Seurat.

Seurat, he told his son, was a genius. And then he said: 'Now, Dick, I'm going to take you to see another genius. You've seen little bits of him on Saturday mornings, but there's a revival of one of his great movies, *The Gold Rush*, at the London Pavilion'.

'We walked to Piccadilly from the National Gallery,' recalls the boy, nearly 70 years on, 'and I remember so clearly' – his hands meet in a thunderclap – 'I watched this bloody genius and the thought that it was possible to make you wet yourself with laughter and then have tears pouring down your face within a second seemed to me quite extraordinary. I thought, if I could ever do anything in that world, that's what I want to do.'

Some 57 years later, Richard Attenborough would pay the ultimate homage to his childhood inspiration, when he directed the feature film *Chaplin*, but back then his academic father had still to be convinced that his decidedly non-academic son was indeed bound for the stage, for even though he was himself a considerable amateur actor, he doubted his son's commitment. And although his wife, president of Leicester's thriving Little Theatre in her time, helped the boy's cause,



“

such notable visiting actors as Robert Atkins (one of RADA's earliest graduates) counselled against.

In the end, Frederick Attenborough devised a double test. Knowing of RADA, he wrote and asked whether, first, they could attest to any latent talent in his son and, if so, whether there was any scholarship available, since he could not afford the fees and upkeep. So it

was that Richard, aged 17, went to London to audition. The war had started: he had to get back to Leicester for his turn as an Air Raid Precaution warden.

News of his acceptance, complete with the vital award of a Leverhulme scholarship, soon followed and the boy left for London, there to live with an aunt in Wimbledon and cycle daily the several very hilly miles across the Thames valley to Gower Street and back. The scholarship's £2 10s a week living allowance had to be husbanded.

The war was at what would prove for the civilian population to be its peak from enemy bomb raids and the Academy was at a new low, with student numbers right down and teachers, too, caught up in the war. 'I think that was one of the reasons I got the scholarship: there were very few men attempting to attend the Academy – I think five men and something like 13 girls in my class. I had volunteered for the RAF and I was apprehensive that my call-up would come at any time.'

In fact, his age meant it would be 1943 before the RAF beckoned, by which time he was spectacularly launched on a stage and film career that actually started while he was at the Academy. For the moment however – 'I had the most blissful time of my life!'

Part of the bliss was doubtless engendered by meeting and falling in love with another student, Sheila Sim – 'Poppy' – whom he would marry in 1945, while he was in the RAF, with the sinister chugging of enemy V2 rockets overhead. But the war had not robbed RADA of such

inspiring teachers as Harcourt Williams, to be a bulwark of Laurence Olivier's National Theatre team; or Lizzi Piske and Alice Gachet.

Gachet was already a RADA legend. She produced French plays, in her native language, and conjured an

impressive standard from her classes. In the 1920s, Charles Laughton had been her protégé and played at the Comédie Française. Richard, who unlike Sheila or Alan Badel spoke no French, was admiring but not exactly Laughton material: 'I could catch the lilt, but I couldn't manage the lines at all [demonstrates perfectly inflected 'French' gibberish] and Gachet would be at the back of the stalls saying "Deekee, I can't hear you, dear boy, I just can't hear you!"

'But of course I dared not fall out of any class, because if I did, that was it: there would be no money to do anything else.'

Then there was the Principal, Kenneth Barnes, knighted just before the war for his role in building the Academy since he joined 30 years earlier. His elder sisters, Irene and Violet Vanbrugh, were big West End stars, and his own plays had been professionally produced, but the 18-year-old, keen to be trying Checkov and Ibsen, found the 'commercial' repertoire Barnes favoured frustrating and wasn't sure the head man knew a great deal about acting.



(Facing page) Richard Attenborough, 24, with Joan Greenwood at the fund-raising RADA Ball, January 1948; (above) as Chairman, with Princess Diana, RADA President, and Hon. Fellow Sir John Gielgud, 1989; (left) with Nicholas Barter and HM The Queen at the re-opening, November 2000

'And then you'd be playing the most devastating scene in the Little Theatre – now the GBS – and the back door of the Principal's "box" would open, in would come a "nippie" with Sir Kenneth's tea-tray and you would hear a clarion call: "Thank you very much, thank you – would you pass the milk please!" more loudly projected than anything that was going on on the stage.

'It was a quite incredible lack of understanding of the concentration and reality of performance. Tea in the stalls used to happen in the West End in those days, but I'm not sure the stalls used to indulge in quite such projection. But, by god, it taught us that we had to get through, no matter what.'

Not that the Principal was the worst problem the Little Theatre posed. 'You couldn't get from one side of the stage to the other, other than going down through the cellars underneath the premises. So if you exited left and had to re-enter right you had to run like the clappers under the stage.

'That was all right in a normal play, but our principal production

was *Cavalcade* – with four or five men and 13 girls playing a cast of thousands. I had to black up for one scene to play on a pier or something and get across to the other side, changing costume and getting the black off on the way – you can imagine the hysteria.'

The biggest theatre drama, however, came in the early hours of April 17, 1941. The blitz was at a peak and students and staff joined in a rota of night-time watches – 'which meant you had a bucket of sand and a half bucket of water and a stirrup pump. What the hell you were going to do if the place was on fire I haven't the faintest idea – it was all fatuous!'

When the latest air-raid on London dropped a landmine squarely on the Malet Street theatre that April night, destroying it utterly – though thankfully without inflicting the human casualties suffered in the neighbourhood – Richard was not on duty, but arrived next morning to be confronted by the chaos and the need to sort it out.

'We put cardboard in the windows and anything we could find

continued overleaf

“ We cleared up the muck with our bare hands, because to get a broom then was out of the question ”

in the doors. We cleared up the muck with our bare hands, because in those days to get a broom was out of the question if you hadn't already got one. There was nothing to help us. We went in and out, morning, noon and night. Nobody went home, nobody slept.'

A week later, Council met in the first-floor council room to decide the Academy's future. 'We were lying on the marble floor of the Gower Street foyer, absolutely exhausted. Some of us, myself, Alan Dipper, Wolfe Morris, all due to go into the services, were praying that Council in their wisdom would allow us to continue our training – because if we didn't, and went into the services, you came out with everybody else at the end of the war, having no qualification for the stage, and your chances of employment were zilch.

'So we were desperate to know what the result would be. I remember very clearly, I was lying on the floor by the radiator, heard the door open, and what I saw was a pair of plus-fours coming down the stairs. We all got up, because obviously this was council coming out, and the voice said: "It's all right, children, it's

all right, we're going to reopen".

'Of course it was Bernard Shaw. I felt I was hearing Shakespeare, practically. I couldn't believe that this phenomenal man was there and had in no small measure been responsible for us reopening.'

This all took place in the Easter vacation. The summer term started just one week late and Richard Attenborough both continued his training and launched his career. In one vacation, a RADA director, Ronald Kerr, proposed him for a professional production of O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness* which brought him to the attention of the top agent Al Parker, who got him an audition for one of the most celebrated British war movies, Noel Coward's *In Which We Serve* – which Kenneth Barnes, bending the rules, let him off to do. Very soon after leaving, still too young for the RAF, he was a West End star.

'So I maintained, as did Sheila, a passionate interest in RADA and a feeling of unbelievable debt. When I played in the West End, one of the first people to ask me to go and see him was Kenneth Barnes, who said, look, the Academy isn't going to last,



Programme-selling in style at the 1949 RADA Ball: Rachel Kempson (RADA 1933) and Sheila Sim (RADA 1940)

we have no theatre, we have got to start raising money.' The response from Richard and other graduates was a fund-raising ball at the Lyceum.

The connection would only get stronger. He joined Council in 1963, became chairman in 1972 and, having led the Academy through the Centenary rebuilding project in the 1990s, last year was named President of RADA, a fitting tribute to a contribution more than 60 years long and not done yet.

Student



Graduate



Chairman



President



LEADING MAN

ATTENBOROUGH AT 80 *Nicholas Barter, Principal of RADA, pays personal tribute to Lord Attenborough's great contribution to the Academy*

How can you celebrate the life of a man whose life has already been celebrated at such a high level? One of the country's most distinguished award winning actors, Oscar winning director of so many remarkable films, tackling ground breaking subjects, knight, peer of the realm, recipient of the Legion d'Honneur and the Japanese Emperor's Prize yet at the same time a national treasure, one of the most instantly recognisable faces in the country.

This is a man who in addition to such an elevated list of achievements has the common touch – creator of Capital Radio, Chairman of Channel 4 Television and of the BFI, founder of the Richard Attenborough Centre for Disability and the Arts, quietly involved at an active level with so many charities, not least, with the redoubtable Sheila, the actors' retirement home at Denville Hall – the list goes on and on.

How it has been possible in the midst of all this to devote himself with such dedication to RADA I have no idea. When I was fortunate enough to be offered the post of Principal by him, as Chairman of the Academy Council, some ten years ago, I had already been working at the academy for five years. Yet driving to RADA for a meeting he would frequently ring from the car to ask me for information or the answer to a question which I was not as prepared for as he clearly was. His capacity to focus on the heart of the matter, to cut through to the



RADA Principal Nicholas Barter with the President

essentials of any challenge is, in my experience, unique.

I can say without hesitation that without his leadership as a Council member and then Chairman over forty years RADA would not exist

“ *I am proud to be able to say that I have worked for this extraordinary human being* **”**

today. As Project Champion it was he who foresaw the possibility of a Lottery bid some nine months before the advent of the Lottery. It was he who spearheaded a fund

raising drive which succeeded to the tune of over £10m partnership funding, releasing the Arts Council's grant.

At every step of the way he was involved down to the smallest detail of design or cost and as the actor and director, the consummate artist that he is, he led the discussions on auditorium design which have given us the magnificent, flexible auditoria for training both acting and technical students which we now enjoy.

I am proud to be able to say that I have worked for this extraordinary human being. His personal support, wise council, irrepressible sense of humour, cautionary vigilance and astonishing tenacity have been a lesson for life. To be able to count him as a friend is a privilege that I shall always treasure.

CELEBRAT

ATTENBOROUGH AT 80 *September 25, 2003, was the day of the RADA AGM - and of celebrating the President's 80th, from breakfast with the staff, via a Vanbrugh Theatre revue by the students, to dinner with a host of friends...*

...and the stars who could not be present sent their tributes

KENNETH BRANAGH

Among the thousands of other students whose life in the Academy was made easier by his stewardship and unstinting industry, I add my own heart-felt thank-you. Aside from ensuring the security of our RADA careers, your work as a performer has been an inspiration.

One of the great moments in my career was having the momentary opportunity to direct Lord Attenborough in a film of *Hamlet*. He had half a dozen lines as the English Ambassador: he was punctual, modest, blisteringly intelligent, full of beautifully judged feeling for the speech and performed it with an effortless clarity and truth that took my breath away.

Happy Birthday, Lord A. You are the most wonderful servant to this Academy and to your art and the kindest and most supportive of friends to so many of us.

Cheers! Lord and Lady Attenborough



Adrian Lester and Lolita Chakrabarti

DAME DIANA RIGG

Not only is he a gloriously talented actor, but subsequently has spent his life serving our profession and so many causes besides.

Goodness knows where he gets the energy. I think it's from heaven.



ION DAY

RALPH FIENNES

How lucky all of us are who have you and RADA as part of our lives. Your extraordinary generosity of spirit, formidable energy, infinite passion for acting, the theatre and film has blessed us all.

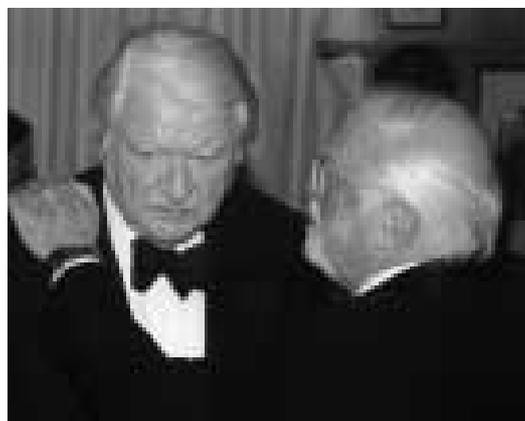
SIR ROGER MOORE

Your Lordship: Kristina and I are so sorry that we cannot be with you and Sheila this evening. You and her wonderful Judgeship are two of our favourite people and we love you both. Even though you have never given me a job – I work cheap, have quite a substantial wardrobe and I can still remember the odd line or two...

Dear Dickie, you are so worthy of every word of praise you will hear this evening. Have a great time. (My agent, by the way, is Jean Diamond...)

EDWARD FOX

It is our good fortune to have this opportunity to celebrate all the great things which Dickie has made happen and has achieved, thus far in his life's work. Dickie is pre-eminent in all that he has done, for countless causes and endeavours, for many years, and for the energy, purpose and love which he puts into everything he undertakes. To whatever in life can be called 'the Good', he has and does manage to make a truly staggering contribution.



Clockwise from above: Lord Attenborough with Alan Rickman, RADA Vice-Chairman; and John Whitney, RADA Chairman; Lord Putnam and Sir Ben Kingsley; Alan Rickman, Richard Wilson, Juliet Stevenson; Sir Michael and Lady Caine



M R T R E E ' S

As RADA embarks on its Centenary Year celebrations, Peter Fiddick recalls the great actor-manager (below) whose vision thus endures

One hundred years ago, on April 25, 1904, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, one of the theatrical giants of his era, who in 1895 had built his own theatre, Her Majesty's, in London's West End and was at this moment touring five other companies in the provinces and a sixth in Australia, launched his latest production: the Academy of Dramatic Art. His vision: to provide the theatrical profession with training to match that of the renowned Paris Conservatoire and an institution to rank with the Royal chartered colleges of art and of music.

It was with a showman's style that Tree declared his Academy open, late that April afternoon, his beloved theatre 'packed to its most uncomfortable parts (if any),' according to the *Manchester Guardian's* observer, 'by a company which included distinguished members of almost every profession'.

Seated beside and behind him on his theatre's stage, demonstrating their support, were the cream of the theatre world. On one side, Sir Squire Bancroft, an actor-manager so successful that he had retired, wealthy, 19 years earlier, aged 44. On the other, John Hare, the actor-manager for whom W S Gilbert had built the Garrick Theatre on the proceeds of his Savoy operas.

Gilbert himself was there, with Anthony Hope, of *Prisoner of Zenda* fame, and the rising generation of actors, including Irene Vanbrugh, Dion Boucicault, H B Irving, son of Sir Henry. In the audience, the regular first-nighters also bidden could spot the actor sisters of the

superstar Ellen Terry, Marion and Kate (who just 11 days earlier had become the grandmother of the infant John Gielgud), Henry Kemble, the influential critics A B Walkley and William Archer.

Tree raised his arm to point high above the heads even of those sitting in the 'gods'. 'Today, we have started the Dramatic Academy. Beyond there, high up in the dome, the accepted students with their appointed teachers have rehearsed a play.'

“ It was with a showman's style that Tree declared his Academy open, late that April afternoon, in his packed theatre ”



Tree spoke for 45 minutes, a speech spiced with humour: 'Ladies and gentlemen, acting cannot be taught. (*Cheers*) Very well, we will accept that as an axiom – we will write it in letters of gold over our door. That is to say, the spirit, the genius of acting cannot be taught. But what art, I ask, can be taught?' Poetry? Painting?

'You cannot communicate to a flower the secret of its existence. You cannot teach a plant to grow. (*Pause*) Nor a tree...' (*Cheers and laughter*). Mr Tree claims innocence.

But this was the actor at work. Tree was there to set on record, after the months of speculation and hectic work, a serious manifesto, delivered to his fellow professionals, whose support would be vital to the health of the project. He listed not only the Academy's staff, all established actors and teachers, but those who had agreed to bring their expertise to its students as 'visitors', a 30-strong roll-call of leading actors, producers and writers.

There were messages of support from Jules Claretie, administrator general of the Comédie Française, and the legendary Sarah Bernhardt. Sir Henry Irving, who had been training his own actors for 30 years, had sent his warmest good wishes, as had his longtime leading lady, Ellen Terry.

After outlining the curriculum embarked on earlier that afternoon, Tree re-stated his three longer-term aims: that the Academy of Dramatic Art be self-supporting but not profit-making, with scholarships to support those who

LEGACY

could not afford the fees; that it should not be exclusively identified with his own theatre but soon have its own premises; and that it should then seek a Royal Charter and become a public institution.

‘It may indeed prove to be the first step towards the formation of a national theatre. But, whereas a state-aided theatre may be considered by some in the nature of a luxury, this School is considered by many in the nature of a necessity.’

Necessity it may have been, but this one bold man alone took it on. ‘Tree’s school’, as it was familiarly known, would be totally dependent upon its students’ fees for economic survival and on the demonstrable value of its training for its professional acceptance. Were it to fail, the costs would fall to him.

It took him until the following year to move the students noisily clogging up his own theatre’s dome and foyers into a leased house, cheaply converted, in Gower Street. But by the end of 1905, his peers acknowledged his achievement and formed a Council of nine, including Sir Squire Bancroft, Johnston Forbes-Robertson, John Hare and the writers J M Barrie and Arthur Pinero, to buy the ADA from him and share the risks.

There would be many ups and downs. In its first decade, the ADA gave the theatre enduring names such as Athene Seyler, Miles Malleon, Fabia Drake, Robert Atkins and Cedric Hardwicke. The house next door was added, a theatre planned and started upon. Then World War I brought

economic crisis and closure threatened.

That averted, the theatre was finished and in 1920 King George V conferred the charter creating the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Its reputation and fortunes thrived, the Gower Street houses were rebuilt – then war came again and, 37 years almost to the day from Tree’s proclamation, a landmine destroyed the theatre and caused much havoc besides. It was 1954 before RADA got its main theatre back and the physical legacy of war was not wiped away until, in November 2000, Queen Elizabeth opened the ‘new Gower Street’.

Yet throughout that time, the roll-call of graduates in every decade attests that the real purpose did not waver: Flora Robson, John Gielgud and Charles Laughton in the 1920s; Rachel Kempson, Trevor Howard, Robert Morley in the ’30s; Richard Attenborough, Alan Badel, June Whitfield; Albert Finney, Diana Rigg, Glenda Jackson; Anthony Hopkins, Susan Fleetwood, Jonathan Price; Alan Rickman, Juliet Stevenson, Robert Lindsay; Fiona Shaw, Mark Rylance, Kenneth Branagh; and in the ’90s, Michael Sheen, Zoe Waites, Ioan Gruffudd...

That, his true heritage, is what ‘Tree’s Academy’ celebrates in this, its Centenary Year.

Peter Fiddick is writing the history of RADA’s first 100 years, to be published next year. He welcomes your memories: reach him via peter@fiddick.net or by post at RADA.

RADA CENTENARY YEAR 2004

Dates for your diary

MAY 9 – *Masks and Faces*

A National Film Theatre screening of the 70-minute silent movie made in 1917 as an all-star (Irene Vanburgh, Gladys Cooper, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, H B Irving) fund-raiser that kept RADA alive. With live music composed for RADA by Michael Kamen, his last work before his tragic death last December. Allied events and ticket arrangements to follow.

MAY 16 – *Masks and Faces, New York*

American RADA Network members’ screening: see page 21.

APRIL 19 – *Sir John Gielgud – The Centenary Gala*

Both RADA and the RSC will be beneficiaries of this fund raising gala evening. Judi Dench, Ian Richardson and Paul Schofield will lead an all star cast at the Gielgud Theatre. Tickets now on sale from the Gielgud Box Office, 0870 890 1105.

JUNE 8 – *Royal Centenary Lunch*

In the presence of HM the Queen, at the Mansion House, including a short music and poetry presentation by students and graduates. Tickets by invitation.

JUNE 16 – *Bloomsday at RADA*

A day-long celebration of the coincidental centenary of the day immortalised in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

JULY 9 – *RADA Enterprises Fund-Raising Lunch at the Savoy*

Sponsored by Sterling Insurance.

OCTOBER 3 – *RADA Associates’ Event*

A Centenary Celebration featuring RADA graduates.

NOVEMBER 7-10 – *Four Dinners with Celebrity Cabaret*

Star RADA alumni top the bills at these fund-raisers in our Vanbrugh Theatre.

Friends of RADA will be kept informed of further details of these and other events to be held during Centenary Year.

2003 PRO

AUTUMN TERM



**JERWOOD VANBRUGH
THEATRE**

WOMEN OF TROY

by Euripides

Translated by Kenneth McLeish

Directed by Deborah Paige



THE GBS

THE CHERRY ORCHARD

by Anton Chekhov

Translated by Michael Frayn

Directed by Lucy Pitman-Wallace

Designed by Kerry Bradley



**JOHN GIELGUD
THEATRE**

JOURNEY'S END

by R C Sherriff

Directed by Ellis Jones

DUCTIONS



**JERWOOD VANBRUGH
THEATRE**

THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA

by Federico Garcia Lorca

Translated by Sue Bradbury

Directed by Geoff Bullen

Designed by Gary Thorne



THE GBS

SUMMERFOLK

by Maxim Gorky

Adapted by

Botho Strauss and Peter Stein.

Translated by Peter Watson

Directed by Helena Kaut-Howson

Designed by Douglas Heap

JOIN THE FRIENDS AND SEE THE SHOWS

RADA's 34 third-year acting students give around 15 shows like these, each for about ten performances, as their final preparation for the professional world. And the Academy's three theatres are now open to the general public, who come in ever growing numbers to see them.

By joining the Friends of RADA, you will enjoy not only advanced notice and booking for each term's two production runs, but reduced seat prices: just £6.50 instead of £8.50. On top of which, your subscription boosts the Friends of RADA Scholarship/Bursary Fund, which every year helps a finalist student complete the training.

WHY NOT INTRODUCE A FRIEND TO THE FRIENDS?

**OUR SPECIAL OFFER 10-YEAR SUBSCRIPTION IS AVAILABLE UNTIL
MARCH 31. FOR FULL DETAILS OF THE FRIENDS OF RADA, SEE PAGE 19.**

CAMERA ACT

Graduating from RADA in 2002, Mark Wells found himself plunged straight into the film business. Now a veteran of five movies, he reflects on his lessons in acting for the camera

I remember my first film audition with a cringe. Covering terminal nerves, I sat bobbing my head to the lines and gyrating my arms like a dancing monkey. I didn't, of course, get the job. But I've been asking myself ever since, calmly, limbs firmly pinned to lap: 'Is there really a difference between acting on stage and acting on screen?'

Acting for me has always been a physical thing and I shamelessly bounced about at RADA. From mime to the animal project, I was never more at home than when I was halfway up a piano stool giving my best baboon. My favourite third-year roles were also the most physical, be it camping up comedy as Trinculo in *The Tempest*, or the unapologetically cartoon-like Benny Southstreet in *Guy's And Dolls*. So perhaps no surprise that this day-release patient from the local dramatic zoo found it hard to sit still in front of a camera.

How though, does the vastly liberating experience of training at RADA adapt to the real world of dog-eat-dog film and television?

My first acting job was on screen – and on stage. I was in my final term and I was given three days off to play Shakespeare's Romeo in the film version of Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*. I was petrified. I felt completely out of my league.

I was sharing a scene with Christopher Plummer, Edward Fox and Romola Garai, all of whom oozed the stress levels of sleeping tabbies. I, meanwhile, furtively whispering my lines in a corner, prayed no-one would notice how

huge a mistake choosing me had been.

When it finally came to 'Action!', I was standing alone at the very edge of the Old Vic's apron stage, staring out at two hundred costumed extras and being politely watched from the wings by famous faces from my childhood. In the hubbub of camera cranes and sound booms, I'd forgotten that I was there to act, so it was with an 'Oh, you mean now?' kind of expression that I began my career. But over the following three

“
I could hardly
hear a word
Christopher Plummer
was saying, even
though I was just
a metre away
”

days I received a tremendous education in acting for screen.

I will never forget sitting behind the camera, feeding cues to Edward Fox during his lecherous 'love' scene with Romola Garai. I saw then that acting for camera could be delightfully simple and that the essence of a performance remains the same as theatre – becoming someone else. But it was so quiet. I could hardly hear a word Christopher Plummer was saying during his scenes, even though I was just a metre away, and slowly I saw why.

These were actors who knew exactly where their audience was – down the barrel of the camera. Their 'proscenium arch' was little higher than their foreheads, so what was most important in their performances was the ever-so-subtle dance of thoughts and emotions across their faces. And that was it. The terrifying mystery of 'acting for camera' seemed to be solved by simply noticing that what these wonderful actors were looking for in their performance was exactly what I had been trained to look for in mine: the truth.

That week's lessons have revisited me time and again in the two years since graduating from RADA. I've done three films since *Nicholas Nickleby*, dubbed a character's voice for a fourth and each time delighted in the intimacy of film work. Yet my love of 'getting jiggy' with characterisation has never waned.

In 2002 I toured England as Gollum in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, and last year I followed a cast of American actors and Nona Sheppard, who directed me at RADA, to Los Angeles to play Hamlet on stage. Taking a comedy and a musical to the Edinburgh Festival last summer, I truly received my live performance fix. But it remains an oddity of my career so far, given my insecurities about the medium, that the majority of my bread-and-butter work has been on film.

I now feel as at home on set as in the wings of a theatre, but this is not entirely due to my experiences in front of the camera. When not

ION

acting myself, I have very much enjoyed working behind the camera. Recently, a large-scale production import from the United States was being cast and I was asked to read behind the camera for the auditions. It was the steepest possible learning curve in film audition technique.

I was privileged to audition some of the most gifted actors in the industry, from seasoned veterans to former RADA colleagues of my own. But the highlight for me came when a former RADA director of mine, Julian Glover, walked into the room to meet us all.

I could describe at length Julian's use of the camera, his commanding screen presence and his techniques in creating a performance in such a sterile environment. Instead, I will simply say that an audition need not be 'just another audition'. Julian showed that when an actor takes enough time to invest the full weight of their talent, an audition can be a goose-pimple experience for the auditioners.

He wasn't alone in this. The award for sheer versatility must go to Sam West, who brought a wave of feverish energy into the room. I had classes with Sam at RADA, so was expecting his infectious personality, but I certainly was not expecting his unbelievable audition.

Due to a clerical error, he had received only one of the two audition scenes. After a brilliant portrayal of his character in the first, he asked to see the second. He read it once, then looked up, chirped, 'Let's do it!' – and



Mark Wells (right) and fellow actor Robert Cavanagh on the set of Paramount's *Sahara*

delivered the best portrayal of that character any of us had seen in two months' auditioning, referring to the page only a handful of times. I had been shown a whole new world, in which actors did well in auditions! And not just well – amazingly well!

So what was their secret? Obviously in Sam's case a spooky ability to sight read, but much more than that. There was a fluency and an ease, gleaned no doubt from years of experience but also from a deep confidence in their talents. And I think that's the key. Confidence can erode so quickly outside the walls of RADA and it is vitally important to have an occasional 'sit down with self' to remember who you are, how far you've come and what you have already achieved.

My second film role came during a time of immense self

doubt. In fact, I spent the whole audition bemoaning to the casting director my inability to act for camera. Hint: don't do that. But next day, like a lightning bolt from a blue sky, I got the part. A week later I was on the George Lucas Sound Stage at Elstree Studios, filming *Sky Captain And The World Of Tomorrow* with Jude Law, Angelina Jolie and Gwyneth Paltrow.

I play a 1930s British naval pilot under Angelina Jolie's command. At one point the plot pivots on the sonar screen I am controlling, the three lead actors gather around me and I show them urgent information about their adventure. It is definitely the most bizarre bit of acting I've been asked to do so far. The entire movie is being created with CGI, so I was sitting on a blue box, staring at a blue box, which stood on a blue floor in

continued overleaf

“ The director leaned over and said: I don't know what you're going to do here, Mark, you'll just have to make it up ”

front of a two-storey high blue screen, having to convince myself that this was the command bridge of an aircraft carrier – and that I knew what I was doing.

Moments before we were due to shoot, Kerry Conran, the director, leaned over and said: 'I don't know what you're going to do here, Mark, you'll just have to make it up. Just pretend to be pushing buttons and sending signals – oh, and do it the same every time. Action!'

I panicked (which was good – we were under attack from the enemy), my fingers went ten to the dozen (the poor CGI guys will have fun keeping up) and, don't ask me how, I managed to remember my movements for the next take. I must have punched those invisible buttons over twenty times that week, all the while trying to pretend I didn't have three of the most famous actors alive breathing down my neck.

Kerry Conran's digitally created roller-coaster ride through the 1930s certainly taught me the hard way that sometimes there's just no time to act. And that, I think, is the final difference between film and theatre. Film is so often terrifyingly under-rehearsed – but that has a beauty all of its own. Things are fresh, happening for literally the first time. I must admit, it is far too easy to catch the film bug. Like the travel bug, it has the habit of occasionally whizzing



'Naval pilot' Mark Wells ready for 'Action!' on the set of *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*

you off into your wildest dreams.

One of my dreams

came true recently when

filming *Sahara* for Paramount Pictures. New Zealand born, I spent two years being raised in Dallas, Texas: my first strong accent was the drawl of the deep south and I have always dreamed of returning to that accent. *Sahara* gave me that chance. I play a Texan sailor in the Confederate Army during the American Civil War.

We filmed at Shepperton and on location at Hawley Lakes, to create a vast and terrible cannon battle sequence in which I was blown up, which resulted in me being partially blinded during one of the takes. With both eyes stinging and only one really able to see anything, I just had to grin and bear it during the rest of the take because the crew and 200-strong cast were spread out across four acres. You don't put your hand up and stop everything.

After the take, I tried my darnedest not to do any 'Oh my god, I'm blind!' flouncing, but I don't think I completely escaped without looking like 'a right ponce from RADA with a bit of dirt in his eye'. Sorry everybody.

To be honest, I didn't mind getting a bit beaten up. It all seemed part of the fun. We may not have stepped one foot out of the UK, but to me we were back in Texas and I was five years old again running around the sofa in cowboy boots, Stetson hat and red bandanna. While everyone else was hearing, 'Action!' and 'Cut!', I was hearing the holler of Indians and the 'Yeehaa!' of cowboys.

Sky Captain And The World Of Tomorrow is due for release in the summer of 2004. See the movie trailer at www.skycaptain.com. Mark is back on stage at the Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre as Trent Conway in *Six Degrees of Separation*.

DISABILITY IN ACTION

Antonia Gillum-Webb reports on an initiative for opening up the performance world

RADA's first venture into conference organising took a challenging but very relevant theme: Action! Disability: Training, Employment and Performance. Supported by the DFES, the DCMS, the Arts Council and the Learning & Skills Council, it took place at the Academy on 8–9 January.

The challenge for RADA Enterprises was to put together a conference programme that addressed the needs of a wonderfully diverse audience. Jenny West, the conference producer, spent many weeks researching what issues were important to those in education and the industry and who they wanted to hear speaking about them, coming up with a programme which combined a mix of traditional presentation with a number of practical workshops.

Opened by RADA's Principal, Nicholas Barter, and chaired by Elspeth Morrison, the event's keynote speakers included Estelle Morris, Minister for the Arts, and Richard Wilson, the distinguished actor, director and RADA graduate. Other speakers included Jo Verrent of ADA inc, Steve Mannix, Jane Deitch, Deborah Williams, Marc Brew and many others.

Thanking RADA for organising the conference, Estelle Morris called it an important staging point in progressing this very important area. It should not, she said, be just about developing policy but about changing attitudes too, the central issue, to

give every child, disabled or not, the opportunity to perform. The best of art, she concluded, mirrors and changes society. The first half of the 21st century should be about creating a society which belongs as much to those with disabilities as to those without.

Richard Wilson spoke of his experiences in staging a play based

“*Disability issues should be on television and in the theatre, which would go some way to reducing fear and ignorance of disability*”

RICHARD WILSON

on the World War I in which the main character was an amputee and the difficulties of finding amputee actors. Disability issues should be on television and in the theatre, which would go some way to reducing fear and ignorance of disability, and directors should look at casting disabled people in non-disabled parts. But, he pointed out, for those non-disabled parts directors have a huge choice of actors, so disabled actors must be in a position to compete for those parts – and that means being trained.

All the speakers reflected on the need to start early – children need role models, training schools need to be equipped not only with facilities but with attitudes that welcome disabled applicants, writers to deal with disability issues, casting directors to consider those with disabilities for non-disabled parts... the list goes on.

The workshops, some run by RADA tutors, sought to address these issues in practical terms, showing how teachers can prepare disabled actors for audition and how easy it is to cast disabled people in non-disabled roles and in the same pieces as able-bodied people.

For some, the highlights of the conference were the speeches, for others the practical workshops and the opportunity to see disabled and non-disabled actors and dancers working together without barriers or limitations. Others found listening to the experiences of disabled actors and dancers inspiring and the variety of views challenging.

The final panel session, giving delegates the chance to express their views, showed an overwhelming desire that this be the last conference on the subject and that the emphasis in future should be on implementing all the changes discussed during the course of the two days.

Antonia Gillum-Webb is chief executive of RADA Enterprises. A transcription of the conference (£49.99) can be ordered from RADA Enterprises Ltd: 0207 908 4805.

SINEAD'S FIRST

Recent graduate Sinead Matthews tells Peter Fiddick about her solo show in RADA's GBS Theatre

Since the reopening of RADA's rebuilt Gower Street home in September 2000, the pocket-hankie 'stage' in the Foyer Bar has itself become a thriving venue, host to small-scale musical, dramatic and comedy events, with RADA graduates greatly involved, including last summer's very entertaining harp recital by about-to-graduate Bethan Bevan.

But until last term, no former student performance had ventured into the more formal setting of one of RADA's three theatres. Now the way into those too has been led by another of last year's graduates, Sinead Matthews, with a powerful solo performance which turned out to have unlooked-for drama around the drama.

It was at the traditional final year showcase, The Tree Evening, last May, that Sinead chose as one of her two short pieces a sequence from *Spoonface Steinberg*, Lee Hall's moving, funny, one-woman, award-winning view of life from inside the mind of an autistic girl. Her impact was such that people suggested she take on the full piece, perhaps as a Foyer event. Attracted by the challenge, she talked it over with Gari Jones, the experienced director in whose impressive RADA production of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* she had just played Grusha.

'Because it's such a personal thing, dealing with a child who is very vulnerable and has all these different sides to her,' says Sinead, 'I could only do it with someone I really trusted. I probably wouldn't have asked anybody else.' After

Chalk Circle, Gari readily agreed.

They soon found what a challenge they had taken on. Lee Hall's stage version, observes Gari, 'gives nothing away – it doesn't even say how old she is, there's no set, no location, no scene numbers, it's just 35 pages of words, fragments of words'. So the early work had to focus on making their own sense of its world, its structure, its shifts between reality and non-reality.

It had already been performed, including by no less a RADA alumnus than Kathryn Hunter, but they had neither seen that nor heard the BBC Radio 4 original. 'I quite like that,' Sinead says. 'It just seems like it's mine and I love it.'

Their research included a visit to a school for autistic children, yielding insights from them and from the teachers. 'It was quite disturbing,' Sinead admits, 'because some are so in their own world, they don't even notice you're there.'

But the acting was only part of it. They needed a rehearsal space (so that it has the focus of "going to work"). Then there were props to find, rights to negotiate and pay for, flyers to print. From connected charities and elsewhere, Sinead raised £700.

They rehearsed for four weeks, with a break in the middle for her to learn the lines. 'There's a pressure, doing one-person shows, to work all hours, which isn't good,' says Gary. 'With only the two of you, you just can't keep going.' Refreshed after the break, they did the final tightening up.

By this time, RADA had offered the GBS Theatre for three nights, so



Sinead Matthews as Spoonface: 'Triumph'

they recruited RADA's head of lighting, Jonathan Samuels, and, as assistant director and stage manager, second year technical theatre arts student (and aspiring director) Kim Verstappen, to work with them.

Then the drama started. The first performance had to be suspended when a member of the audience was taken ill. By the second night, Sinead herself was ill, fought on, but was forced to give up. As the final show approached, she said: 'It feels like we haven't done it properly yet'. Before a packed house, she triumphed.

Would she encourage others to follow? 'Definitely – only if you feel passionately that you want to do something, but yes, take the spaces and use them. It's a chance to take things upon yourself and whether you fail or succeed at least you're doing something that you believe in.'

BECOME A FRIEND OF RADA AND SUPPORT THE STARS OF TOMORROW, TODAY!

RADA, a founding affiliate of the newly created Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, provides training of the highest order for actors and technicians and is a world leader in its field. The newly rebuilt and refurbished Academy in Gower/Malet Street houses three in-house theatres, through which RADA finalist students are launched into their professional careers. Around 16 productions a year enable you to watch the acting students in the final stages of their training, very often performing in productions seldom staged in the commercial theatre.

The Friends of RADA assist the Academy in numerous ways, not least by providing an income to support the student production seasons and by contributing to the Friends of RADA Scholarship/Bursary, which is awarded annually to a finalist student. Friends also support the Academy by:

- introducing friends and colleagues to the Friends of RADA
- bringing guests to Academy productions
- introducing potential sponsors who may be able to offer additional financial assistance
- offering paid casual work for students at weekends and during the holidays
- offering temporary accommodation to new students relocating to London for the first time in September
- supporting fund raising events held by the Academy
- making a bequest to the RADA Scholarship/Bursary fund.

WHY DOES RADA NEED FRIENDS?

The creation of the new Conservatoire for Dance and Drama has ensured that all home and EU students now receive fee support from the Higher Education Funding Council paid through the Conservatoire. However, the Academy must continually raise new funds by its own efforts, not only to maintain the calibre of the teaching but also to ensure financial support for students in genuine need. There is currently no funding available, other than the Student Loan system, to provide for term time living costs in London.

HOW MUCH DO I CONTRIBUTE?

The Friends of RADA annual membership fee, though modest, provides a regular income, particularly if we are able to attract new members each year. So, as well as joining us yourself, please introduce a friend.

RADA Graduates	£15.00 a year
Non-RADA Graduate	£25.00 a year
Five Year Membership	£100.00
Ten Year Membership	£175.00
(before 31.3.2004)	£150.00)

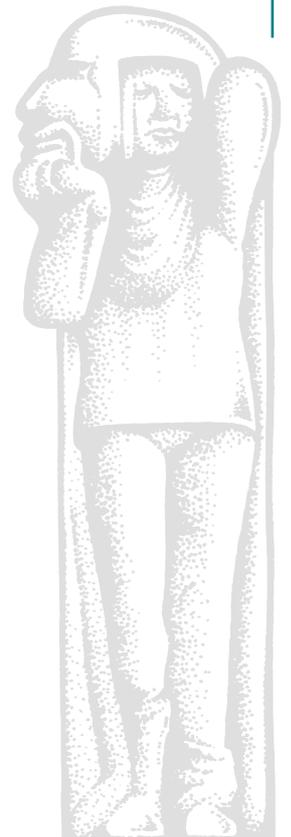
HOW WILL I BENEFIT?

- advance booking facilities for all RADA student productions and the opportunity to follow the rising talent in student productions in our three in-house theatres
- concessionary rate tickets for Friends visits to other London productions featuring RADA graduates
- invitations to post-show discussions with the director and cast
- an invitation to the dress rehearsal of the Prize Fights
- *RADA, The Magazine* – founded for the Friends
- **and, most of all, the gratitude of the students and staff for actively supporting the actors and technicians of the future.**

Contact the Registrar, Patricia Myers, for further details.

RADA

ROYAL ACADEMY OF DRAMATIC ART
62-64 GOWER STREET, LONDON WC1E 6ED



STAGE MOVES

**RADA's own intelligence service charts
who's working where**

RADA ACTING GRADUATES 2003

NICK BARBER, playing Mercutio in *Romeo & Juliet*, Southwark Theatre. BETHAN BEVAN, *D-Day Dangerous*, film, BBC, *Idle Pop*, Quicksilver Theatre. LORRAINE BURROUGHS, *Down to Earth*, BBC1. BERTIE CARVEL, *The Pallisers*, BBC Radio 4, *Jack in Revelations*, Hampstead Theatre, *Victory* at the Donmar Warehouse, Macbeth Union Theatre. MARTHA HOWE-DOUGLAS, *The Office Christmas Special*, BBC1. EDMUND KINGSLEY, *Julius Caesar*, playing Caesar at the Menier Theatre London Bridge. JACK LASKEY, in RSC production of *Hamlet*. PIETER LAWMAN, for the Basingstoke Company, a one man show, *Head On*, about the nature of drug addiction. TOM LAWRENCE, Being Conscious theatre, *The Puritans*, short film, *House and Garden*, Salisbury Playhouse, *Made in China*, BBC World Service. SINEAD MATTHEWS, *Bingo Club*, BBC, playing Abigail in *The Crucible* at the Sheffield Crucible.

ARN CELEBRATES

The American Rada Network's Centenary Celebration launches with a Members' screening of the RADA-saving, edge-of-your-seat, silent movie *Masks and Faces* (see p11) in New York.

May 16, 7pm

The Abingdon Theatre, 312 W. 36th St,
1st Flr, NY, NY 10018.

RSVP: Ron Bagden/US + (201) 758 2544 or
bagroguy@aol.com.

More info: Tara Hugo/UK + (020) 8761 7213 or
tahugo@hotmail.com.

Also: www.rada.org ARN link

Midsomer Murders, ITV. SOPHIE STANTON, *Wall of Silence*, ITV1. LLOYD HUTCHINSON, *Measure for Measure*, Radio 3. SAM HAZELDINE, *Shameless*, Channel 4. SARA COOMES, *The Upside of Anger*, film with Kevin Costner, *United Biscuits*, Comedy double act. SASHA HAILS, Acting and writing for Westway. SEBASTIAN HARCUMBE, *World Music*, Donmar. JAMES HILLIER, *Something Cloudy Something Clear*, British premiere, Finborough Arms, *The Recruiting Officer*, Lichfield Garrick Theatre, *Sex and Lies*, BBC2. DAWN MCDANIEL, Play at the White Bear directed by Joseph Blatchley. STEVE MANGAN, *Green Wings*, comedy TV Series. NORMA SHEAHAN, *The Clinic*, TV series. TOM WALKER is directing pop videos.

RADA NEW COURSES

During its Centenary Year, the Academy has developed two new courses, which will start in September 2004. King's College, London, has validated both courses and the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama given its approval, so applications are now invited for:

1-Year Graduate Certificate in Theatre Directing:

This is a vocational course, aimed at students who have a serious intent to proceed with theatre direction as a career choice. It aims to provide students with the technical skills and knowledge necessary for a professional director, as well as developing understanding of such areas as marketing, producing and fund raising.

The course, held at RADA, will give the opportunity to be assistant director on two RADA productions and include two professional work placements. It culminates in the student directing their own piece of work in a RADA theatre.

The course is aimed at graduates with a degree in an Arts subject, technical theatre or actor training, or suitable professional experience in another area of theatre.

2-Year Graduate Diploma in Theatre Design:

This is a practical course aimed at people who wish to achieve a career as a professional theatre designer. It aims to provide the student with a broad based practical training in the area of Stage Design, encompassing all aspects of the work of a stage designer, both technical and creative, and to encourage an understanding of the artistic and collaborative process of stage design, as well as fostering the essential managerial and organisational skills.

The course is taught through practical project work and in-house production attachments, as well as a professional work placement.

Candidates for the course must have completed a foundation course in Art or Design or other related fields at Further Education level or higher, or have had extensive experience of relevant work at amateur or professional level.

For further information and application forms for these courses, please contact Gill Salter, Academic Administrator: 020 7636 7076/gillsalter@rada.ac.uk.

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The Academy welcomes the opportunity of entering into partnership with grant giving trusts, companies and philanthropic individuals to support a wide range of its activities, including student scholarships/bursaries, student productions, short courses and special projects. It is only by maintaining its fundraising activities that the Academy can maintain the calibre of its teaching and its broad selection policy. This enables it to continue to offer places on the basis of an individual's potential and talent rather than the ability to cover the term time living costs.

Throughout its history, the Academy has been fortunate in benefiting from the support of donors, both named and anonymous, who have made substantial contributions to the Academy and its Scholarship/Bursary funds. Donations can be made in several ways.

A bequest to the Academy.

As a registered charity, it is free from Inheritance Tax as the Gift is deducted from the total net value of your estate when assessing Tax liability. For further information regarding arranging a bequest to RADA, please contact Patricia Myers.

Donations through the Gift Aid Scheme.

As a registered charity, the Academy is eligible for a donation through the Gift Aid Scheme which now has no lower limit. Tax relief will apply to all donations made through this scheme from £1 upwards. Donations can be

directed towards the support of individual students to contribute to the fees or term time living costs in the following ways:

- £680 per year to cover student travel card costs during term time
- £630 per year to provide meal vouchers for a two course lunch in the Academy Refectory during term time
- £895 per year to provide meal vouchers for breakfast and lunch in the Academy Refectory during term time
- £250 per year for a third year acting student to cover additional costs of photographs and mailings to agents and casting directors
- £2060 per year provides the balance on a student's fee account between the cost of the course and the grant received
- £1125 per year provides the mandatory student fee contribution for a graduate ineligible to receive LEA support
- £7800 per year provides a student with £150 per week towards rent, bills, travel costs and food
- £2985 per year provides the balance between the maximum student loan available to a student living in London and the minimum £7800 we estimate is required to cover the BASIC living costs during term time.

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All long term subscriptions are held on deposit and the interest is used annually to provide a Friends of RADA bursary to a final year student.

RADA

ROYAL ACADEMY OF DRAMATIC ART