

Ian Mckellen

Acting Shakespeare

This booklet originally served as a programme
for 'Acting Shakespeare' on Sunday 31st August 1986,
500 of which were personally signed by Ian McKellen.

Acting Shakespeare

31 August '86

ACTING SHAKESPEARE began in 1977, when I was invited to present a solo performance for the Edinburgh International Festival. I was acting for the Royal Shakespeare Company at the time and, with my mind full of Shakespeare, it was almost inevitable that a quickly-devised show should be based on that work.

The first performance in St Cecilia's Hall was pretty tame. I'd scarcely worked out what I wanted to say, let alone learnt the famous speeches. So I had cribs stuffed up my sleeve, with prompts all over the little stage. That might have been the end of it and as I've never much liked other people's one-man shows, I shouldn't have much missed my own.

But an invitation a year later from Israel and a subsequent visit with ACTING SHAKESPEARE to wonderfully enthusiastic audiences in Jerusalem, changed my mind.

I had unwittingly issued a visa which has since taken me across Europe, often to Socialist countries and introduced me not only to the world-wide reverence in which Shakespeare is held but also to the widest possible variety of theatre conditions. I've played national theatres in Romania, Norway and Cyprus (on both sides of the Green Line); I've played universities in

America and Scandinavia, a drama school in Moscow (quite illegally), an open air theatre in Washington DC, a restaurant in Charlottesville, Virginia, as well as theatre festivals in Paris, Belfast, Bolton and of course, Edinburgh.

Much of this touring has been organised by the British Council, who have had to respond to the regular cuts in their grants by sponsoring more and more soloists and fewer and fewer full companies of actors.

Most recently I tapped the commercial possibilities of Shakespeare with a run in Los Angeles and New York, followed by a tour of Canada.

During these ten years the show has developed into an entertainment for Shakespeare enthusiasts who don't hear him in English as often as they would like. I hope that Londoners — with a host of full-scale Shakespeare readily on tap — will welcome ACTING SHAKESPEARE..

I'm grateful to you for buying this souvenir of an occasion when we met to honour Shakespeare and two causes which I unreservedly support.

Ian McKellen

Acting Shakespeare: 1947-86

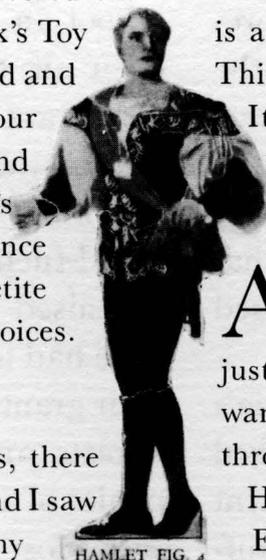
In 1947, Santa Claus delivered the cheapest in the range of Pollock's Toy Theatres to a stage struck 8 year-old and so I did my first Shakespeare in our lounge in Wigan, with scenery and cardboard cut-outs from Olivier's film of HAMLET, sliding Sir Laurence onto wire and waggling him at a petite Jean Simmons — me doing both voices.

In South Lancashire in the 50's, there was a huge variety of theatre and I saw plenty of varied Shakespeare — my older sister playing Bully Bottom in an all-schoolgirl MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM; Gielgud's Japanese-style KING LEAR on tour in Manchester; Doris Speed (later Coronation Street's Annie Walker) as Lady Macbeth with the local amateurs. Then, each summer, I went on the school camp, pitched near Stratford-upon-Avon, where we saw the productions season after season. We queued through the night for half-a-crown standing, wore ourselves out punting all day and we snoozed through stretches of the most eminent performances. Mostly, my eyes were wide open in amazement.

In 1957, I saw Peggy Ashcroft in CYMBELINE. The beauty and grace of Imogen was so overpowering, that I fancied it was all for my benefit alone. I had seen Dame Peggy up close, when I got her autograph and I knew she was, in life, old enough to be Imogen's mother. But from the back of the stalls, she was essential youth, in

voice and gesture: I think I realised that Imogen is a great part — but how did Ashcroft do it? This divinity was beyond what I knew of acting. It made no connection with my own clod-hopping efforts.

At the Boys' Division of Bolton School, we were encouraged to act, if we wanted to, just as much as to play soccer — which I never wanted to. So each dinner-break, I dodged through the dribblers in the playground, to Hopefield Miniature Theatre, a converted Edwardian villa, just along the main road. There, the same crowd of boys and masters from the summer came to Stratford, spent the rest of the year rehearsing little melodramas, marionette shows, French playlets (in the original) or bits from Aristophanes or Shakespeare. Each term we put on a programme for 50 indulgent parents, packed into the ground-floor auditorium of the old mansion. At Hopefield, I decided that I much preferred acting to making puppets or scenery. I even practised a rudimentary acting technique. In the school library, a theatre-manual defined the principle of 'upstaging': 'the actor furthest from the audience is the most dominant'. How infuriating, as a 13 year-old Malvolio in the Letter Scene from TWELFTH NIGHT, to be upstaged throughout by Sir Toby Belch and the rest of them, hiding in the box-tree behind me! It might have helped if I hadn't held my arrogant little head so far back. Never mind: as the classics master stuck on my crêpe-hair beard, he joked: 'Of course, McKellen has grease-paint flowing in his veins'. I believed him.



HOPEFIELD MINIATURE THEATRE

BOLTON SCHOOL,

PRESENTS

A PROGRAMME OF PLAYS

MARCH 13th AND 15th 1952.



Back in the main school there was an annual classic play. My first part was Margaret, in Robert Greene's extravaganza FRIAR BACON AND FRIAR BUNGAY. The following year, we did OTHELLO but I was 15 and too old for Desdemona or Emilia — I'm still waiting to play a Shakespeare heroine. The Great Hall's acoustics were abominable, its echo bouncing off the panneling and mullions, then fighting the creaks from a thousand rush-bottomed chairs, before it faded away somewhere among the hammer-beamed roof. The senior English master took rehearsals twice a week after school through the Spring Term. When I played Henry 5 (1957), he gave me a solo lesson in audibility. 'Just talk as loud as you can; don't shout and we'll see if I can hear you clearly.' Off I charged into 'Once more unto the breach...' and off he strolled, with his back to me, up the centre aisle, nodding approval but occasionally halting — 'Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit...' — and he sloped off further, as I flung the consonants at his retreating M.A. gown. When he reached the back — 'And you good yeoman...' — he quietly pushed open the glazed double-doors, which closed behind him. I could see him out beyond them, still listening — 'Cry God for Harry, England and Saint George' I belted — he turned round, smiling, and hurried back in to me: 'Heard every word; no good if they can't hear the words'.

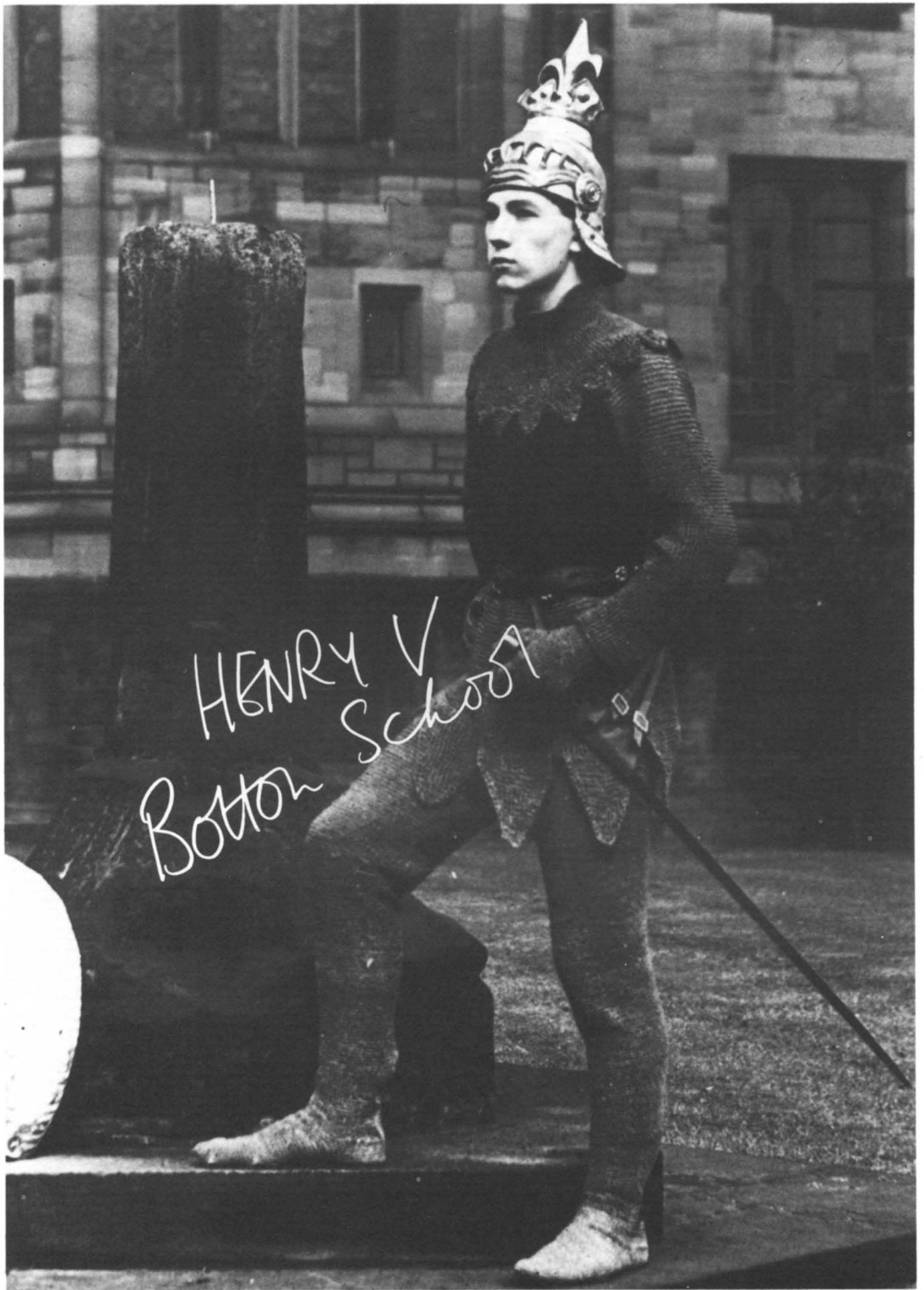
Auditioning for the Amateur Dramatic Club at Cambridge (1958), you had to do two speeches — one Shakespeare, one modern. I

chose Aaron from TITUS ANDRONICUS, having been impressed by Anthony Quayle's performance in the Brooke/Olivier version. The mainly undergraduate selection committee for the ADC couldn't possibly have been impressed by my effort, although I saved my face as old Billy Rice, in my modern speech, from THE ENTERTAINER. John Barton, then a junior don, remembered it six months on, when he cast me as the ancient Justice Shallow, in his student production of both parts of HENRY 4 (1959). Derek Jacobi was Prince Hal, Clive Swift was Falstaff and the current Head of BBC Radio Drama was a very larky prelate. Barton pressed me hard in rehearsal, more and more painfully, as he made me, over and over again, lead Falstaff onto the stage with 'Nay, you shall see my orchard...' He told me to speak, full of the warmth of a summer's evening, full of the wine from supper, full of age and nostalgia. He drove me mad and incompetent, as he spoke the lines himself, brilliantly.

Eventually I gave up my independence and resorted to mimicking Barton, his stoop, his wheezes,

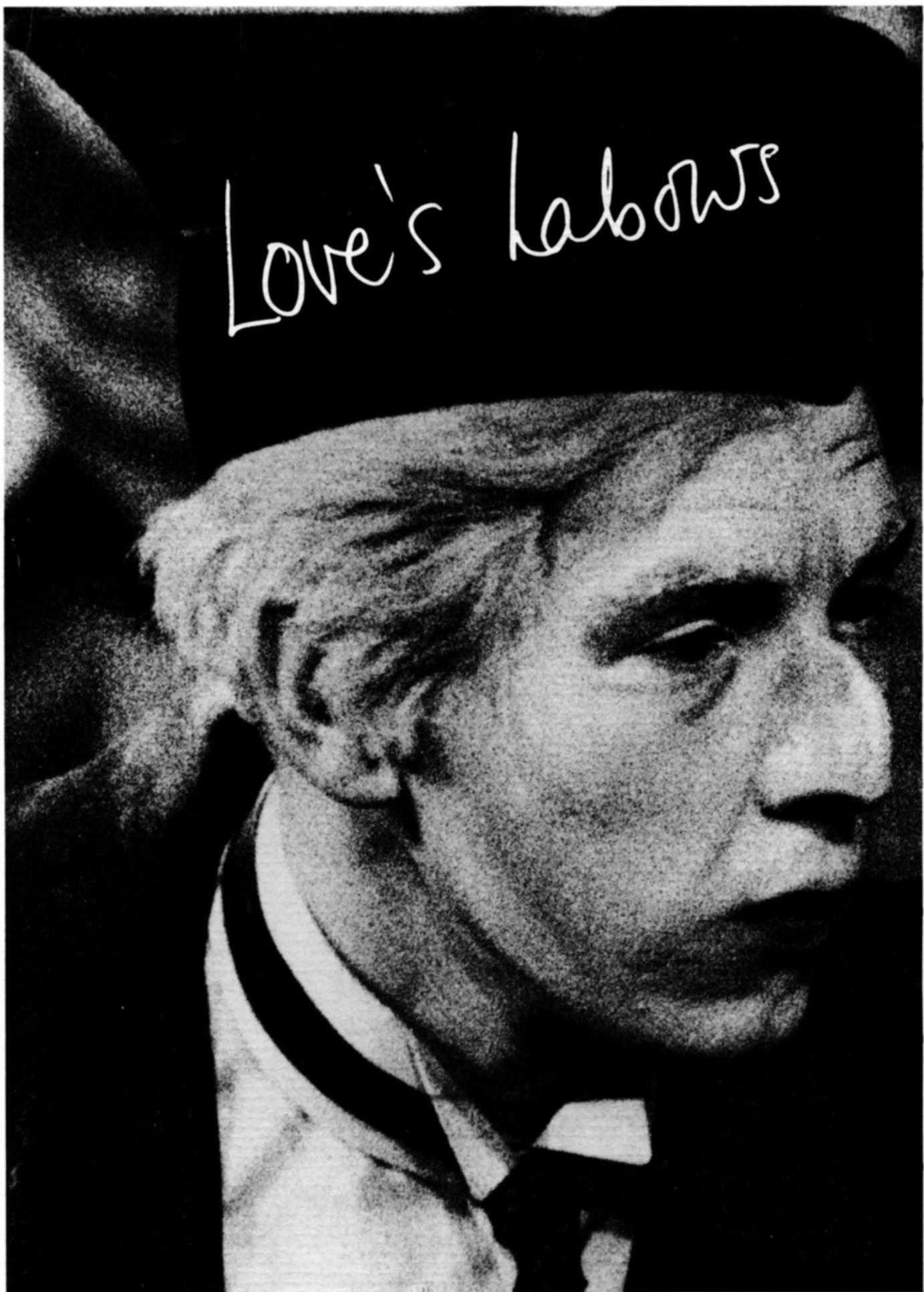


Shallow
Cambridge



HENRY V
Botton School

Love's labours



his pendulous jaw and twinkling eyes. When a couple of newspaper critics gave me credit for a performance which, in truth, belonged to the director, my friends congratulated me and assumed I would now decide to join them in the professional theatre.

Three months later. I played another old Shakespearian, Holofernes the school-master, in an end-of-term musical from LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST. The larky prelate directed it in a week: it was every actor for himself, this time.

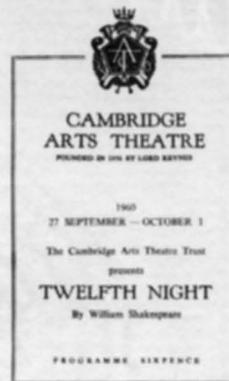
When we took the show to the old Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, The Sunday Times said:

At the Lyric, Hammersmith, the Cambridge A.D.C. May Week production, "Love's Labours," had some neat songs, and Ian McKellen showed signs of promise.



I decided to go on the stage, when I left Cambridge.

In my first job, at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry (1961-62) we did the lot — Shaw, Priestley, Agatha Christie (twice), a revue and my first professional Shakespeare, MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING. As Claudio, I wore far too much paint round the eyes — my one regret about missing drama school is that I've never really understood stage make-up.



TWELFTH NIGHT

Dramatic Personnel

Orsino, Duke of Illyria	CORIN REDGRAVE
Sebastian, brother to Viola	TREVOR NUNS
Antonio, friend to Sebastian	DAVID ROWE-BEDDOE
Valentine	DESMOND JONES
Curio	PHILIPPE GRATER
(Gentleman attending the Duke)	
Sir Toby Belch, uncle to Olivia	IAN MCKELLEN
Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a English knave	MICHAEL WHEELER
Maholla, steward to Olivia	JULIAN CURRY
Feste, a clown	HUGH WAJTERS
Fabian, an appetizing clown	ANTHONY ABLEDGE
Sea Captain	DUCK STEPHENS
Prize	DESMOND JONES
Olivia, a rich Countess	GILLIAN GOODMAN
Viola	MARGARET DRABBLE
Maria, Viola's maid servant	JILL DALTRY

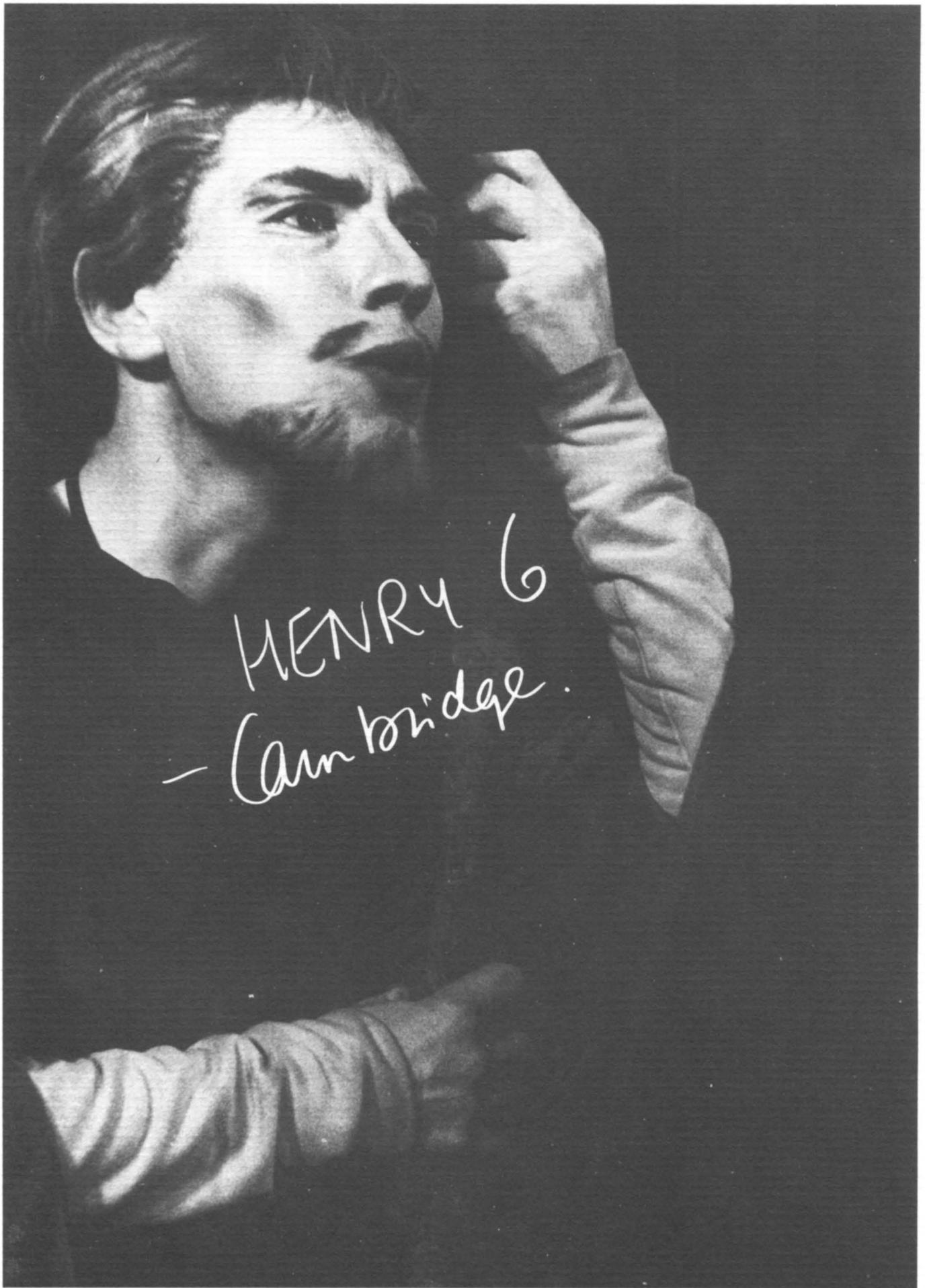
The scene is Illyria

Directed by WARD HARBULLAH

Assisted by Lawrence Gordon Clark

There will be one interval of fifteen minutes

At Ipswich (1962-63) I returned to HENRY 5. The cast was small and there were too few friends to urge unto the breach. To disguise this, those soldiers we had, crouched in front of the tiny stage and, in the dark, I whispered the final battle instructions, as if the whole audience were my band of brothers. I think they heard alright. No good if they can't hear the words.



In 1963, Laurence Olivier founded the National Theatre of Great Britain at the Old Vic in London. At the end of that same year, John Neville (late of the Vic) opened a new playhouse at Nottingham, playing *Coriolanus* in the inaugural production. His director was a giant, 6 feet 4 inches, and a theatre legend, Tyrone Guthrie. He was the father of modern directors, in that his work was flamboyantly individual, with a strong design concept. His sense of humour and cheeky irony, often upset the critics (though not, I think, many audiences) especially when it nudged tragedy off-balance. For Guthrie, theatre was above all meant to be entertaining. He travelled the world and wherever he worked, grabbed hold of his actors and dominated them. He despised laziness and expected everyone, actors, stage-managers and stage-crews, to reach for their highest potential. He was inspiring. He was just what I needed. I was cast as First Citizen in *CORIOLANUS*.

The giant explained his approach: 'We can't have you all flapping around in togas; always so tricky working out who's a senator and who's a soldier, let alone of what rank. Best to go for uniforms and boots and plumes, don't you think?' So, he set ancient Rome and Antium late in the 18th century, with Neville in a gold breast-plate and white buckskins and me, all in black, with a pigtail and drooping moustache. Guthrie soon realised that I was nervous and probably over-parted, so he kindly suggested that we should work in private each day for 20 minutes, before any of the others were around. He indulged me with praise, fed my confidence

and, only when I was fully prepared, did he allow me to work with the rest of the cast. I'd been in the business for only 2½ years. It took another 7 or so, before I fully dared to make a fool of myself in the rehearsal room. Guthrie crucially pushed me on the way at the dress-rehearsal in Nottingham.

Aufidius doesn't have much to do early on, so I walked-on in a couple of crowd scenes, hidden behind a banner. I enjoyed that and was feeling relaxed. But at the play's climax, Aufidius is centre-stage, having betrayed his dearest partner/rival and had him mercilessly slaughtered in public, before defiling the noble corpse by stamping on it. And then! 'My rage is gone and I am struck with sorrow...' This reversal is usually played with heavy political irony but Guthrie disagreed, as always, with the conventional. He had directed me to kneel and, embracing *Coriolanus*, to keen out a wail of true despair, turning hate instantaneously into grief. Throughout rehearsals, I had funk'd this

THE CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

First Citizen	RONALD MAGILL
Second Citizen	MICHAEL CRAWFORD
Menenius	LEO MARRIOTT
Calpurnia, afterwards Coriolanus	JOHN NEVILLE
Officer	KENNETH MARESDEN
Titus Lartius, a Roman General	DAVID SAVILE
Cominius, another Roman General formerly Consul	JAMES GARDNER
Antoine, Tribune of the Plebs	CHRISTOPHER HANCOCK GEORGE DELVAY
A Volucian Senator	ANTHONY HOWELL
Titus Aufidius, Volucian Commander	IAN MCKELLEN
First Soldier	JOHN COLLINS
Second Soldier	JOHN TOYE
Volucian Soldier	ROGER CLISSOLD
Third Citizen	JOHN COLLINS
First Aedile	JOHN COLLINS
Second Aedile	JOHN TOYE
Citizen of Antium	RONALD MAGILL
First Servant	JOHN TOYE
Second Servant	MICHAEL CRAWFORD
Third Servant	JOHN COLLINS
Volucian Senator	JOHN TOYE, JOHN COLLINS
Young Martius	PETER DRAKES
Volucius, master to Coriolanus	DOROTHY REYNOLDS
Virgilia, wife to Coriolanus	HELEN RYAN
Volucius, a Roman Elder	MARILYN DOUGLAS
Guests	MAGGIE JORDAN

Enter and Volucian Senators, Citizens and Soldiers—
 John Neville, Michael Crawford, Robert Brown, John Sedy, Richard Sewter,
 Richard Dyer, Jack Wetherill, Clive Fookes, Robert Williams, Ed
 Andrew, Ronald Moore, Victor Mankinoff, Rodney Ford, Colin Edwards,
 William Ronald Moore, Victor Mankinoff, Richard Brown, Anne Tovey, John's
 Young Nellie Day.

SCENE: Rome, Corioli and Antium.

There will be ten intervals each of 12 minutes duration.



moment, which would have been a gift to a more confident actor. Now, with only 24 hours before opening, Guthrie would have none of it. As I failed yet again, he charged down the aisle, clicking his fingers: 'Stop. Now look. We have reached the most exciting point in an epic story. If we haven't convinced the audience by this time, that they've been witnessing great events and that the theatre is larger and more unexpected than life; if they can't see a stage full of God-like heroes and if they aren't lifted out of their seats with excitement — then we are cheating them and ourselves and Shakespeare. Once more please, and properly.' I tried to live up to his challenge and it worked well enough. By the first night, next day, I didn't have to try quite so hard. Confidence is almost everything in acting.



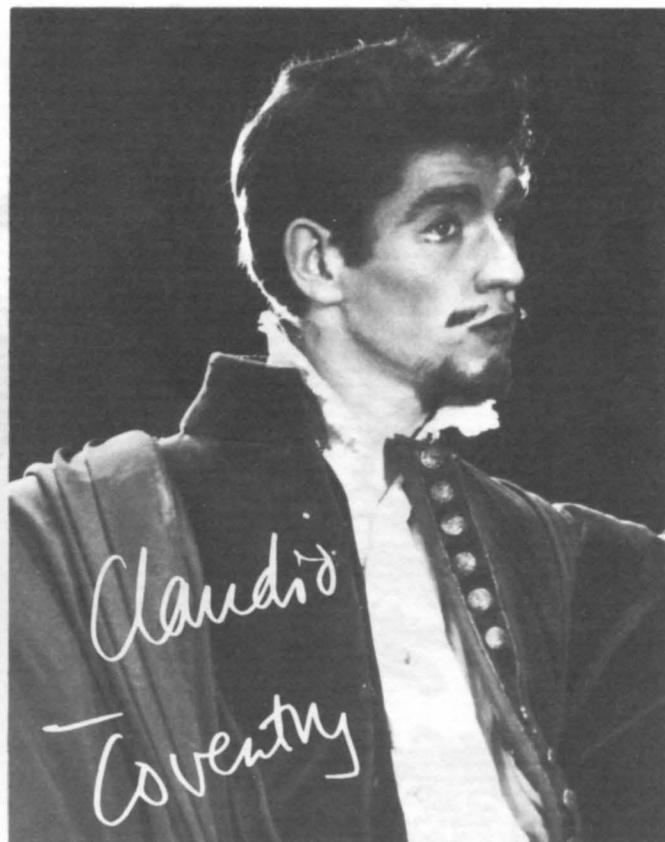
A curiosity. At the end of the Nottingham season, Frank Dunlop (an altogether cosier director than the giant) cast me as Sir Thomas More in the Elizabethan play for which Shakespeare probably wrote just one long speech. This was delightful, as ours was the first recorded professional production. Assuming that no-one unearths *LOVE'S LABOUR'S WON* or *HENRY 5* part 2, I shall forever be the last actor to create a part by Shakespeare.

Meanwhile, down south, the National Theatre was well-established and employing every decent young actor in the country. When Maggie Smith saw me in my first West End play (*A SCENT OF FLOWERS*: 1964), she recommended



*Richard
1951*

me to Sir Laurence, who called me for an audition at the Old Vic. For my Shakespeare piece, I gave him my John Barton imitation: 'Nay, you shall see mine orchard...' Olivier had played the part famously himself: but that would have been true, whatever I'd picked. Franco Zeffirelli was there too. He was casting his very Italian MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING and surprisingly hadn't yet found, among the young bloods in the company, anyone suitable to play the juvenile lead. Shallow was a daft audition piece — and yet that's how I came to play Claudio for the second time. I wore even more make-up than at Coventry but at least, this time, it was expertly applied — by the director himself, as he faced me sitting on my lap! Throughout rehearsals, he had given me only one note of any substance: 'It's too simple, Jan; you enter in and make all the audience fall right in love with you, caro'. A fat chance of that, I thought, with Albert Finney,



Derek Jacobi and Bob Stephens in all my scenes, let alone Michael York as a very glamorous coffee-waiter. Shakespeare's young lovers must first and foremost be hugely attractive — Franco was right — although his doll-like make-up did nothing for my face or my confidence. I went right off Shakespeare and soon left the National to do a string of modern and new plays elsewhere. I even made a few films.

Richard 2 -
Punch by
Hewison.



I was in Ireland (1968) supporting a big movie-star in an epic no-one ever saw — I hope — when Richard Cottrell, a friend from Cambridge days, bravely invited me to play Richard 2 for the touring Prospect Theatre Company. He flew out to the location, where we planned the production together. We realised that all the leading characters of the drama were related and that it was a royal family saga of squabbling marriages, rebellious sons and worried parents, of cousins who love or hate each other. Head of the Family is one of the youngest and least suitable members, ruling with the divine right of kings. At the outset, King Richard behaves as if he were God himself and it is only as his power is challenged and eventually usurped, that he comes to painful terms with those human failings which had marred his kingship. Yet, as the king declines and the more he suffers, the more impressive he grows as a man. This left me with the main acting problem, of understanding what it feels like to be a god.

Playing a king is always easy. You wear a crown and a glittering robe (mine was partly partly fashioned out of milk-bottle tops); you sit on the throne upstage and get the rest of the cast to kowtow. You walk ever so slowly, like the Queen always does, as if the slightest hurry would crack the precious glass which invisibly protects you from your subjects. But the House of Windsor is not divine. I had to look around for some other, modern equivalent of King Richard, which might connect Shakespeare's mediaeval monarch with our contemporary

experience. I thought of the present Dalai Lama, who was deposed and desanctified by the Chinese invasion of Tibet and I devised a half-oriental gesture which might symbolise divinity, both hands raised, protecting the crowned head with a double blessing. I also took heart from an example nearer home. My movie-star colleague lived on location, surrounded by a little court of employees and fans, who guarded his security, carried his cash, laughed at his jokes, procured his women and gave me the creeps. One day he had told me how responsible he felt for the welfare of his sycophantic crew. 'It's like climbing a mountain, roped to them all. They depend on me not to slip. There's no-one above me to save me if I fall. Of course I won't fall but none of them realises how lonely it is at the top.' That cliché

With relief I report . . . McKellen is very good

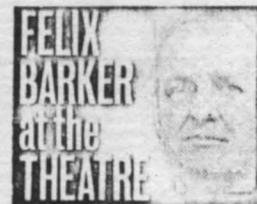
— FIBLING NEWS
Edward II and Richard II: SEPT 26, 1969
Mermaid Theatre

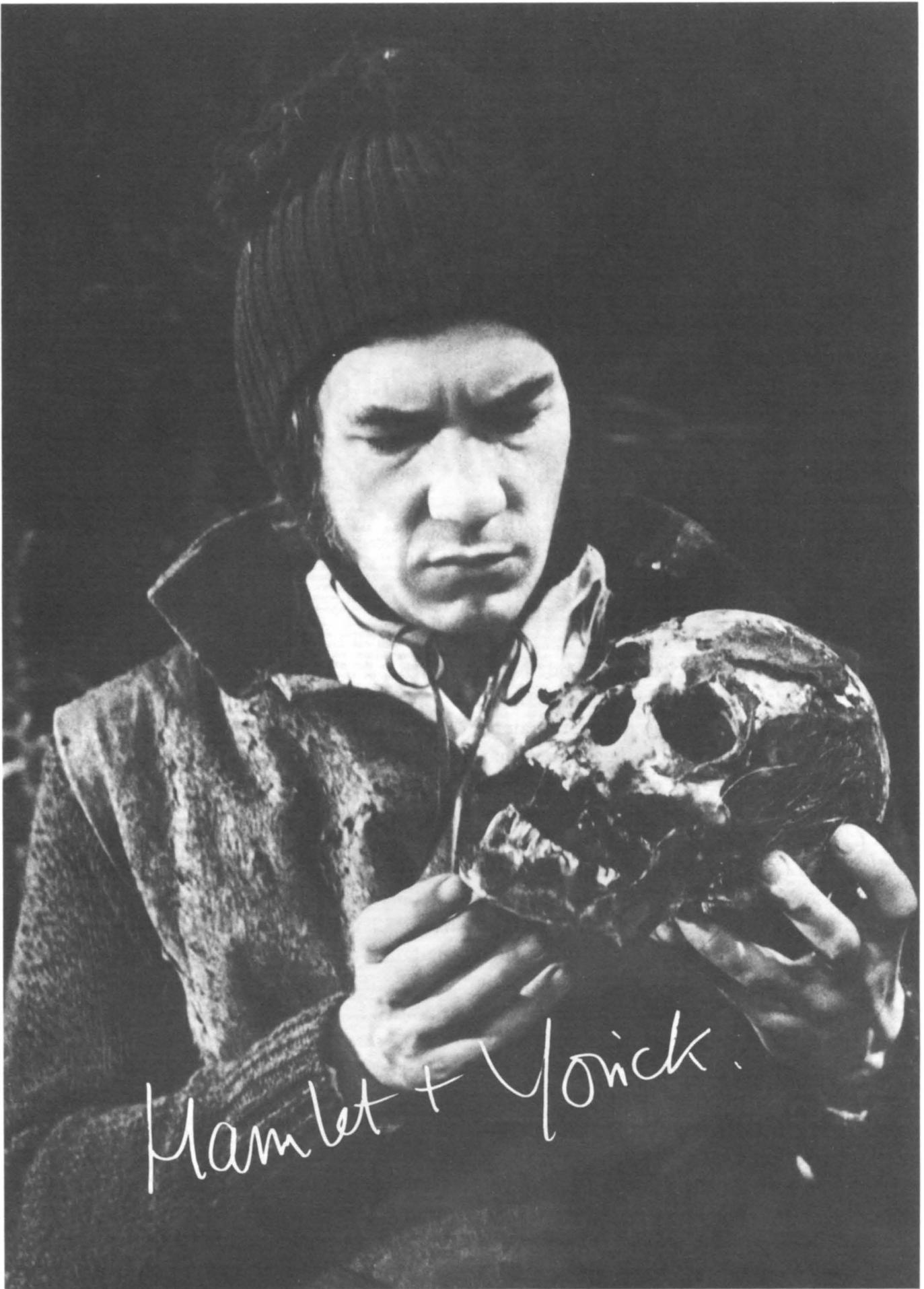
NEVER, in my recollection, has any young actor arrived on the London stage preceded by so much praise as Ian McKellen. Applause has reverberated from Edinburgh. Even Time Magazine ran dry of adjectives.

After all that has been written about his twin performances as Marlowe's Edward and Shakespeare's Richard, we could expect nothing short of a theatrical apocalypse.

Clearly Sir Larry's throne was usurped. Sir John might as well cut his throat. At 28, the future Sir Ian was waiting in the wings like a greyhound in the slips.

Well, I have spent two nights with him at the Mermaid. It is with relief that I report that Mr. McKellen is very good.





Hamlet + Yorick.

Charity Gala Performance

Ian McKellen
Acting Shakespeare

The Olivier Theatre
Sunday 31st August 1986
3pm and 8pm.

SEYTON: *The Queen, my lord, is dead.*

MACBETH: *She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

macbeth, Act 5, Scene 5

The gala committee and Ian McKellen thank everybody who has worked for us in preparation or on the day itself.

IAN McKELLEN ACTING SHAKESPEARE

This performance will probably include:

JACQUES — As You Like It

KING HENRY V

POLONIUS HAMLET, FIRST PLAYER — Hamlet

BULLY BOTTOM — A Midsummer Night Dream

CHORUS — Henry V

DUKE OF GLOUCESTER — Henry VI part 3

PRINCE HAL, SIR JOHN FALSTAFF — Henry IV part 1

MRS QUICKLY — Henry V

SONNET XX

ROMEO AND JULIET

Interval of 15 minutes

THE TRAGEDY OF KING RICHARD II

SAMUEL PEPYS

DAVID GARRICK

BERNARD SHAW

MACBETH

PROSPERO — The Tempest

Acting Shakespeare will last about two hours

Proceeds from the performance will be equally shared between Action Against Aids (The Terence Higgins Trust) and the National Theatre Studio

ACTION AGAINST AIDS

Action Against Aids is very grateful for your support today. Its share of the proceeds from these performances will go to the Terence Higgins Trust and AIDS research.

The number of people with AIDS is increasing rapidly. At present there is no cure.

The Terence Higgins Trust has four aims:

- ★ To provide welfare, legal and counselling help and support to people with AIDS, their friends and families.
- ★ To disseminate accurate information about AIDS to high risk groups, the general public and the media.
- ★ To provide health education for those at risk.
- ★ To encourage and support research into the causes and treatment of AIDS and related conditions.

Since 1984 the work of the Trust has escalated to keep pace with the growing menace of AIDS. Its activities range from working with people with AIDS, through health education, to advising government, trade unions and professional groups. There are now over three hundred people working as volunteers for the Trust. This number does not include doctors, nurses and

health advisers who are part of the medical group the Trust; nor does it include those people in other parts of the country who are working, with guidance from the Trust, to combat the ever-growing threat of AIDS.

The number of cases of AIDS seems to double every eight months, the majority of them being in the London area. To provide counselling and support services for them, the Trust also must double in size every eight months. Support groups will need to be set up for other groups of people as time goes on (e.g. families and relations of people with AIDS).

Research into AIDS is also crucial and funds are desperately needed to help those organisations which are involved in this work.

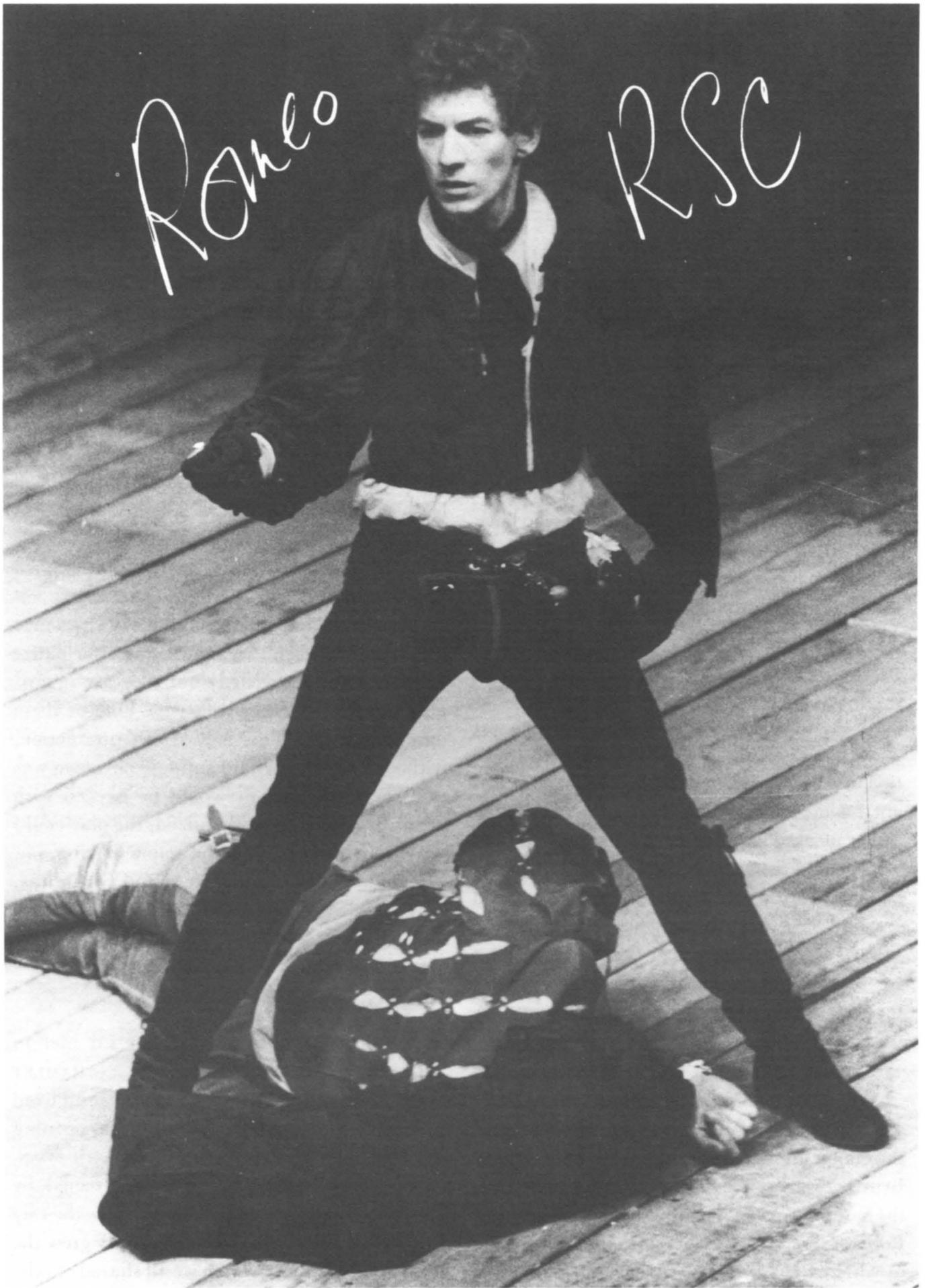
There is a lot to be done. Action Against Aids intends to be there to help and will be mounting a number of very special events to raise the public consciousness of what needs to be done as well as the necessary funds.

Please help us. If you need help or would like further information, please telephone the Terence Higgins Trust on 01-833 2971.

The NT Studio

The NT studio under the direction of Peter Gill is an experimental workshop for the NT Company which encourages new writing and helps develop the work of new directors and actors.

It is based at the Old Vic annexe and regularly shows samples of its work to the general public in the Cottesloe.



was it — although Richard, of course, puts it better:

*'You have but mistook me all this while:
I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends...*

Richard 2 is a star. Show business is littered with the corpses of stars who have been unable to reconcile their public image with their inner insecurity. Richard is more resilient and he doesn't commit suicide. We had him, at the end, fighting off his murderers (as Holinshed records) like a lion.

All this added up to a performance which was noted for breaking with the recent tradition of a limp-wristed playboy, cocking an elegant leg over his throne. Just as I was feeling rather pleased with myself, a letter arrived from an ex-critic, who analysed every detail in my supposedly innovative performance and said she had seen it all before, here and there, in Maurice Evans, Redgrave, Gielgud and John Neville. All the actor can do is try and inhabit these classical parts. He never owns them.

I'm always doubtful when an actor is dubbed 'The Hamlet of his generation', particularly as no-one ever wrote it about mine! Mind you, the competition was considerable: there were 10 British Princes of Denmark in 1971. I was 31, the same age as Hamlet by the end of the play. Robert Chetwyn (the director who had got me to whisper Henry 5 at Ipswich) persuaded me

that we shouldn't tell the Olivier story of a man who couldn't make up his mind. Our Hamlet was a boy who knows exactly what has to be done but lacks the manly resources to do it. He grows up, until finally he is ready and the readiness is all. Shakespeare's heroes all go on such painful journeys to maturity. I wore pants tucked into boots and a sweater under a fringed leather jacket. We had a psychedelic, multi-faceted Ghost, reflected in the mirrors of the set. This modern-looking Hamlet didn't much appeal to the critics, which led to a fruitless correspondence with a couple of them. Critics may well be right, when they say that a performance has failed (or succeeded) but they are invariably hopeless in analysing why. One of them damned us all: 'This is a Wolfit production, without a Wolfit'. What I suppose he meant was that the ideal HAMLET would be packed with great performances and, indeed, the play could come startlingly to life if the actors playing, say, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Fortinbras, were all talented enough to be cast as the Prince himself. That would be to realise the impossible dream — a company of equal talents.

Edward Petherbridge, whom I'd met in Olivier's National Company, saw HAMLET at the Cambridge Theatre in London and liked it. He asked to join me in my next job, opening the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield with SWAN-SONG, a two-hander by Chekov, directed by David William. Ted was offering to play the tiny supporting part. Out of his generosity grew the Actors' Company, in which we all shared out the

large and small parts as equally as possible. Our experiment in democracy was based, also, on equal salaries and billing and a collective responsibility for managing our own affairs, choosing the plays in committee and employing our directors, designers and staff.

In our second season, we all invited David William (who had encouraged us through out) to direct KING LEAR. Robert Eddison was a magnificently arrogant and pathetic old king, Ted, a definitive Fool. I was Edgar, another Shakespearian who goes on an heroic journey to maturity and self-awareness. In preparing my disguise as Mad Tom, I flung off all my clothes and stood briefly onstage as the bare fork'd man. This was a simple image to counterpoint the impenetrable obscurity of Edgar's language — and didn't often get a snigger. Otherwise, nothing remarkable; although we went to USA.



Theater

RICHARD WATT

A Wonderful 'King Lear'

The illustrious British Actors Company was very apologetic because the costumes and settings for its production of "King Lear" hadn't arrived in time for the opening performance, which took place at the Brooklyn Academy of Music yesterday afternoon. It was the most unnecessary apology I've ever heard because, in street or rehearsal clothes, and without scenery, the players gave a brilliant presentation of one of the world's greatest tragedies.

'King Lear'

The play by Shakespeare. Presented by the British Actors Company. Directed by David William. Cast included Robert Eddison, John Woodvine, Matthew Long, Ian McKellen, Caroline Blackiston, Sharon Duca, Sheila Reid, Tenniel Evans, Edward Petherbridge, Robin Ellis, John Moreno, John Tardoff and John Bennett.

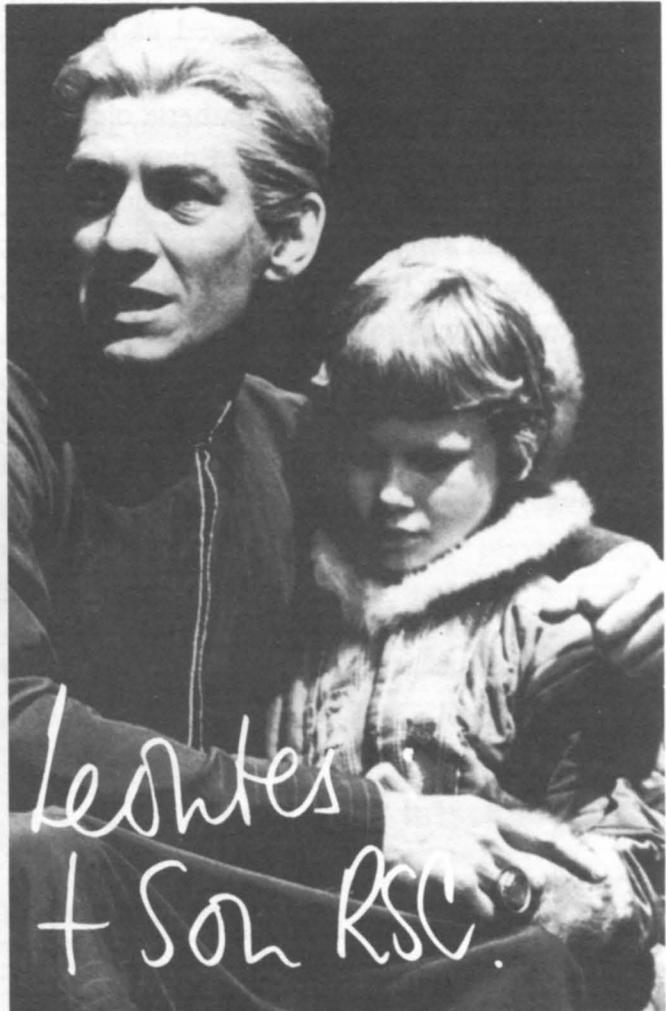
Richard 2, Hamlet and Edgar, although they ended up in London were all productions designed for touring and that's what I most enjoyed about them. The innocence of audiences in the regions and abroad is a relief from London, where one world-weary theatergoer told me I was his 71st Hamlet! A school-girl in Aberdeen, on the other hand, cried out in surprise when I killed Laertes. She had assumed, as Shakespeare intended, that it was impossible for Hamlet to win. Each time I start out preparing these famous parts, I think first of telling their story clearly to an audience who do not know the outcome. That is a big enough responsibility, without also trying for anything extra-spectacular that will startle the jaded. I try and forget what I know or have seen and begin with the text.

At Stratford in the 70's, the text was all! And there, for the first time, I tackled the problem of how to speak it. I had three mentors — John Barton, again; Trevor Nunn, another Cambridge friend; and Cicely Berry, the voice coach for the Royal Shakespeare Company. Cis is small and shy, yet she radiates the energy of a healer, as she lays her hands on your back, your ribs, your neck, your forehead, soothing the body so that it can breathe freely and confidently. She encourages the voice to express your individuality and be responsive to the character you are playing. Your diaphragm muscle below the lungs, pumps air from the body's centre, guiding it up over the vocal chords, its passage

hindered by nothing but your emotion, so that feeling and sound are projected as one, over the lips, to sail along the air, where they strike the audience's eardrums. Cis teaches the intimacy of acting, regardless of the size of the auditorium. Actors and audience should be physically connected — that's why I hate the mechanical aids of microphone and loudspeakers.

John Barton's lessons are different but equally illuminating. He gets together half-a-dozen actors, who singly learn a Shakespeare sonnet and present it out loud to the rest of the group. It becomes a self-contained speech, without any context of scene or play to complicate matters. John then analyses it into the ground, whence, if you're lucky, it grows, nurtured by his knowledge of the myriad devices and flexibility of Shakespeare's poetry. When it comes to blank verse, he is omniscient and it took him 9 hour-long television programmes (PLAYING SHAKESPEARE) to say the half of it. It was astonishing how few of my colleagues at Stratford had time for the Barton classes. They believed, perhaps, his reputation as a purely academic director. Rubbish John Barton is Mr. Show Biz. If a speech or scene isn't working on its own in one of his productions, he will happily shove a bit of atmospheric music underneath. He loves sound effects and smoke and dry ice and elaborate scenery. When I came to do THE WINTER'S TALE with him, I found that the notoriously complex text had had all the difficult lines cut out of it.

I was playing Leontes and, benefitting from my classwork, I did my newly-trained best. For reasons never explained, the production had three directors, who divided up the scenes between them for rehearsing. I cannot invent a metaphor ridiculous enough to describe the confusion this caused. The play was botched.



Barton's teaching was more relevant to ROMEO AND JULIET, a play full of sonnetry. But I was nervous. 36 is no age to start playing

Romeo; and my over-earnest athleticism was more like the last gasp of youth than the first flush of love. But at least I was old enough to find Romeo a little ludicrous as well as tragic. One happy matinée, Francesca Annis and I managed to get 27 intentional laughs in the balcony scene. We played through a long season in Stratford and Newcastle-upon-Tyne and, by the time we reached London, surprise, surprise, I was much better for the experience. I ended up quite satisfied with my farewell to juvenile roles. Unfortunately, the overhang of the Aldwych Theatre's dress-circle restricts the view from the rear stalls. Sitting there, it's like viewing the stage through a letter-box. The Capulet balcony was out of sight. I've never understood why you need a balcony — Shakespeare never mentions the word. The lovers are not kept apart by architecture: my Romeo, who leapt the orchard wall and clambered half-way up the proscenium arch, wouldn't be put off by a balcony, for God's sake! What stops him getting at Juliet, is her insistence on keeping sex for marriage,



DEAR Ian. trying to get up
 please will you the pole and
 sign this photograph. you nearly got up
 I thought you were but Juliet made
 a very good actor your hands come
 for Romeo. I off. and I was
 knew you would be the little girl you
 exorsted after all shouted Hello to
 that work. I on the stage
 liked the best bit, bench seat. I
 when you were Am 3/8 Just eight

which precipitates the whole tragedy. The Aldwych should have been an ideal opportunity to throw away an old tradition and to play the scene on the flat. Imagine the emotional and sexual tension. Trevor Nunn didn't agree. He installed television monitors at the back of the stalls.

My third Shakespeare for the RSC was *MACBETH*, which opened in the middle of a thunderstorm. So foul and fair I day I have not seen. It was beautifully done on the cheap in The Other Place, the old tin hut along from the main theatre. John Napier's entire set cost £200 and the costumes were a ragbag of second-hand clothes. My uniform jacket had buttons embossed with 'Birmingham Fire Service'; my long, leather coat didn't fit, nor did Banquo's so we had to wear them slung over the shoulder; Judi Dench, as Lady Macbeth, wore a dyed tea-towel on her head. Somehow it was magic: and black magic, too. A priest used to sit on the front row, whenever he could scrounge a ticket, holding out his crucifix to protect the cast from the evil we were raising.

The play is considered unlucky, perhaps because it so rarely works. It's nevertheless popular with audiences, perhaps because it's Shakespeare's shortest. These days, there are three big problems with *MACBETH* and Trevor Nunn solved them all.

First: what do you do about Scotland? I've seen a very good *MACBETH*, with kilts, horned helmets and a lone piper at the banquet — but they were all rather off-putting. Apart from Iain Mc Diarmid's Glaswegian Porter, our *MACBETH* wasn't set in Scotland; it took place in the theatre. The cast of 12 sat round in a magic circle of beer crates, on a plain wooden floor, from which they watched the scenes they weren't part of. The sound effects were openly made by the actors. My first job was to rattle the thundersheet as the doors of The Other Place were banged shut. There was no interval and no escape. The action was happening in front of your eyes — even the offstage action: Judi Dench and I bathed our hands in mock blood for everyone to see. Set in 'Scotland' the play is distanced and 'Brigadoon' hovers dangerously on the horizon. In that tin hut, you couldn't avoid a thing.

Second problem: how can modern scepticism cope with witches, cauldrons, and ghosts? Simple — we didn't have Banquo's ghost, which after all, is only there in Macbeth's imagination. The witches, on the other hand, were three real women — a psychic girl, her helping mother and a granny, who kept the book of spells. You'd smile if you met them at market but, once in the magic circle, you'd jump out of your skin. When they simply walked back to their beer crates, you'd swear that they'd vanished into air.

And third: what do you do about the last act, in which so many good Macbeth's are judged to have failed to thrill? That really is Shakespeare's fault. After giving the actor a good break during the long scene in England, he swings the action back to Macbeth, embattled in Dunsinane. The audience is rightly expecting a coiling of the spring. Instead, the tension is clumsily released, by a series of short scenes with Malcolm's advancing army. Most Macbeth's have the unfair job of winding the audience up again, once the action switches back to him. Nunn's staging put the army round

the circle, with me strongly lit in its centre. We were all in each others' scenes. This simple device (it was all simple), plus some judicious cutting, made the last act work. For perhaps the first time in the history of Director's Theatre, Shakespeare had been improved on.

The effect of the production can still be felt, by viewing the television version. Trevor said: 'I want to photograph the text'. So again, there were no scenic effects, just groupings and close-ups in shadows and coloured light. The actors' familiarity with the produc-







9.0 ITN News

9.30 Macbeth

**The Royal Shakespeare
Company in Trevor
Nunn's Production**

Television adaptation of this classic
Shakespearean drama.

Macbeth
Lady Macbeth
Lennox
Third witch
Lady Macduff
Second witch
Gentlewoman
Donalbain
Seyton

Ian McKellen
Judi Dench
John Bowen
Susan Drury
Judith Harte
Greg Hicks



tion and with each other, meant we could concentrate on hitting our marks on the studio floor, without worry or waste of time. It only took two weeks. The claustrophobia of the stage production was exactly captured. Trevor had used a similar technique with *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA* on the box. No-one else should ever be allowed to televise Shakespeare. When I remember *MACBETH* I feel I could write a book about it all: (a number of research students already have). There is so much I was proud of: discovering how to play a soliloquy direct into the eyes of everyone in the audience; making them laugh at Macbeth's gallows humour; working alongside Judi Dench's finest performance. But there's no need for a book. It's all on video.

Theatre-life is full of crossroads (and cul-de-sacs, too): and if I hadn't left the RSC when I did, I mightn't have been free to play on Broadway in *AMADEUS*, directed by Peter Hall. And if I hadn't done that, Sir Peter mightn't have invited me to play Coriolanus at the National Theatre.

In his latest book, *ON ACTING*, Laurence Olivier (who should know) says that Coriolanus is an easy part. It's true that psychologically he is bang straightforward. You've got it all, once you've understood the idiosyncratic nature of his pride. He is a world-beating athlete, who demands the public's attention and yet resents their praise, lest it should sap his strength. (The John McEnroe syndrome, perhaps.) Caius Martius stands superbly alone, unwilling to change: his pride is the stubbornness of a boy.

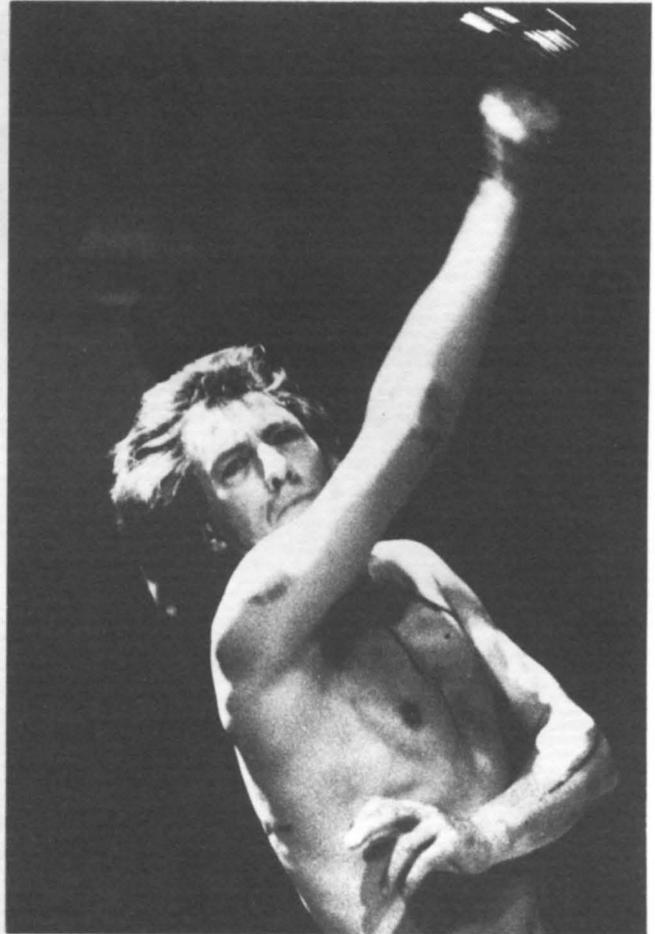
He is inflexible, incapable of adaptation, like a dinosaur, and the play is the story of his extinction. Half-way through, when he leaves his home and family in Rome, he searches for a world elsewhere but, significantly, that journey to Antium, takes place offstage. There's no comparison with the self-discoveries of Hamlet or Edgar or Richard 2. All this may be easy enough to understand but was not easy, for me, to play. I had to be fighting fit. If the audience didn't believe that I could at least have a go at taking Corioli single-handed, I might as well have hung up my sword and shield. I needed lung-power, too, for a man who so often rails and rages against the odds. The acoustics of the Olivier Theatre are more stable than the Great Hall at Bolton School but then Sir Peter put 100 of public onstage, behind the actors, so that, upstaged throughout, I had to project in the round. Oh, for the intimacy of *The Other Place*! John Bury's magnificent set was a crumbling Roman theatre, surrounding an arena of sand. It was the sort of place where gladiators had fought, where, in more recent times, public rallies might have been held or dissidents rounded up for questioning. It was an ideal setting for the political debate which is the centre of *CORIOLANUS*. At the end of our 9 month run we went to Athens, where we played in a real Roman theatre. The Herodus Atticus is built into the very rock of the Acropolis. From the stage we looked up, over the heads of 6000 people, seated on roughcast benches, to the Parthenon floodlit in the night sky. I have not often played, as Shakespeare's original actors always did, in the open air and the effort was

stupendous. So was the Athenians' response. When I got home, I had to go to bed for 3 days.

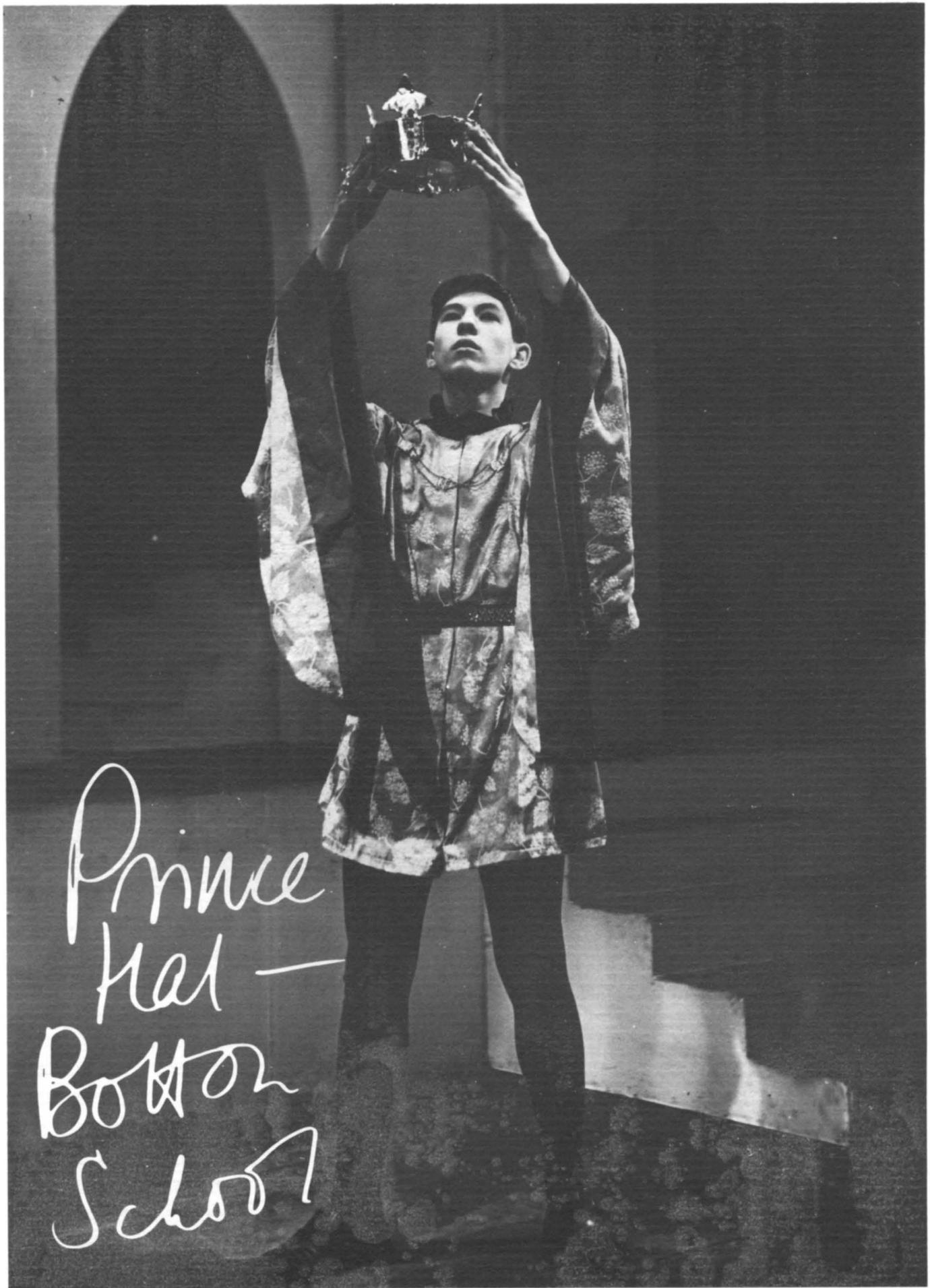
As for my future with Shakespeare, there is no part I'm dying to act well, Benedick and Iago, maybe, but only, as with any part, if the conditions (theatre, director, cast, pay) are propitious. There are (however,) parts that I'll try and avoid, because they somehow offend. Every modern, white actor, taking on Othello, feels obliged to explain why he's not playing him black, which was surely Shakespeare's intention, when the unspoken reason is that to 'black-up' is as disgusting these days as a 'nigger minstrel show'.

Again, try as actors and directors may to explain what Shakespeare really intended, *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW* and *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE* stand, these days, as anti-feminist and anti-semitic. That crosses Petruchio and Shylock off my list. It's worrying, too, that *RICHARD 3* seems to equate physical handicap with evil: which I don't. There are a few parts I'd like to have another crack at. I've still played Malvolio, only in that schoolboy letter-scene and I'm looking forward to Shallow again, in the hope that I may have forgotten John Barton's intonations. I keep *Richard 2* and *Macbeth* fresh in my memory in *ACTING SHAKESPEARE*.

Looking back at the rest, I've no regrets, even about the bad performances, because



I learnt something from them all. No regrets, either, about missing out on parts that I'm now too old to play. Indeed, I'm ecstatic not to have had to try Bassanio, Ferdinand, Florizel and others of that ilk. Like Claudio and Sebastian they should be attempted only by charismatic beauties. It would have been fun, on the other hand, to play Edmund, Hotspur, Mercutio and Puck but, then, they are such easy parts — you never see a bad one. For me, over the years, acting in Shakespeare has always been a challenge. Accepting the challenge has always been part of the reward.



Prince
Hal —
Boston
School

SHAKESPEARE

Amateur Theatre:

Bolton School (1952-58):—

TWELFTH NIGHT (Malvolio): letter scene.

OTHELLO (Montano)

HENRY 4 part 2 (Prince Hal) HENRY 5 (Henry 5)

Bolton Little Theatre (1958):—

TWELFTH NIGHT (Sebastian)

Cambridge University (1958-61):—

HENRY 4 part 2 (Justice Shallow) director John Barton

CYBELINE (Posthumus Leonatus)

director George Rylands

HENRY 6 parts 2 & 3 (Henry 6)

adapted and directed by Corin Redgrave

TWELFTH NIGHT (Sir Toby Belch)

director Waris Hussein

Professional Theatre

1962 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING (Claudio)

director Graham Crowden: Belgrade Theatre Coventry

1963 HENRY 5 (Henry 5) director Robert Chetwyn:

Arts Theatre, Ipswich

1963 CORIOLANUS (Tullus Aufidius)

director Tyone Guthrie: Nottingham Playhouse

1964 SIR THOMAS MORE (More)

director Frank Dunlop: Nottingham Playhouse

1965 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Franco Zeffirelli: National Theatre at Old Vic

1968 RICHARD 2 (King Richard)

director Richard Cottrell: Prospect Theatre Company

HAMLET (Hamlet)

director Robert Chetwyn: Prospect Theatre Company

1974 KING LEAR (Edgar)

director David William: Actors' Company

1975 KING JOHN (The Bastard)

adapted and directed by John Barton: R.S.C.

1976 ROMEO AND JULIET (Romeo)

director Trevor Nunn: R.S.C.

MACBETH (Macbeth)

director Trevor Nunn: R.S.C.

THE WINTER'S TALE (Leontes);

directors John Barton, Barry Kyle, Trevor Nunn R.S.C.

1978 TWELFTH NIGHT (Sir Toby Belch)

directors John Amiel & Trevor Nunn: R.S.C.

1984 CORIOLANUS (Coriolanus)

director Peter Hall: N.T. on Southbank

Television

1969 RICHARD 2 (Richard 2) director Toby Robertson

1971 HAMLET (Hamlet) director David Giles

1980 MACBETH (Macbeth) director Trevor Nunn

1980 PLAYING SHAKESPEARE devised by John Barton

1982 ACTING SHAKESPEARE

directed by Kirk Browning and Sean Mathias

Audio

1958-60 ANTONY & CLEOPATRA (Mardin)

director George Rylands Marlowe Society/Argo Records

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (Lysander)

director George Rylands

HENRY 4 part 2 (Davy) director George Rylands

1966 HENRY 5 (Dauphin)

director Howard Sackler: Caedmon Records

1966 HENRY 8 (Surrey)

director John Tydeman: BBC Radio

1967 RICHARD 3 (Hastings)

director John Powell: BBC Radio

1970 ROMEO AND JULIET (Romeo)

John Tydeman: BBC Radio

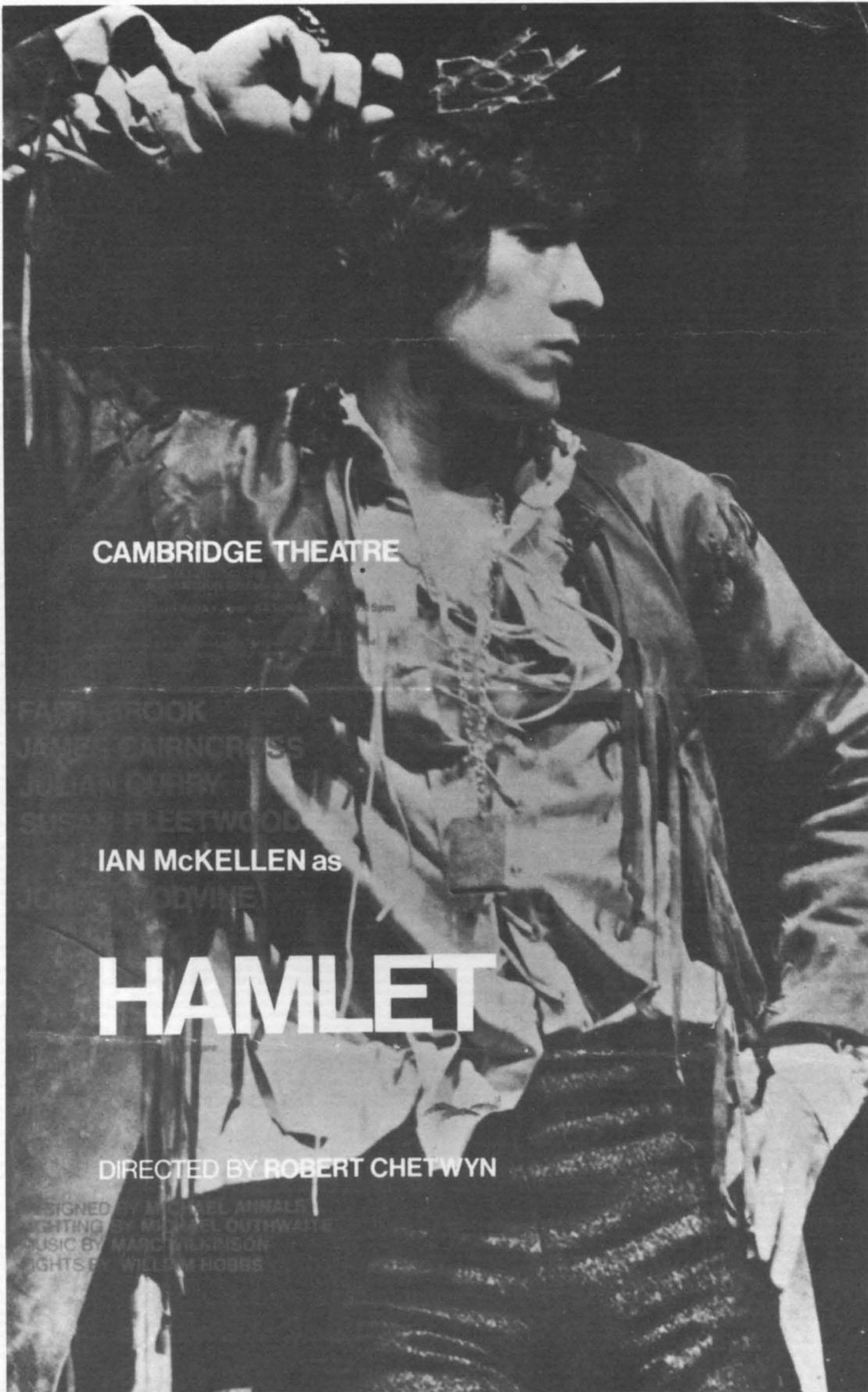
1974 HENRY 6 parts 1, 2, and 3

(Duke of York & Duke of Gloucester)

adapted & created by Raymond Raikes: BBC Radio

1979 SIR THOMAS MORE (More)

director Martin Jenkins BBC Radio



CAMBRIDGE THEATRE

PAUL PROOK
JAMES CARNICROSS
JULIA CURRY
SUSAN FLEETWOOD
IAN MCKELLEN
JOHNSON

IAN McKELLEN as

HAMLET

DIRECTED BY ROBERT CHETWYN

DESIGNED BY MICHAEL ANNALI
LIGHTING BY MICHAEL OUTHWAITE
MUSIC BY MARC WILKINSON
COSTUME DESIGNER WILLIAM HOBBS

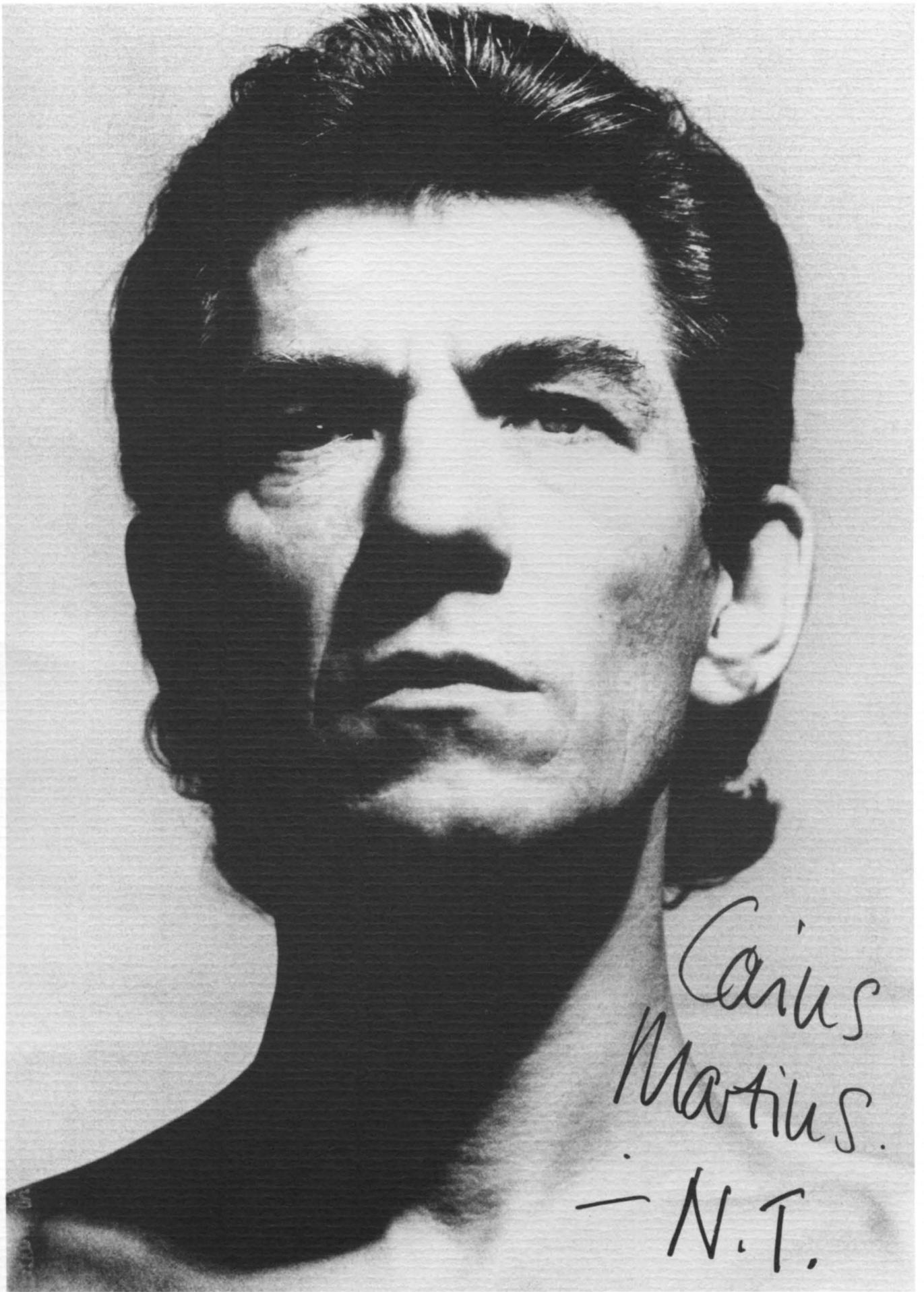
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Carius
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- N.T.