

## CULTURE

# Affairs to remember

Farley Granger bedded Ava Gardner, Shelley Winters, and Leonard Bernstein. In his autobiography, *Include Me Out*, Hitchcock's muse reveals how he lived as an openly bisexual actor in classic Hollywood and got away with it By Michael Giltz



**F**arley Granger isn't coming out. He's always been out. Frankly, he never found much use for the closet beyond being a good place to hang his suits. And if being bisexual doesn't bother him, why should it concern anyone else?

Since starring in two key gay films by Alfred Hitchcock, *Rope* (1948) and *Strangers on a Train* (1951), Granger has been a tantalizing figure. Fortright and open about sleeping with men as well as women throughout his career, he has been happily partnered with TV producer Robert Calhoun (*As the World Turns*, *The Guiding Light*) for the last 45 years. His new autobiography, *Include Me Out: My Life From Goldwyn to Broadway* (St. Martin's Press), written with Calhoun, reads with equal candor about the industry and his escapades.

It's one juicy anecdote after another: Granger lived with writer Arthur Laurents (and walked in on him being too friendly with a delivery boy); he had romps with Ava Gardner, Barbara Stanwyck, and Leonard Bernstein; stared down Edward Albee; and maintained a tumultuous lifelong friendship with Shelley Winters (and nearly married her).

The book should be a window into an era when gay actors worried about being outed so much that they'd marry women and avoid all roles with the slightest hint of gay subtext. But what's noticeably absent from *Include Me Out* is angst. Granger doesn't talk about his worries, coming out to his parents, or guilt of any kind.

"I have loved men. I have loved women. I will talk with affection and without guilt or remorse about both," he writes matter-of-factly.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID NEEDLEMAN FOR OPUSERS.COM. GROOMING BY CARRYL BOWSLAUGH. STYLING BY GAN SPELTON FOR AARHUSLOFT.COM

Even the simplest question about whether he considers himself gay or bisexual doesn't engage him. "I'm too old to worry about that," says the 81-year-old. "I've done too much."

His partner, Calhoun, 76, is less reticent, readily discussing the moment he knew he was gay, the couple's support of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, and Granger's unwillingness to place importance on his sexuality.

"It's very frustrating for reporters because they often ask him what it was like being gay in Hollywood at his age," says Calhoun. "And his answers seem like he's avoiding the question. I've grilled him on my own afterwards, just to say, 'Well, come on, you must have had some feeling,' but he never had any feeling of guilt. He said he never worried about it or tried to hide who he was."

I spent several hours talking to Granger in his apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side, Calhoun and cats by his side. And while he might not have much to say on some topics, he will eagerly and enthusiastically discuss his work.

Granger's career ran backward in many ways. He went from big Hollywood films to off-Broadway productions, from a movie star to an actor, and from a contract player (Hollywood's term for indentured servant) to an independent talent who nonetheless had genuine commercial pull.

It all began in 1943 when the famed producer Samuel Goldwyn signed an exuberant teenage Granger to a contract, and then had no clue what to do with him. Goldwyn also unwittingly set the tone for Granger's stance on his sexuality when he told the young actor to stay away from composer Aaron Copland, "a known homosexual," and Granger flatly refused.

Frustrated with Goldwyn and the films he was being asked to do, the actor wanted to break away from his contract to pursue the theater. Their battles were so legendary they became a running joke in the 2002 one-man show *Mr. Goldwyn*.

"I did get a few good things out of Goldwyn," says Granger. "None of them was money, of course. It was great when he finally said, 'I will let you go; I'll free you. But you have to give me all the money you've got.' I said, 'Sure, I'll give you all the money I've got. I'll give you all the money other people have got.'"

Granger's best work definitely happened outside of Goldwyn's influence, especially when loaned out to Hitchcock.

"Hitchcock was a devil," says Drew



Strangers on a Train: Granger with Robert Walker

Casper, professor of American film and holder of the Alma and Alfred Hitchcock Chair in the School of Cinema-Television at the University of Southern California. "He loved gossip, and he loved to know secrets about people in a very nice way. He knew when casting *Rope* that indeed Farley Granger was gay; he knew Arthur Laurents, who adapted it, was gay; he knew John Dall was gay; and he knew—although Granger hadn't moved in yet with Arthur Laurents—they were lovers. He knew, and they knew he knew. But none of this was discussed. It was just secrets that they had, and he loved that.

"*Rope* certainly up to that time was the most sophisticated representation of homosexuality on the screen," Casper continues. "And probably even today—it's just accepted. That's the point; it's just accepted. And the picture made money."

*Strangers on a Train* was especially satisfying for Granger, giving him a lifelong friendship with Hitchcock's daughter, Patricia, and one of the best roles of his career. "I loved doing *Strangers* because Hitch knew he had a hit," says Granger. "He'd gone through some bad times over in London, and the movies weren't that good."

While working on Luchino Visconti's ▶



Granger, John Dall, Jimmy Stewart, and Hitchcock filming *Rope*

EVERETT COLLECTION | 21



Calhoun and Granger at home in Manhattan

*Senso* in 1954 (an underrated film and one of Granger's best), Visconti's lover Franco Zeffirelli accidentally dyed Granger's hair bright pink.

"That was terrible, just shocking," says Granger, laughing. "I thought Visconti was going to kill him. The makeup man had to work on me every morning. I thought I was going to lose my hair."

Besides the two Hitchcock movies and *Senso*, Granger's film credits include Nicholas Ray's classic *They Live by Night* (1948) and films by Lewis Milestone and Anthony Mann.

To every role he played Granger brought what *Entertainment Tonight* critic Leonard Maltin begrudgingly calls "vulnerability."

"I hate to use that old, overused word," says the film historian. "He's not weak when he plays those characters, but he's vulnerable. And that's something we can all relate to very easily. It makes him flawed and human, and he expresses those qualities really well."

For all his film success, it was the stage that would bring Granger his greatest accomplishments as an actor. Arthur Miller praised the 1964 revival of *The Crucible*, starring Granger, as exactly what he'd intended for the play.

Granger gave *Deathtrap* a final goose at the box office when he joined the cast in 1981, extending its record-breaking run another 15 months. The crowning moment of his theater career was winning an Obie award in 1986 for his performance in the off-Broadway *Talley & Son*.

Granger's most unexpected stage success came in a 1960 New York City Center revival of *The King and I*, a show headed for Broadway until an actors' strike derailed it. Richard Rodgers later wrote in a letter that he and Oscar Hammerstein considered Granger, as the king, and Barbara Cook, who played Anna, their favorites in those roles.

"We were kind of in the same boat as far as casting goes," says Cook. "Normally, neither of us would have been cast in those roles."

"This chemistry that people talk about? Boy, did we have it!" says Cook. "Farley has a sensitivity that touches you so very well. With Yul Brynner it was hard to see how his spirit could be broken so easily—I mean, he dies! But with Farley it made more sense."

The two actors were attracted to each other, but Cook was married, so they didn't pursue it. Still friends after all these years (Granger and Calhoun's

apartment has numerous Cook albums scattered about), Cook pauses before acknowledging the attraction was mutual. "I did sense that," she says.

But certainly the woman who most dominated Granger's life was the bombastic Shelley Winters.

"I would have married her if she hadn't been quite as crazy as she was," says Granger. "She wanted to get married to...make herself respectable. She could be very, very difficult, and she could also be very funny and very dear, really. It was the angel and the monster all together."

When Winters accidentally overdosed, it was her lover Burt Lancaster and Granger who came to her rescue. Years later Granger would get her an apartment in his building by introducing her to the building manager.

"She came in the building and she said, 'Don't you think it would be wonderful if there was a portrait of me on the wall?'"

The manager's response? "No!" Her ego was unbelievable."

Even as Granger and Calhoun share stories of Winters accusing them of stealing her best glasses or leaning mattresses up against the windows to keep out the cold, they're told with genuine affection.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID NEEDLEMAN FOR GQ; STYLING BY SAM SHELTON FOR ARTISTLOFT.COM

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It's the same tone he uses in his autobiography. For while Granger enjoys a good story, he never dishes dirt or seems to be settling scores. In Laurents's memoir, *Original Story by*, he took digs at Granger, but *Include Me Out* doesn't return the favor. Granger calls the writer a mentor and tips his hat to the importance of their relationship. Even Goldwyn is given a fair shake, though Granger suggests without rancor that breaking with Goldwyn (and, in effect, the studio system) is one reason he didn't get many good roles in Hollywood after the 1950s.

It might be said that Granger applies the same parity to his sexual exploits. While stationed in Hawaii with the U.S. Navy during World War II he lost his virginity to a woman, then hours later to a man.

"One of the hardest things in the world is to really find yourself," says Granger, who first slept with Calhoun the night of November 22, 1963—the date John F. Kennedy was shot. "And once you find yourself, it's great. You should hang on to it. But sometimes it takes a lot of work, to really say, 'This is who I am.' It wasn't that difficult for me because Hollywood really did not impress me. I felt, *I'm not going anywhere here*. I mean, I was, but I didn't like what I was doing. I'd seen those actors on the stage in New York, and that's what I wanted."

Good thing, because Hollywood during the 1950s was looking for a slightly different type of leading man. "It was the time of Brando and Holden and Dean," says Casper. "Farley was very difficult because Hollywood was, in the postwar period, into tortured men, anguished men. He didn't convey that. He was young, he had a handsome demeanor, and he didn't look like he was troubled."

"Troubled" is exactly what Granger has never been. Maybe it's his rare ability not to care what other people think. Maybe it's his tendency to focus on the work, not the fame. Maybe it's that particular breed of self-confidence that only good looks allow. Or maybe it's selective memory.

I point out to Granger that *Include Me Out* has stories of him rejecting the advances of admirers like Noël Coward and Laurents but none of him being dumped. Any memories of heartache?

"Not that I can think of," he says with a laugh. Who can blame him? ■



Granger and Joan Collins in *The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing* (1955)

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BFF: Granger and Shelley Winters



Granger outside New York's Plaza Hotel in 1955

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