



The Sher Thing

Renaissance actor Antony Sher crosses the Atlantic.

LONDON-BASED actor Antony Sher enters Marsden's, a French restaurant in a sleepy suburb of the city, with a mildly distracted air, as if he interrupted some project to keep this rendezvous. It could be any number of things: more research on Disraeli, the character he portrays in *Her Majesty, Mrs. Brown*, which Sher is currently filming; working on a novel, since he's already published three accomplished books, most recently *Cheap Lives*, about a gay man haunted by the fact he was spared by a notorious serial killer; or perhaps he was just working on a charcoal sketch or writing in his well-known diary.

Whatever it was, the trip home to

his work will be a short one, since Sher lives just around the corner. The 47-year-old actor will make a much longer journey when he brings *Stanley*—a play written expressly for him by Pam Gems—to Broadway in February, making his belated New York theatrical debut.

Sher has been a major force in British theater for 15 years. There, he says matter-of-factly, "I'm usually offered the roles." Movies are another matter. "I hate auditioning," Sher continues. "It just seems to throw out the window everything I believe about acting." Nevertheless, he gives a strong performance as an angry, somewhat dumpy therapist who falls in love with an HIV-positive dancer in the forth-

coming *Indian Summer*, a film written by playwright Martin Sherman (*Bent*). Sher's role in *Stanley* is at the opposite end of the sexual spectrum: Stanley Spencer was a painter who scandalized Britain because he set his religious works in local settings (the Resurrection in Cookham, for example) and couldn't see why an artist should be limited to just one woman.

Perhaps Sher's Broadway experience will one day turn up in print: His just-published *Woza Shakespeare!* (published in the U.K. by Methuen) is the actor's diary about mounting *Titus Andronicus* in his homeland, South Africa. It serves as a sequel of sorts to *Year of the King*, an acclaimed 1985 work recounting a production of *Richard III*. In *King*, Sher makes only passing reference to his "roommate," Jim. But *Woza*—co-written with his partner of 10 years, Gregory Doran—finds Sher getting irked when Doran isn't allowed to accompany him to an audience with Prince Edward, joining in a Gay Pride march with Ian McKellen, and generally acting like a model citizen of the queer nation.

"Growing up in Cape Town [South Africa] when I did, I was the only gay person in the world," Sher says of his gradual coming out. "My partner Greg, growing up here in the U.K., had exactly the same feeling. So whenever we do publicity and mention it casually, it is simply to make it *there*: These people are doing these jobs and they're not making a big issue of it."

Also not making a big issue of the time, Sher looks discreetly at his watch. "The oils are calling," he says, revealing that it was a painting he was torn away from for this visit. He says his goodbyes and heads home.

—MICHAEL GILTZ

Michael Giltz has also written for Entertainment Weekly and for Blockbuster magazine.