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Out actor
Rupert Everett has
his say on Bush, 9/11,
and killing his directors

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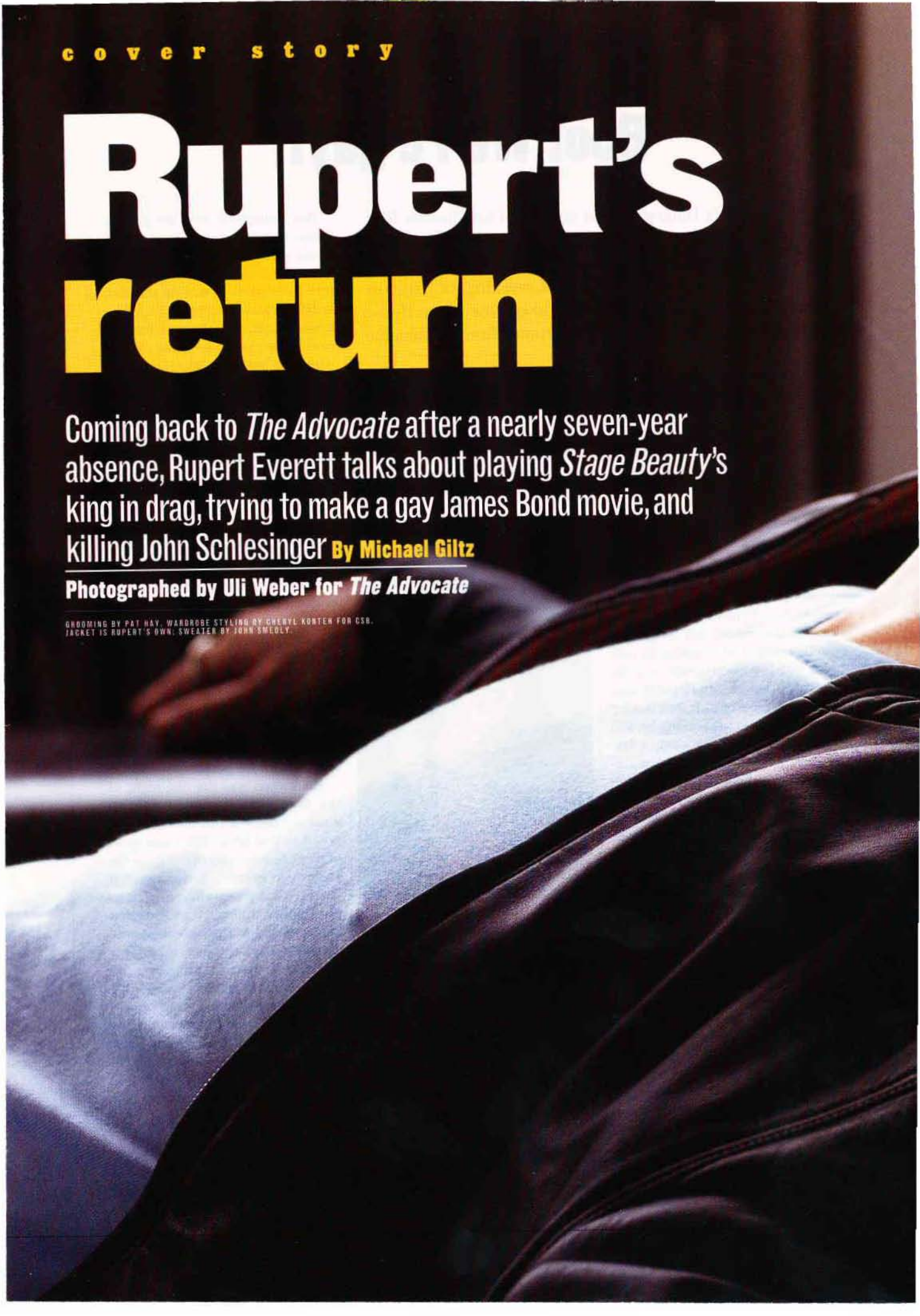
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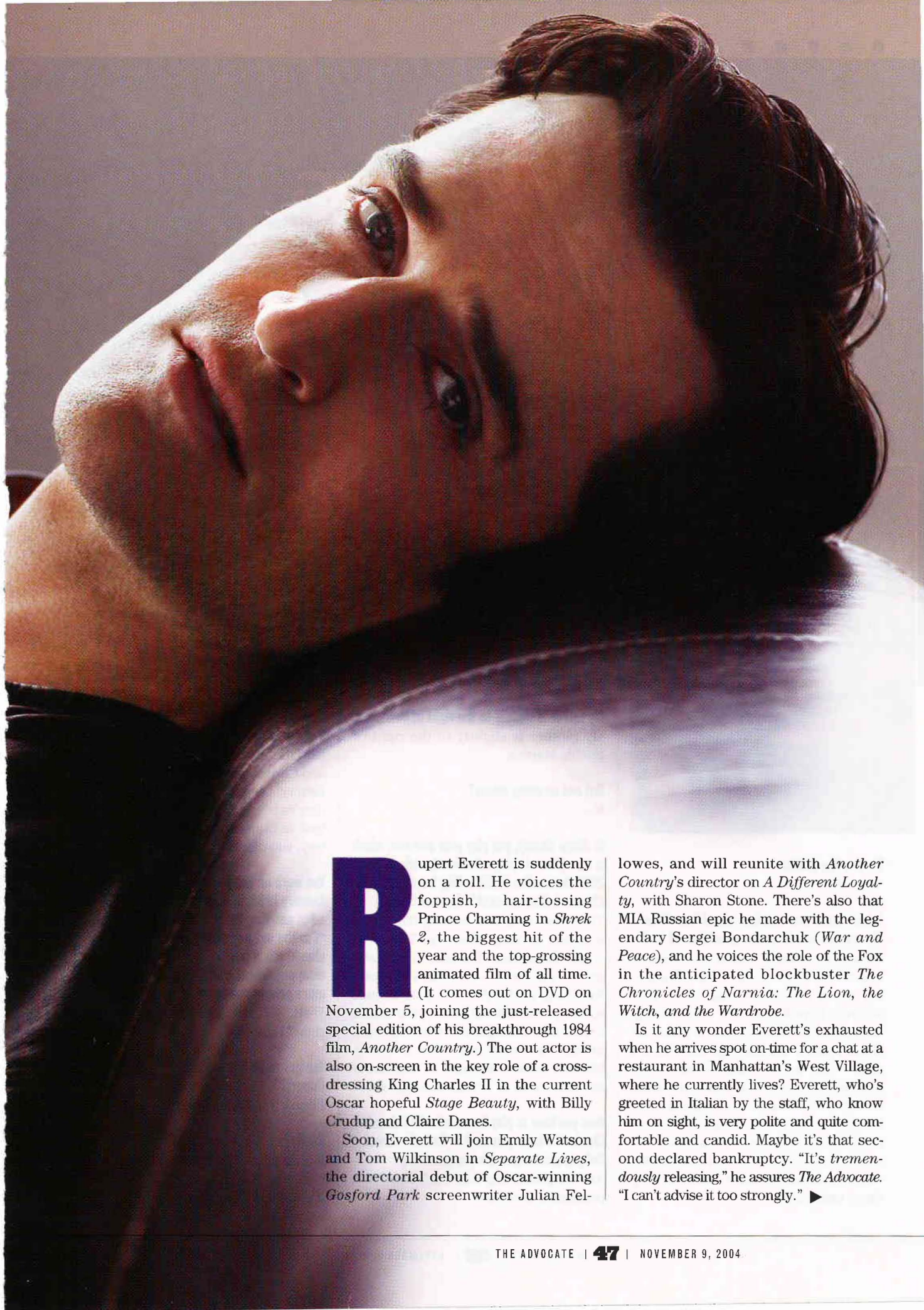
Rupert's return

Coming back to *The Advocate* after a nearly seven-year absence, Rupert Everett talks about playing *Stage Beauty*'s king in drag, trying to make a gay James Bond movie, and killing John Schlesinger **By Michael Giltz**

Photographed by Uli Weber for *The Advocate*

GROOMING BY PAT HAY, WARDROBE STYLING BY CHERYL KORTEN FOR CSO.
JACKET IS RUPERT'S OWN; SWEATER BY JOHN SMOLY.





Rupert Everett is suddenly on a roll. He voices the foppish, hair-tossing Prince Charming in *Shrek 2*, the biggest hit of the year and the top-grossing animated film of all time. (It comes out on DVD on

November 5, joining the just-released special edition of his breakthrough 1984 film, *Another Country*.) The out actor is also on-screen in the key role of a cross-dressing King Charles II in the current Oscar hopeful *Stage Beauty*, with Billy Crudup and Claire Danes.

Soon, Everett will join Emily Watson and Tom Wilkinson in *Separate Lives*, the directorial debut of Oscar-winning *Gosford Park* screenwriter Julian Fel-

lowes, and will reunite with *Another Country*'s director on *A Different Loyalty*, with Sharon Stone. There's also that MIA Russian epic he made with the legendary Sergei Bondarchuk (*War and Peace*), and he voices the role of the Fox in the anticipated blockbuster *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

Is it any wonder Everett's exhausted when he arrives spot on-time for a chat at a restaurant in Manhattan's West Village, where he currently lives? Everett, who's greeted in Italian by the staff, who know him on sight, is very polite and quite comfortable and candid. Maybe it's that second declared bankruptcy. "It's *tremendously* releasing," he assures *The Advocate*. "I can't advise it too strongly." ►



Dogs and drag: Rupert as Charles II in *Stage Beauty*

Do you like politics?

Yes, very much.

I don't know how you feel about Tony Blair. We wanted him to be our president at first.

Blair is a mystery. I think God plays a role in this whole thing. I was talking to my mum the other day, who is a staunch Republican. We were having one of those mother-son arguments about politics that don't go anywhere. I said, "What do you think George Bush and God talked about that time when George Bush asked about going into Iraq? Mummy, do you really think God said, 'Yes, you should go and lop off some Iraqis?'" And my mum went, "Well, you never know. He's a *very* funny man, God."

My father is slightly to the right of Mussolini. My mother is slightly to the right of Imelda Marcos.

But not as many shoes?

No.

In *Stage Beauty*, you play your own son, which is fun. [Everett plays Charles II, while in the 2003 British film *To Kill a King* he played Charles I, that monarch's doomed father.]

That was really fun, playing the son of a father in *Stage Beauty*. That was what I liked most, because in the category of your own work, that's kind of a fun thing to do. Also, to play scenes where you're talking about your father and you're imagining yourself—it's great. For someone who is not a Method actor, I thought it was about as methodical as I could possibly get.

Now you have to play Cromwell, who beheaded Charles I. I know you went to Catholic school. Did you practice, or are you practicing?

Am I a practicing Catholic? No, I'm a practicing Buddhist.

Not even for your mother at Christmas?

Yes, I do [go to church then], and I love Christianity. But the Catholic Church and Christianity in general I find unsatisfactory, because since the third century they've been hijacked by neocons. If you look at Christianity before the third century, you discover a very different thing.

You were on the cover of *The Advocate* in January 1998, and you didn't seem interested in carrying the gay banner and saying, "I'm the out gay actor, and other people should come out too." But is there any disappointment that there haven't been more people coming out?

Well, selfishly, less is more for me, right? [Laughs]

You get to be the gay actor. "Get me Rupert!"

I don't think it's something I'd advise.

Really?

Not in show business. Not in a trophy business like Hollywood. I don't think it's ideal. I think it's very lucky for ►

me to have been English and to have the opportunities to work in all the various different places that I could so I could keep going. French cinema, Italian cinema, theater, English movies, and getting a Hollywood one if I can. I think if I had been an American...it's definitely not a...a...friendly environment, really. I don't want to particularly elaborate on that.

Do you wish you hadn't done it?

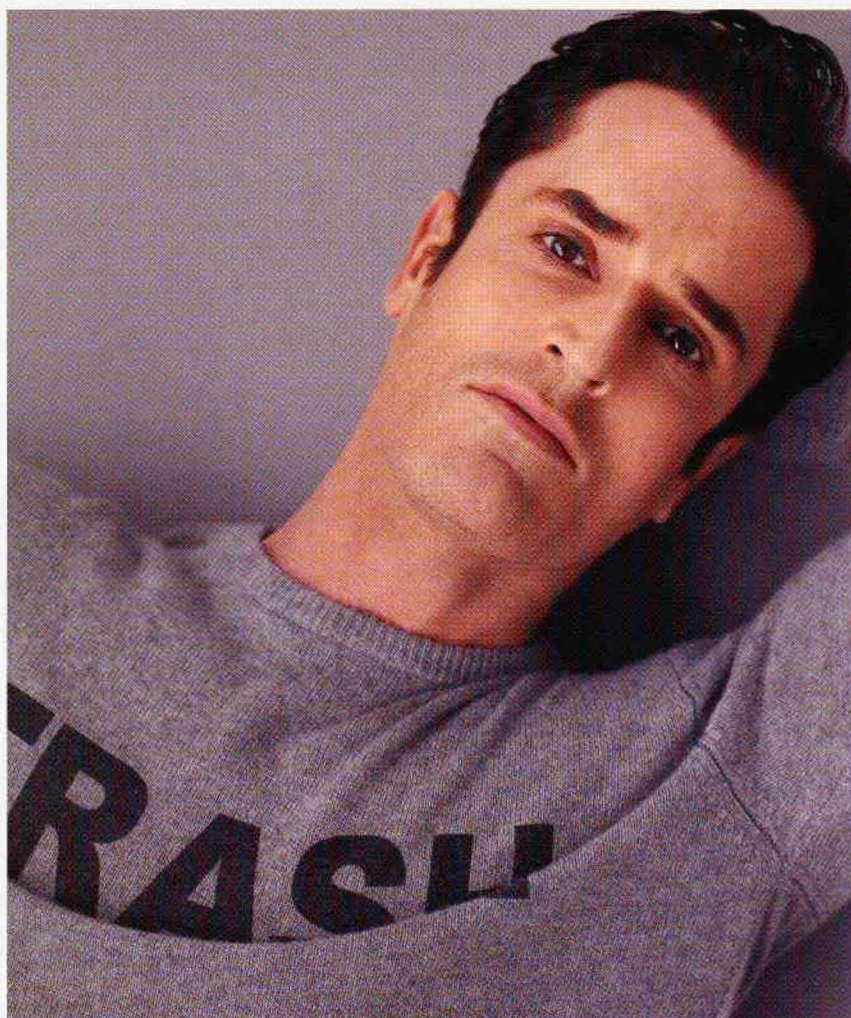
No. I have a very old-fashioned way of thinking about the business and my career. I thought when I started out that your life was kind of it. All the actors I saw and loved from the '50s and the '60s were people who stretched their lives out like a bodybuilder stretches muscles out.

Richard Burton?

Oh, yeah. The hell-raisers; not my favorite one. But Marlon Brando, Vivien Leigh. You saw the madness of Vivien Leigh in every frame of her films. Montgomery Clift. Not wearing your heart on your sleeve—it was all part of one thing, your life and your work. It's part of your expression. It's a different business now. Now, the relationship between actor and audience has changed substantially. When you think of *On the Waterfront* and imagine working America going to the cinema on the weekend and seeing this god. This god but almost, almost like them and talking about their problems. When he said, "I coulda been a contender," you can imagine what the atmosphere across the screen and into the audience was. It was a communion. You came out of that theater and back to whatever your life was. You could get a lot of things out of it. You could analyze your own life through a great piece of writing. You could comfort your own life. Montgomery Clift in *A Place in the Sun*. The relationship between spectator and star was much more profound then.

Clift and Elizabeth Taylor were the two most beautiful people in the world at that moment.

Yes. But now none of the characters in mainstream cinema are realistic. They're all about what we want peo-



"The Next Best Thing did help to kill John Schlesinger. If anyone has the guilt, it's me. But Madonna didn't kill him."

ple to be or what a Republican pretending to be a Democrat in Hollywood wants. Look at Tom Cruise in *Mission: Impossible*. It's not a character. What the audience wants is a kind of love-hate thing. They want the hair, the teeth, the ass, the body, the money, the girlfriend—they know they can't have it but they look, steamed-up against the window like Dickensian children, at what they can't have. And it's a very, very scary kind of fandom. I noticed it particular-

ly when we were premiering *Shrek 2* at Cannes. At Cannes, you drive in cars very slowly through the crowds. And it's really scary because the crowd is...there's love and hate in there. Really, there's a very conflicted emotional response. Sometimes it's, "Who is it? Who is it?" Someone will at Cannes get out a gun and shoot someone because the relationship between a spectator and what they're watching has really changed. I think it's because we're not putting out the

kind of work that's telling us about...we're not holding up a mirror in show business to the real world.

The question was, Could you come out in Hollywood and play a heterosexual hero? And the answer was, Of course, as long as he was animated.

Right.

If people came to you today and said they wanted a Hollywood career—
I wouldn't come out then.

You wouldn't encourage them to come out?
No, definitely not. Have electroshock treatment. [Laughs] You'd do much better.

It always seems to us that the U.K. is so much better for gays, and then some artists say the U.S. is better—not for your career, but for life.

I don't know. I was thinking about this because I thought you might ask. I don't know what it's like in the workplace in general if you're gay. I think maybe soon we'll get to a point—maybe—where all the divisions between us that make us all different types of human beings, maybe we'll grow out of that. We're so insecure as human beings, is how it feels to me.

I'm too insecure to do drag. I wouldn't even do it for Halloween. I want people to know I'm gay, but I don't want them to *think* I'm gay. It's all my fault, I'm sure. You've done drag on-stage in *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* [the Tennessee Williams play in which he assayed a female role], and of course you have a very funny drag scene in *Stage Beauty*.

Well, I wouldn't dress up for Halloween. I wouldn't go to a club dressed in drag. For work, yeah, I like the idea. But having said that, from the age of 1 to 10 I was a seasoned cross-dresser. I used to be taken out on these very macho things like hunting, and I would just be dreaming of being home and trying on my mother's nightdress.

It makes it very hard to tell which British men are gay. And of course it doesn't make it any easier to tell when someone like Robbie Williams is witty and clever and records a love duet with you. He just doesn't care what people might think.
He doesn't care. ►

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Rupert and... (from left): Julia (*My Best Friend's Wedding*), Madonna (*The Next Best Thing*), Colin (*Another Country*)



That had to be fun [recording the duet "They Can't Take That Away From Me" for Williams's 2001 big band album *Swing When You're Winning*].

It was really fun and very memorable, because I recorded that on September 12 here in New York.

Really?

When I think of September the 11th, I was watching the television between takes and singing this extraordinary song. It was such a weird juxtaposition. We did it for two days, and the second day all those rains came. It was a very extraordinary time. Funny enough, I felt...were you here?

Yes.

I thought afterwards, when you were in the city, you knew if you asked anyone for anything, they would help you. They'd do it. You could feel the spirits of the dead hovering around. It lasted until the rain came. That rain came, and then the whole thing of what they were doing down there in the rain...you could feel that energy went down and it turned into this panic and then victimization and then anger. But for the first few days I thought, *My God, this could herald the biggest change in the world. If everyone could see how all New Yorkers—the most hardened bitches on the planet—how they are now in the eye of this disaster. And that changed.*

You've reunited with Marek Kaniwvka, the director of your breakthrough film, *Another Country*. Another director you worked with

who hasn't worked for many years, for 18 or 20 years, is Russian director Sergei Bondarchuk. He's dead, so he's not going to work again.

You did make...And Quiet Flows the Don with him, right? [It's based on the novel by Nobel Prize-winning author Mikhail Sholokhov.]

That was his last thing. I killed him. I've killed quite a few.

We haven't seen it yet.

The film is lost.

What happened?

It was financed by...a builder in Naples. They didn't really care about it. The print was locked in a safe in Naples for a few years. Now apparently it's got back to Russia and [Bondarchuk's] daughter—who I saw when I was in Moscow the other day—is trying to get it together.

How did you kill him? The stress of the whole thing?

The stress of the whole thing. Also, he didn't realize I was gay at first. And the character I play is one of the most popular characters in Russia. He realized I was gay when I brought this tiny little pixie queen to do my cooking, and this pixie collected Barbie dolls. The first time I asked Sergei Bondarchuk to dinner was when I had just moved into a new flat,

and the pixie queen was looking after things and making dinner. I come in the door with Sergei, and hanging from the chandelier is a Barbie doll. And I go into the bathroom, and sitting by the toilet paper is another one. Then I go into the sitting room, and lying on the couch—everywhere—are Barbie dolls, and they're positioned and combing each other's hair. I'm picking them up and hiding them behind things as Sergei comes in, and I run into the

kitchen and say, "What the hell are you doing with these Barbie dolls?" And he says, "Oh, relax! Just tell him they're mine."

How did he die? Heart attack?

Everyone died in our movie. We had four deaths, four weddings, and three babies. The first person who died was one of the Italian grips who had a heart attack outside the hotel. The second person who died was the guy organizing the wind machine, which was a propeller from an old Russian plane. He was decapitated

by it. His head flew over the entire set and landed a little way from where we were standing.

[Trying not to laugh and failing] Oh...
And then the cherry picker—

Did you stop for the day?

[Pauses to think] No, we didn't.

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Does Rupert Everett's presence in a film make you more likely to go see it?

Sign on to The Advocate's Web site before November 9 to cast your vote and leave your comments. Results will appear in the December 7 issue.

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You had to keep moving.

The guy driving the cherry picker ran over a couple with their child and killed them. I know it's funny, but life is very cheap there.

Sergei's death obviously brings up *The Next Best Thing*. There were stories in the London tabloids saying Madonna caused director John Schlesinger's stroke, and one even said she killed him. [It's all based on letters Schlesinger donated to the British Film Institute, some of which detailed his complaints about the film and her behavior.] [Shocked] No.

You didn't know this? They've pulled out details from the upcoming biography by William Mann [*Edge of Midnight: The Life of John Schlesinger*].

No! No, I think *The Next Best Thing* did help to kill John Schlesinger. In that sense, if anyone has the guilt, it's me. Because, um...John really shouldn't have been working. I wanted to make a film that had the same kind of tonal quality as *Shampoo* and was more a slice of life and not about a miniseries, which our film ended up being. Its tone was just too general, and he was too old to understand about specific tone, I think. But Madonna didn't kill him.

Some of your projects people always wonder about. The secret agent who is bisexual. [A project called *P.S. I Love You*.] It seemed like you'd be able to make it happen. Was *The Next Best Thing* what you rolled the dice on in Hollywood?

No, I think that was probably my fault too. I don't think I've ever been well organized enough. Hollywood responds very well to things if you're right in there and right on the case. I can't blame...if I'd been on the case better, if my writing partner had been on the case better, we'd have got stuff done. But we weren't. And then *The Next Best Thing* happened.

Same thing with *Martha and Arthur*? [His proposed pairing with Julia Roberts about a famous Hollywood couple, one gay and one straight, who are filming a costume epic about Marie Antoinette as their public lives unravel.] *Martha and Arthur*, Julia did not like how the script came out. And she's probably right. The first half of the script was good, and the second half didn't quite work.

I'm sure you're always writing. Do you keep a diary or journal?

Uh-huh.

That'll make a good book someday.

I want to write my biography, actually.

You didn't want to get too specific in an interview, which I understand. But if you wanted to do it right for a memoir, I assume, you'd have to talk about who was homophobic and who was supportive during your experiences in Hollywood.

I think it's a bore when you're a very lucky performer, in one sense, to complain too much about where in your terms things have not measured up to what you think you deserve. In one sense, I feel very much like my career has been totally fucking blessed. Because I have fairly seamlessly—fairly seamlessly, not altogether, not all the time—kept going and lived and really lived and been to all sorts of different places. That is all good. That is really the best thing. The rest is fine print.

One good thing about *The Next Best Thing* was that your dog, who has since passed away, had a starring role. I know you can't replace him, but have you found someone else, another dog?

No, I want a human being next.

Seems reasonable.

But I can't hold one down.

For long.

No, not that, but I would like to have a human being.

So you're not in a relationship? That's depressing. I don't mind if you don't have a really big Hollywood career because you came out. But you should at least have a boyfriend.

I never stay long enough in one place to have one. It's very difficult to have a boyfriend when you don't live anywhere. Something happened. I stopped living anywhere, and now I can't start living somewhere. I don't know. Once it happened and once you get into that rhythm of moving all the time, then you're moving all the time, and it's difficult to break it. And I want to break it, because I'd definitely like to be in a relationship. ■

Giltz is a regular contributor to several periodicals, including the New York Post.