

From the first sentence, your memoir *Walking With Ghosts* cries out to be read aloud. Was it always your intention to perform it on stage?

No, I hadn't thought of it. I had finished it and was moving on to something else and the producer called me up from Dublin. Myself and the director looked at it and thought if we shaved off 95 per cent we might actually have something. We reduced it to what the demands of a play are. It should have drama. It should be emotional. It should be funny. It should be moving and it should provoke the audience into some kind of examination of their own selves. My journey might have been a bit different from yours but essentially the same big themes affect us all - loss and death and joy and life and sex and love and birth.

SIXTY SECONDS

THE ACTOR, 72, ON THE NIGHT SOMEONE TRIED TO BOTTLE LEONARDO DICAPRIO - AND CARRYING MORE LUGGAGE THAN JOAN COLLINS

INTERVIEW BY PAUL SIMPER

With **Gabriel Byrne**



Target: Leonardo DiCaprio

Do you read other actors' memoirs or would you rather swap stories when working together?

I'm not much interested in actors' memoirs. On

set they're always vying with each other to tell their stories. I worked once with Max von Sydow, Christopher Plummer and Susan Sarandon (on *Emotional Arithmetic*, 2007). We'd have dinner, the four of us. Max, in his very unshowy way,

would always be in competition with Christopher. Christopher would say, 'When I did *Lear*... when I did *Hamlet*... when I did this movie... oh, don't talk to me about *The Sound Of Music*! I hate *The Sound Of Music*!' And Max would say, 'Yes, well, when I was working with Bergman...' And I could see Chris going through his file going, 'How do I top that one?!'

Having worked and socialised with Richard Burton and Richard Harris, what were they like as company?

They were wonderful, witty, sometimes melancholy, sometimes angry, but always entertaining. I'd look at Harris especially and think, 'God, the energy it takes to be that person.' It just never stops. But they had to be listened to, whether it was on poetry or politics or movies. Both wanted to be writers. Both were men who became incredibly famous who had real alcohol problems. The idea of 'f*** tomorrow, let's drink today' was a culture I grew up with in Dublin and was the culture Harris and Burton grew up in. I'd say that both of them, despite the fame and the money and everything, were lonely men.

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You worked with Leonardo DiCaprio on *The Man In The Iron Mask*. Did he deal with fame differently to someone such as Richard Burton?

I admire the way that Leo has dealt with it because he experienced fame on a global scale. What that brings out in people can be truly unnerving and sometimes scary. Somebody smashed a bottle and tried to stick it in his face one night at a party. I recount in the book that Gianni Versace was assassinated and Leo was one of the people on that killer's list. I remember the day after, Leo was walking on to the set surrounded by five security men because they were afraid he was going to be next. How do you deal with that at 23?

You write about being alone in your Broadway dressing room with a few good-luck mementos. What will you take through this run?

I stopped doing that because I'd attach importance to an object and then have a terrible show. Or I'd attach no importance to something and it would go well. Now I listen to music and sometimes have imaginary conversations with people who are gone.

Is the sense of belonging you feel from being with other actors different when you're doing a one-man show?

I see the play first of all as a two-



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hander. The audience is the other actor. And by me being honest and truthful talking about my own journey, the audience gives you back a huge gift - the gift of listening. That's enormous.

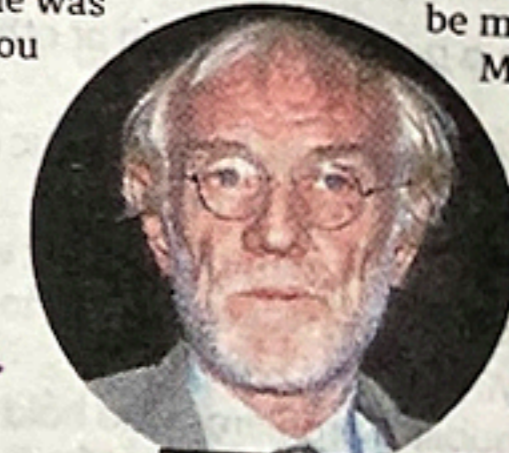
Actors often talk about leaving friendships behind after jobs. Who has remained a close friend? Richard E Grant has spoken of your kindness.

Richard is a friend. Elizabeth McGovern is a friend. But even when we were working together, she and I talked about this. No matter how well you get on with the cast, people go off and do their own thing. I keep in touch with Embeth Davidtz, from *Schindler's List*. There's not that many, really. My friends tend to be mostly writers. We live in Maine and most people don't know anything about what I do, which is fantastic. People fish here. They make tables and raise cattle. It's lovely to be around that where you can learn from them.

What are you doing with the rest of your day?

I'm getting ready to go to Ireland and have to do my least favourite thing: packing. I aim for one small suitcase but end up with more luggage than Joan Collins. Why am I going to need an overcoat, a suit and corduroy trousers in Wexford in August?

Byrne's *Walking With Ghosts* will be at Edinburgh from August 24 to 28 (eif.co.uk) and London's Apollo Theatre from September 6-17 (withghosts.co.uk)



Hellraiser: Richard Harris