

What a Knight

I confess to being star struck!

Of the many theatrical knights that this country has produced one of my favourites is Sir Ian McKellen.

Something that all these gentlemen have in common is the way that they use their own language, elevating it to the status that it so richly deserves. They are invariably compelling to listen to, whatever the piece they are performing. Sir Ian is no exception. It is as if everything he has taken a part in has added another layer of richness to his voice.

He was born in May 1939 and just before the outbreak of WW2, in September of that year, he and his family moved to Wigan in Lancashire where his education began. After moving again to Bolton, due to his father's promotion, he attended Bolton Boys School. All of his schools encouraged his interest in theatre, which first manifested itself after his parents took him to see a pantomime when he was three years old.

He was able to take part in a number of productions at school playing his first Shakespearean role, aged 13. He was cast as Malvolio in Twelfth Night. Later winning a scholarship to St. Catherine's College, Cambridge to study English, his acting opportunities continued and expanded. He met and acted with several others who made a name for themselves in the world of the arts, e.g. Sir Derek Jacobi, Sir Trevor Nunn and Sir David Frost.

On leaving Cambridge Sir Ian decided to be a professional actor and has, over the years, acted in theatres all over the UK and in the USA. He has also worked in film, on television and on radio, spanning a wide range of theatrical genres from, Shakespeare to pantomime. His film career alone is breath-taking to contemplate, playing real people and fantasy characters with equal ease.

He will always be remembered as the great wizard Gandalf in the film "Lord of the Rings", but one of my own particular favourites is as Norman in the title role of the play "The Dresser". His portrayal of the devoted Norman, who tolerates the monstrous "Sir" – ironically played by another theatrical knight (Sir Anthony Hopkins), was superb and very touching to watch. The play also gave the audience a glimpse of life backstage in a

provincial theatre in the 1940's - a far cry from the splendour of the scenes the company is striving to create.

Sir Ian is able, without exaggeration, to suggest grandeur or grovelling with equal conviction, playing characters of high status and none at all, making his audience laugh, cry and even wince at times.

You can see that I am a fan. For me he will always be – a knight to remember.

Jan Rees April 2021