

## MARTIN CLUNES

Pro-Chancellor,

Martin Clunes is an actor of national renown who has played in a very wide range of film, television and stage productions, and first achieved his huge following for his role as Gary in *Men Behaving Badly*. His many other successes include the lead role in *Doc Martin*, and in feature films such as *Shakespeare in Love*. He is a son of the classical actor Alec Clunes and a cousin of the late Jeremy Brett, television's Sherlock Holmes, so perhaps Martin's school should not have been taken by surprise when he told the careers adviser that he too wanted to be an actor. The headmaster was discouraging ('it's not going to happen: buckle down') but a teacher who evidently had some foresight saw his potential and put him in *Love's Labour's Lost* as Costard, the clown who is also very much at home with wit and wordplay. So his first performance was a comedy part in a classic play, and if comedy drama has been his forte ever since, he has by no means lost contact with the classics.

Martin went to the Arts Educational Schools in London, on the strength of an audition, at the age of 16, and then into repertory, now more often playing Shakespeare's courtiers than his fools. He made his name in the long-running TV situation comedy *Men Behaving Badly*, where he played Gary Strang, a character described (and I quote) as a 'lager-loving loafer'. The show, its stars and its writer have won many awards, and it was voted the best sitcom in the BBC's history at the Corporation's 60th anniversary celebrations in 1996. It was also controversial: for some it was 'synonymous with the mid '90s lad culture', though others saw it as a satire on political correctness. Martin simply attributes its success to the fact that it was very funny, and his enormous audiences clearly agree.

Currently he is best known as *Doc Martin*, a title which may bring him even more headlines after today. In this prime-time TV series he created and still plays Dr Martin Ellingham, a brilliant but socially uncomfortable surgeon who retrains as a GP and moves from London to a Cornish coastal village. *Doc Martin* has attracted a number of awards and nominations, beginning when the series was named Best TV Comedy Drama in the British Comedy Awards 2004, and continuing to 2006 when Martin was nominated as Best Actor, Male in the Royal Television Society's Awards.

But although Martin is best known as a comedy actor, his range is much wider than the popular image would suggest. Appearances in stage plays such as *The Admirable Crichton*, *Julius Caesar* and *Tartuffe*, and television or feature films such as *Ghormenghast*, *Shakespeare in Love*, and *Goodbye Mr Chips*, all illustrate his versatility. He has appeared in many television series, from *Inspector Morse* to *Jeeves and Wooster*. With his wife Philippa Braithwaite, the producer of *Doc Martin*, he owns Buffalo Pictures; their projects include a forthcoming documentary series on various species of dogs, from African hunting dogs to North American wolves and coyotes.

Martin's directing debut in 1987 brought him one of the most memorable and revealing experience of his career. He directed Alan Sillitoe's *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* in London; then, on behalf of the British Council, he took it to several countries including Nigeria. Here Martin and his small company found themselves leading theatre workshops for local actors and directors under a tree, with minimal props carried in a single trunk. This was for him an unforgettable insight into the role and power of theatre in Africa, where it often provides the only ways in which people can express their political and social concerns.

In this and many other ways Martin has sought to make a difference in the lives of those who suffer or are underprivileged. He is an ambassador for the Prince's Trust in Dorset, his adopted county, and tells how he is always moved to see young people with what he describes as 'terrible histories' achieving remarkable things and breaking out of the circle of their troubles. He is also a patron of Julia's House, the first children's hospice in Dorset, and of the Weldmar Hospicecare Trust. His love of animals takes him back to Africa with the Born Free Foundation.

Martin Clunes has been described as 'one of our busiest, best-loved actors, quietly but devastatingly cornering the market in impersonating tough guys with tender hearts'.

Pro-Chancellor, I have the honour to present Martin Clunes, and ask you to confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Arts.