

· PUZZLES, HEALTH, WELLBEING, HOROSCOPES & RECIPES

The Lady

8 JULY 2016

WEEKLY

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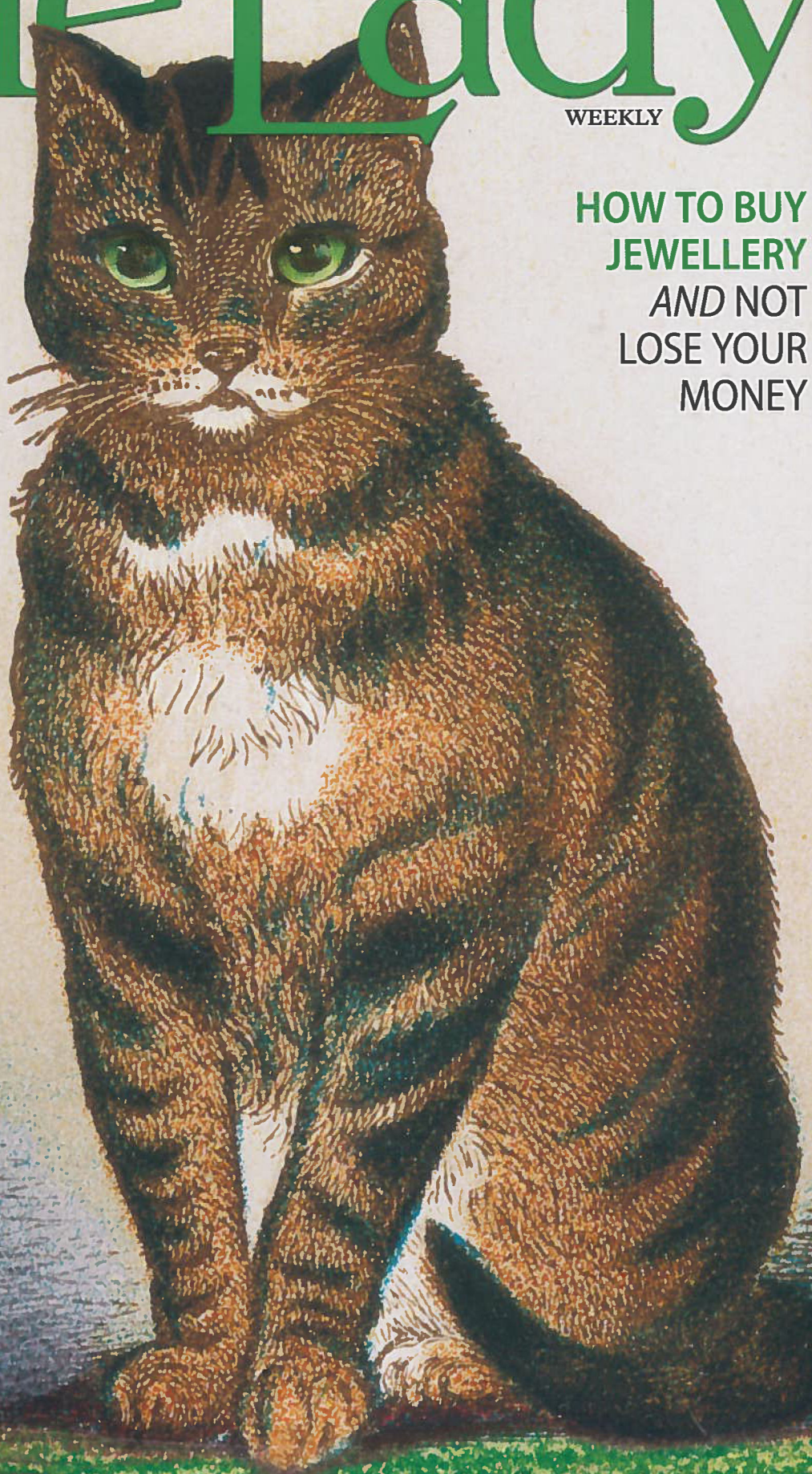
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Theatre

MAJESTIC STAGING OF KING LEAR

Timothy West impresses as the ageing doomed king in this superior production of the Shakespearian tragedy



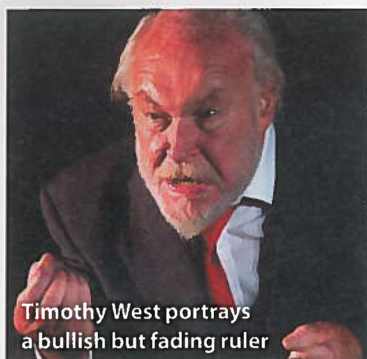
Ian Shuttleworth

KING LEAR



Just halfway through the year, I have already seen four productions (arriving two at a time, like clumped buses) of Shakespeare's *other* great tragedy, with at least one more – Glenda Jackson's return to the stage in the autumn – yet to come. Still, as if to demonstrate that you can never have enough of King Lear, the latest turns out to be the most impressive for some time.

Timothy West's is a Lear who is past his bullish physical best but refuses to accept it, still cavorting nightly with his knights as they wear the skins of their hunting kill. And his heart and mind are both quite undimmed by age. In his first scene, his daughter Cordelia's refusal to lard him with flattery meets with the immediate and fiery response of a man used to getting his own way. Yet even here he retains a germ of awareness: when he tells the king of France, 'we/Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see/That face of hers again', his voice catches just a little on the last



Timothy West portrays a bullish but fading ruler

words. Two or three times later on we see the same momentary pause for recollection and regret; this Lear grows mad not least because he has always known how foolish he has been.

Director Tom Morris, who picked up an OBE in the recent Birthday Honours List, assigns all the younger roles in this modern-dress (antlers aside) production to students from the associated Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. In a delightful blend of past and future, some of the students also get to play with some of Morris's dearest toys. When the theatre's extensive renovation began (warning: the main entrance is currently round the back, with a jerry-built theatre bar in the scenery workshop), a number of storm machines were found dating back to the 18th century. The storm scene here uses the original Thunder Run in the theatre's roofspace as well as a quartet of wind and rain machines operated onstage by students.

On a not-quite-Glenda level of cross-casting, Stephanie Cole makes a wonderful Fool, with a coxcomb attached to her knitted woolly hat. She and Lear clearly have a particular love of each other: during his madness the only word for her treatment of him is 'motherly'. Then his final near-recovery – always the most moving phase of the play – is simply masterly, injecting a wealth of distinct nuance into each repeated 'Howl' or 'Never' before suddenly dying as it seems in mid-sentence. And, of course, it all comes at a time when the 'division of the kingdom' has particular tragic significance for Britain.

♦ *Until 10 July at Bristol Old Vic, King Street, Bristol: 0117-987 7877, www.bristololdvic.org.uk*



CD OF THE WEEK

IN A SOUTH DOWNS WAY by Damian Montagu,

£12.65: www.amazon.co.uk

This unique and unusual album is a musical evocation of the South Downs in Sussex with original compositions by composer Damian Montagu interspersed with poetry written and read by actor Hugh Bonneville. The beautiful tracks for strings, piano and brass are performed by The Tippett Quartet, with the occasional birdsong to make the spirit soar. GS

BOOK AHEAD

OPEN-AIR CINEMA AT BLETCHLEY PARK

Watch Oscar-winning drama *The Imitation Game* in the place where the real-life code-breaking action happened. On 2 and 3 September at Bletchley Park, Milton Keynes: 01908-640404, www.bletchleypark.org.uk

LAPADA ART & ANTIQUES FAIR

More than 100 exhibitors showcase everything from furniture to ceramics. From 13-18 September at Berkeley Square, London, W1: 020-7823 3511, www.lapadalondon.com

OPUS ANGLICANUM

An exhibition showcasing the finest examples of medieval embroidery the country has to offer. From 1 October at The Victoria And Albert Museum, London SW7: 020-7942 2000, www.vam.ac.uk



Bletchley Park is showing films this summer