

BRITAIN'S TOP DOCTORS

The back man the luvvies can't live without



Sir Antony Sher first met Garry Trainer when he took the title role in the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1984 production of *Richard III*. It sounds like a tidy little irony – a humpbacked king and an osteopath – but it wasn't. In

fact, Sher knew exactly what he was doing.

"Richard III ends up crippling a lot of the actors who play him," he explains. "It's the third-biggest part in Shakespeare, he's an enormously energetic character, and however you play his disability, you're holding yourself in some kind of twisted position. I made the decision early on that I would take a preventative approach."

Trainer arrived in London from New Zealand in the late Seventies to study osteopathy and acupuncture. He hoped to work with sports teams, but found they were sceptical of what were then viewed as unconventional methods. Sher was more open-minded.

"It was the phone call that changed my life," says Trainer, who is tanned, tall and unmistakably Antipodean. "Normally you get one call and it's for one treatment. I got one

call that was, 'Please can you come in three nights a week?' for however many months the run was. My knowledge of Shakespeare was almost nil. I didn't know who Tony was. I didn't know who Richard III was."

But the day of each performance, Trainer would arrive and treat Sher, who went on to earn an Olivier Award for his performance. It didn't take long before other actors at the RSC, and then beyond, saw the advantages of having someone keep an eye on their moving parts.

"Suddenly, I was quite busy," grins Trainer.

"Didn't you do Ben Kingsley when he did a run of *Othello*?" asks Sher. "Sorry, Sir Ben Kingsley. You have to be careful about that..."

"I know. Someone once said I've treated more knights than sat at the Round Table..."

Since establishing his own practice, other patients have included Sir Paul McCartney and Sir Derek Jacobi, Gwyneth Paltrow and Emma Thompson. He has toured with George Michael and has just returned from doing a world tour with Depeche Mode.

"Every two weeks, they would fly me out for five days' intensive treatment. Depeche Mode like a good massage for relaxing,

but even more relaxing is acupuncture. They use it to calm down."

Trainer explains the different sounds patients' joints can make. "Pings" are the little noises that anyone can produce by stretching their bodies, but "thuds" are the satisfying, dull sounds of release, which show that synovial fluid is being sucked back into the joints. "When I'm working with a patient and I hear that noise, it's great," he says dreamily.

Sher explains how he has had niggling problems with his back for some years.

"I remember when I was doing *Macbeth* in Stratford. I rang Garry, because my back had gone during the big fight. And this man jumped in his car, drove to Stratford, treated me, and then drove back to London."

They both chuckle at the memory.

"I read once that if people describe their symptoms in flowery ways, there's a good chance there is a psychosomatic influence," says Trainer. "Actors describe things that way all the time. But I love working with them. They have this fantastic expression, 'The show must go on!' They always want to get back on stage," he smiles. "It makes me look very good." **BEN MACHHELL**