



THIS PAGE: NIGEL HAVERS AT THE
CHARIOTS OF FIRE RE-RELEASE IN 2012.
CREDIT: FEATUREFLASH PHOTO AGENCY/
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OVERLEAF: AS CAPTAIN NIGEL IN THE
LONDON PALLADIUM'S DICK WHITTINGTON

MAYFAIR of CEREEMONIES

As Nigel Havers prepares to step into the spotlight at the London Palladium for this season's festive panto, **Hannah Lemon** succumbs to his gentlemanly charm

I first met Nigel Havers at The Mayfair Awards 2016. Of course, I was well acquainted with his achievements before that point: BAFTA nominee for *Chariots of Fire*, a suave escort in *Coronation Street* and a *Downton Abbey* schmoozer. But there he was, flirting with Mayfair's elite, who reciprocated with hoots of laughter.

Yet, when I ring him up a few months later for this interview and bring up his reputation as an on-screen lothario, he seems oblivious. "I don't know whether I'm smooth and charming. I think people say I always play that type of character, but I've played my fair share of nasty people," he replies in his soft, cut-glass accent. "Wait, you're right, I am often cast as [a charmer], aren't I?" Then goes on to refer to himself as a "sort of younger version of Leslie Phillips – and he's still going!"

But I think he does it better than Phillips. The silver hair that strays across his forehead, the sharp suits and his posh tone have made many weak at the knees.

Earlier this year, Havers got a slot on *Piers Morgan's Life Stories* and through his candid account of love affairs and bouts of depression, viewers were enrapt.

"My wife said about a year ago that 'if Piers Morgan ever asks you to go on his show you must promise me you'll never do it'. So I didn't tell her I was doing it until the day before, and she was very cross with me, but said, 'okay, here's the deal: you do the show, and I get a puppy.'" Safe to say Mrs Havers (aka Georgiana Bronfman) received her puppy.

What was it like being grilled by the ex-editor of *News of the World*? "I can say this because my wife's not here, but I quite like him, you know, he's a mate," smiles Havers. "I have a sneaky admiration because he's so outspoken, isn't he? And people really hate him, don't they? And he doesn't give a s**t! He's a real character. You need outrageous characters like that, actually, to pop up on telly."

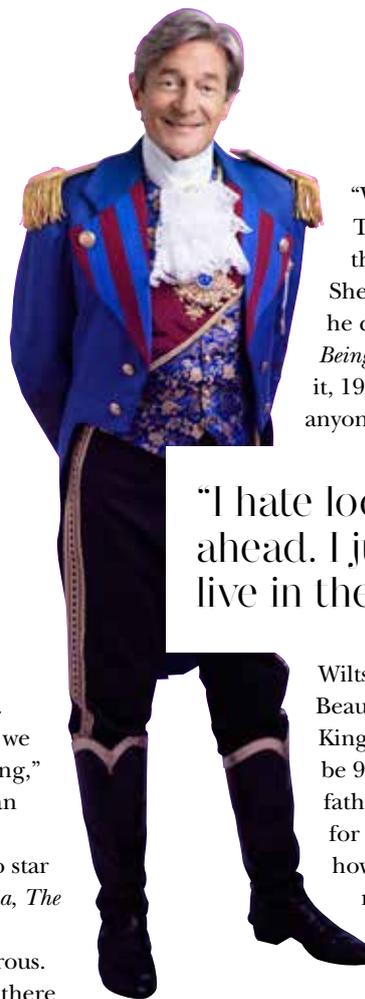
Haver's next appearance will be in the London Palladium's *Dick Whittington* for the Christmas panto season, for which he is playing Captain Nigel 12 times a week. "I think I've done [panto season] now for 14 years, can you believe it? But this one at the Palladium is the greatest. It is the most enjoyable. Normally I have to go and live somewhere like Birmingham or Manchester, but to be home is terrific. And also the theatre is such a wonderful one." ►

► Acting wasn't the most obvious choice for Havers. Born in Edmonton, north London, in 1951, he was the second son of Baron Havers, attorney general for England and Wales; as well as nephew of Baroness Butler-Sloss, the first female Lord Justice of Appeal; and grandson to high court judge Sir Cecil Havers. The long list of legal heads seems intimidating but, naturally, Havers is unfazed. "There's enough to worry about without worrying about that, certainly."

And so he went on to work his way up through theatre, television and radio, eventually landing his breakthrough role as Lord Andrew Lindsay in *Chariots of Fire*. The success brought him worldwide recognition. "We all went to America for the Oscars, and we were told we were never going to win anything," Havers recalls. "Then it won four Oscars! Can you imagine being in the audience? We just couldn't believe it." With that, he went on to star in blockbuster films such as *A Passage to India*, *The Whistle Blower* and *Empire of the Sun*.

His personal life has been equally adventurous. Three marriages later, he has since admitted there were numerous flirtations and transgressions when he was younger. Looking back at his career – and personal life – has he learnt from his mistakes? "I haven't really learnt anything. I just go from one crisis to the next. I don't mind any more. It's just a joy to be alive, really."

At 66, he certainly seems young at heart, listing the gym, running, tennis and golf as activities for 'downtime'. On the topic of age, I ask if he thinks older men have it easier than older women in the acting industry. "It's a shame, but it's true," replies Havers.



"I hate looking ahead. I just want to live in the moment"

"Women do struggle even as early as their 40s. This country is much better than America, though. Look at Judi Dench – I mean, God! She just never stops!" He recounts a time when he co-starred alongside her in *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the National Theatre. "When was it, 1982? And she's the naughtiest girl on stage of anyone I've ever come across."

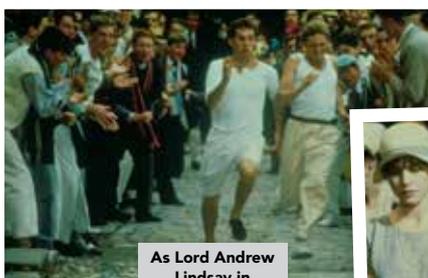
As conversation turns to Christmas, Havers says he will be spending his day off in his South Kensington home rather than his country retreat in

Wiltshire. "We'll go for lunch at the The Beaumont hotel. We're usually joined by Jeremy King and Chris Corbin. And my mother, who will be 90 next year, is coming to stay, as is my father-in-law. So, we're going to have the oldies for lunch on Christmas Day." Christmas Eve, however, is reserved for the younger family members: his daughter Kate (from his first marriage) and her two children will be coming to watch *Dick Whittington*.

When the New Year's celebrations are over, Havers will be prepping for the three-man comedy *Art*, which will tour the UK from February. As I probe what else Havers has lined up, he shrugs me off with: "I hate looking ahead. I just want to live in the moment." We could all do with taking a page out of his script. ■

From £22.50, 9 December – 14 January 2018,
Dick Whittington at the London Palladium, W1F,
dickwhittingtonpalladium.com

Acting up in the '80s



As Lord Andrew Lindsay in *Chariots of Fire* with Ben Cross



As Ronny in *A Passage to India* with Judy Davis



As Bob Jones in *The Whistle Blower* with Michael Caine



As Dr Rawlins in *Empire of the Sun*

1981

1984

1986

1987