



■ Scottish Youth Theatre patron Brian Cox (left) with BP scholarship winner Paul Nolan: a chance for the youngsters to find out about themselves as well as others.

Brian Cox's Scottish reconnection

"HAVE a great time in Sin City over the next four weeks," the actor Brian Cox told an audience of more than 100 members of the Scottish Youth Theatre on Friday afternoon before they hid themselves off to rehearsals and workshops for the SYT's summer festival productions of *Tam o' Shanter* and *Nicholas Nickleby*.

As Cox made his pronouncement, a rumbling sound effect from the Glasgow Underground beneath the Old Athenaeum, the SYT's permanent home, added a portentous weight to his words. Was the earth moving? The newly appointed patron of the SYT had just finished telling the assembled company that, as a Dundonian, he had long felt Glasgow to be an alien place. "It was Sodom and Gomorrah; it was a den of iniquity when I was growing up."

But as a boy he would have been prepared to make the momentous journey to such an evil place for the opportunity to work with an organisation such as the SYT, he said. "Nothing like this existed when I was growing up and wanting to become an actor — how I wish it had."

Make the most of your opportunities with the SYT, Cox urged his young audience, who had earlier been chanting "Brian, Brian, Brian" as if they were on the terraces at Ibrox. This was the youngsters' chance to find out about themselves as well as others. "I want them to grab it with both hands," he said.

He had been very flattered, he said, to be asked to become the SYT's patron because he has worked only occasionally in Scotland and not at all in recent

years. Later Cox, who was in town to present the BP-SYT £1000 scholarship to 21-year-old Glaswegian drama student Paul Nolan, said he felt the time had come to reconnect himself with Scotland.

The greater part of 45-year-old Cox's career has been spent in England, where he has won golden opinions as both an actor and director. He has been garlanded with awards, and early this year published his first book, the splendid *Salem To Moscow: An Actor's Odyssey*, about his experiences directing Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* with an all-Russian cast. All of which, according to his big sister Betty, who attended Friday's awards ceremony with him and his teenage daughter Margaret, means he has done "no' bad" for a wee boy from Dundee.

Most recently he was seen in Scotland with the Royal National Theatre as a truly great King Lear. Now Cox is boxing clever and planning a total change of direction. "I'm trying to cut back on the acting; I felt I had to get away from it after *Lear*," he said. Although he is still doing the odd telly — "it pays well" — and had just come back from Amsterdam where he was filming an episode of *Van Der Valk*.

The director had said to him, "Can we do something about the accent, lovey?" To which Cox replied: "What accent?" Can you imagine, he asks, any director saying that to Sean Connery? There he was, fresh from playing *Lear* all over the world with a broad Scots accent, and now he



was being told he was "too Scottish".

"That has been the trouble all along. I have never been able to throw off my roots in England. I have always felt a complete stranger there. They — the theatrical establishment — have simply tolerated me in the south."

Now he wants to direct — particularly movies. He hopes to direct a film of Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession* with Anjelica Huston as Mrs Warren. He has found a scriptwriter, the novelist Fay Weldon, and is currently deep in discussion with the money men. He also has a producer, Ann Skinner, who did the movie adaptation of Rebecca West's *The Return Of The Soldier* with Glenda Jackson and Julie Christie.

"I am going into films because I have got to get away from the English theatre. I am very impatient with it after my experiences with the National. The time has come for theatre in England to grow up. And something has also got to be done about the bloody critics — they are so awful."

Theatre

JACKIE McGLONE

meets two award-winning actors — a star of today and a prospect for the future.

The other day he had been to Highbury to see Footsbar's brilliant production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a tent (in Glasgow until tomorrow evening as part of the Glasgow Fair — and not to be missed). The critics had slammed it in London, he said. "It was certainly crude, not wonderfully spoken — all they have to do is trust the language; nothing I couldn't have sorted out by spending a morning with them. But it was also full of incredible energy and raw enthusiasm and real physicality."

He had then gone to see his old *King Lear* and *Richard III* company, led by Sir Ian McKellen, in Eduardo de Filippo's *Napoli Milionaria* at the National. "It was awful, really terrible. The critics raved. It really does seem that the meek shall inherit the earth in England," he said.

Later in the year Cox will appear in *The Philanderer* at Hampstead Theatre and is much intrigued by a Brian Eastman project called *Big Battalions*. "It is about religion — a subject which fascinates me," he said.

Cox was born and brought up in a working-class Catholic family.

Early this year he split up from his companion Irina Brook, the actress daughter of the director Peter Brook. He is divorced from his first wife, Caroline, the mother of his 21-year-old actor son Alan and daughter Margaret, and now lives alone and is likely to do so for a very long time, he said.

Cox has many career ambitions, however. The most burning being to play Antony in *Antony And Cleopatra* and to direct *The Cherry Orchard* or *John Bull's Other Island*. He would do anything, he said, with his famous crooked grin, to return to those roles with the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford, where he was happier than he has ever been before or since when he played an acclaimed season topped by his stunning *Titus Andronicus*. But they haven't asked him. Perhaps they ought to, before he gets too old for the one other Shakespearean role that also might have been written for him — *Coriolanus*.

A man with little time on his hands, Cox dispatches daughter Margaret and sister Betty to the shops to buy him a suit — "size 36 to 38 waist, 31 inside leg," he calls after them as they head for Princes Square. Cox affectionately says his farewell to Paul Nolan, who looks utterly dazed as he murmurs: "All this and Brian Cox too."

Nolan, a former member of SYT and a first year diploma student at the RSAMD, started acting when he was 15. He has worked with the SYT's Xsyt

Company and toured with the to New York and to the Royal National Theatre in London, a was in *Annexe Theatre Company's Boothies And Vodka A Daisies* as well as appearing *Taggart* and with Tom Conti the film *Heavenly Pursuits*.

The son of a painter and decorator in the South Side, Nol has been working nights in a pub to pay his way through the academy. His £1000 scholarship cheque will just about keep his head above water, he said. It already earmarked to pay his rent and buy some food. Many of his fellow students are in real debt either to their parents or to bank managers, he said, because this is the first year students have not been able to claim housing benefit and some are even exempt from being awarded grants.

He has no grant because he has worked for two years in a supermarket, stacking shelves, and a cabaret double act rounds pubs to raise the money to finance his studies. "I don't want to get too heavy about it, I every time you turn around the Government is tightening the screw on every aspect of funding. Now they are even making it difficult for us to study. This award is an absolute godsend for me."

■ *The SYT's production of 'Life And Adventures Of Nicholas Nickleby' is at the Old Athenaeum Theatre, Buchanan Street, Glasgow from August 4 to 10. One performance of 'Tam o' Shanter' will be given at the People's Palace at noon on July 27.*