

Bewitched

Nicholas Hytner directs a powerful *Crucible*.

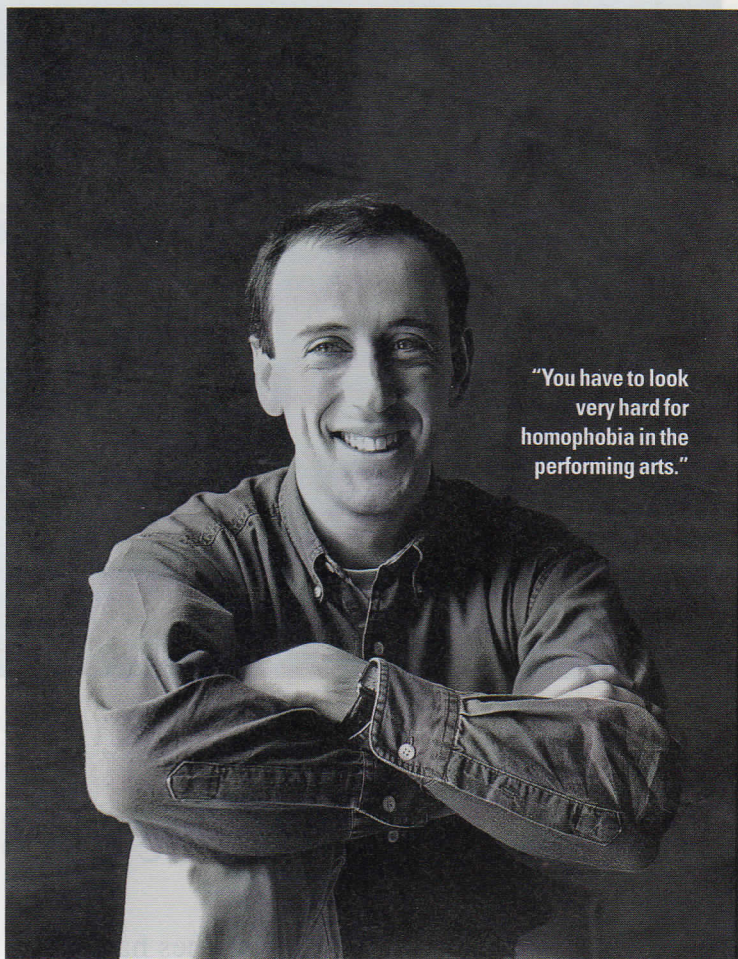
THIS STORY, ALAS, will always be topical," says director Nicholas Hytner, talking about his blockbuster screen version of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* (opening in November from 20th Century Fox). "Communities always need to demonize those they despise and brand them with the mark of Satan."

Hytner's movie, a handsome and exciting production headlined by Daniel Day-Lewis and Winona Ryder, is a powerful tale of mass hysteria and the paranoid witch-hunts conducted in its wake in 17th-century Salem, Massachusetts. Having come across the script in a stack that arrived at his door following the success of his first movie, *The Madness of King George*, Hytner says he responded as he would to great tragedy: "It's unbelievably compelling and entertaining because your heart beats faster, you feel pity and terror, and you are seized by suspense." He adds, "I had a better time than at *Mission: Impossible*—that's why I decided to do it."

Surprisingly, the 40-year-old British director, who's both gay and Jewish—two groups only too familiar with Salem-style witch-hunts—claims no personal connection to *The Crucible's* themes. "In my entire life I have never experienced anti-Semitism and I have never felt persecuted because I'm gay," says Hytner. "You have to look very hard for homophobia in the performing arts; we just don't have the problems that gay people in the community at large have." As for imposing his own experience on Miller's material, "It would be a grotesque impertinence to enter a story only on behalf of yourself," he says.

Director of the worldwide stage smash *Miss Saigon* and 1994's acclaimed Lincoln Center revival of *Carousel*, Hytner will be returning to the stage in January to direct a new play at London's National Theatre, but he's also planning his next film, based on Stephen McCauley's *The Object of My Affection*, about the friendship between a gay man and a straight woman, which Hytner calls "as personal a piece of work as I've ever done." After that may come a contemporary version of *The Dybbuk*, inspired by the traditional Jewish folk tale. Perhaps the reluctant auteur has some need to explore his own roots after all.—GERARD RAYMOND

Gerard Raymond has also contributed to Harper's Bazaar and The Village Voice.



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The Ballad of Gus and Allen

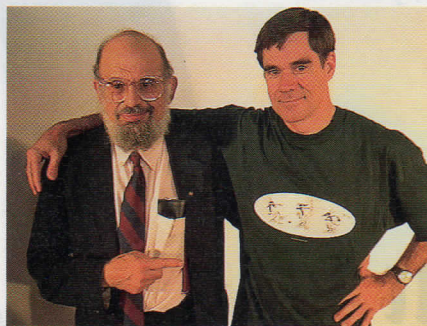
Van Sant visits Ginsberg to shoot a video.

ALLEN GINSBERG BREATHED NEW LIFE into an old musical form, the political protest song, when his prescient "Ballad of the Skeletons" (Mouth Almighty) came out this fall, just in time for the first round of election-year debates. The prolific poet wrote and recorded the number in collaboration with Paul McCartney and Philip Glass, with Lenny Kaye as producer.

On one autumn day in New York, filmmaker Gus Van Sant joined the effort, shooting the accompanying video at Ginsberg's spacious new flat on 13th Street: Ginsberg had just moved, on doctor's orders, to this elevator-equipped Greenwich Village apartment from the walk-up he'd inhabited for years.

"I'm 70 years old," said the Beat elder statesman, wearing a red-white-and-blue Uncle Sam hat as crew members took over his home. "My mind's not feeble, but my body is."

In between takes during the all-day shoot, Van Sant (who's still trying to get his long-delayed Harvey Milk biopic, *The Mayor of Castro Street*, into production) told Ginsberg what a great source of great inspiration he is for the busy filmmaker. "Whenever I think I'm taking on too much work, I think of you, Allen, and all of the work you do at your age, and that keeps me going."—RAY ROGERS



NEIL LIBBERT (HYTNER), S. LOVEKIN (VAN SANT)