

most important task, he says, is telling the actors and camera operators when and where a blast will occur or a fire will start; which props will fall; and so on. "If they're not comfortable enough to do their job, then my work is going to be wasted," he says.

Fisher's specialty has allowed him to indulge his fondness for something besides the benign use of tools of mass destruction: travel. He's worked in some far-flung locations, including Hawaii, Hudson Bay, Israel, and Nice. He's not the only Fisher who gets a charge out of his line of work—his 23-year-old son, Scott, works with him, and his wife, Paula, usually goes on location as well.

Contributing the element that gives certain movies universal appeal offers its own special satisfactions. "When a picture gets sent abroad, especially to less-developed countries, the dialogue isn't necessarily going to mean much to them," Fisher says. "But somebody's head getting blown off—that's something everyone can understand."

DIANA SHAW



DIRECTOR
SIMON CALLOW



LEE CRUMOUTLINE

IT IS A HOT AUGUST day, the lights and cameras are ready, and Simon Callow strips to his underwear and steps into a river some 30 miles outside of Austin, Texas. The sight of the curly-haired, somewhat stocky figure wading into the water gives the film crew a sense of déjà vu. "It's the Reverend Beebe!" someone cries, recalling Callow's performance as a nature-loving cleric in *A Room With a View*. The cast and crew are on location for another Merchant Ivory production, *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*, but this time Callow is the director, and he's clambered into the river to get a better view of the shot.

The 42-year-old Englishman established his reputation on the London stage playing Mozart in Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* in 1979. He has since written three books, including a biography of Charles Laughton, and collaborated on a fourth;

directed plays and operas on both sides of the Atlantic, including *Shirley Valentine* on Broadway; and translated works by Jean Cocteau and Milan Kundera. "This is a visionary man," declares producer Ismail Merchant. Callow has played small roles in three Merchant Ivory productions (the other two are *Maurice* and *Mr. & Mrs. Bridge*), and Merchant says he had no qualms about giving him his first feature-film directing job: "You just have to take a plunge if you believe in somebody."

The Ballad of the Sad Cafe was no small challenge. Based on Carson McCullers's well-known novella, it stars Vanessa Redgrave, Rod Steiger, and Keith Carradine. "I felt like a fraud at the beginning," Callow admits with a braying laugh. "I was surrounded by people who knew infinitely more about every aspect of the business than I did." His task, he says, was "to accommodate and weave" the highly creative talents involved "into one texture as discreetly and as invisibly as possible."

Callow recently played the pompous director who gave Meryl Streep obscure advice in Mike Nichols's *Postcards From the Edge*, but in his real-life role as director, he is anything but pretentious. He takes the time to compliment the cook on the food and to listen to the costume designer register, once again, her disapproval of the upcoming shot featuring a Klan meeting: "I know how you feel," he says gently, "but how can we avoid depicting evil when it is part of the story?" Then he rushes off to check whether the cross will burn properly.

How much could Callow rely on his experience as a theater director? "It's quite unlike the theater," he says. "Think of it in terms of fighting a war. There is no calm, no reflection, no period of exploration or experimentation. You must have a damn good idea of what you are going to do, and then you have to be very open to whatever the actors or the other collaborators might bring to it. But you have to make all these decisions very, very fast."

In his first book, *Being an Actor* (1984), Callow concluded with an exhortation to actors not to lose their initiative and sense of responsibility and not to submit to the hegemony of directors. He has also published *Shooting the Actor*, a diary he kept during the making of Dusan Makavejev's *Manifesto*. Callow acknowledges that he wouldn't have written the latter book if he had directed a film before: "I have deep sympathy with the director now." But he still believes in the creed laid out in *Being an Actor*: "I always tell actors who work for me to shout at me if I offend against any of those tenets."

Carradine says that Callow added "immeasurably" to his performance in *Sad Cafe*. "Simon is a brilliant actor's director," he says. "He knows how to help the actor better than just about anyone I have worked with."

Callow is currently writing a biography of Orson Welles and directing the London premiere of *Carmen Jones*, after which he hopes to direct another film. He had his first inkling of this latest calling seven years ago, while playing a minor role in Milos Forman's film of *Amadeus*: "After about ten minutes of work, I realized there was only one job worth doing there, and that was Forman's."

GERARD RAYMOND