



Love at Dachau: *Bent*'s Max (Owen) and Horst (Bluteau).

Bent, opening November 26, Jagger got something his sporadic acting career could well use—a project brimming with intelligence, prestige, and originality. Based on the play by Martin Sherman (see story below), *Bent* covers, in hellish detail, the treatment of gay men at the hands of the Nazi regime. Using stark, elemental dialogue and a chillingly surreal production design, *Bent* offers an appro-

priately otherworldly look at the world of late-'30s Berlin. Though overseen by an untested movie director—Sean Mathias, highly regarded for his directing work with Britain's National Theatre—the movie takes the sparest of plays and transforms it into a visual feast.

In December of 1979, after an acclaimed run in London's West End, the Broadway production of *Bent* raised eyebrows with its Hollywood lead, Richard Gere, who played the lead role of Max, a selfish gay lothario who through tragedy and love learns self-sacrifice; Clive Owen plays Max in the movie. The other main role—played by David Duke on Broadway and Lothaire Bluteau in the film—is Horst, who helps Max find his conscience amid the dehumanization of Dachau. Jagger has a small but pivotal part as Greta, the sexually ambiguous owner of the gay club where Max's boyfriend Rudy (Brian Webber) works. He appears at the movie's start, swinging from a trapeze while singing a leeringly amorous, Dietrich-style ode to "a boy with two ocean-blue eyes."

It's a far cry from the three-chord rockers Jagger is used to belting out with the Stones. "I never thought of myself as doing [material] like (continued on page 153)

Sherman's March

One man's battle to bring *Bent* to Broadway forged the way for other gay playwrights.



NO WONDER Martin Sherman (left) says he was "extraordinarily moved" during his recent Tokyo visit. A group of Japan's leading young gay writers and activists came running up to the

playwright, gushing, "You're our teacher!" and praising his play *Bent* as a defining moment of their lives. But back in his native America, Sherman remains largely unknown, despite his groundbreaking 1979 Broadway smash.

Sherman was among the first of a new breed of writer, acknowledges playwright and activist Larry Kramer (*The Normal Heart*): "Martin has consistently written about his sexuality and has managed to make a living out of it." Now, nearly two decades later, Sherman may at last get the recognition he deserves. Not only has *Bent* finally made the transition to a feature film (for which Sherman wrote the screenplay), but *Alive and Kicking*, the romantic movie he wrote about a gay, HIV-positive dancer, seduced art-house audiences this summer, and his 1989 London hit, *A Madhouse in Goa*, will receive

its overdue American premiere October 25 at New York's Second Stage Theatre.

Sherman's long absence from the U.S. theater scene has corresponded with his long absence from the country—he moved to London 17 years ago, shortly after *Bent* opened in New York. "It wasn't prompted by anything at all negative about America, but by positive feelings about England," insists the slightly built, salt-and-pepper-haired writer, who was born in New Jersey to Russian parents. "I was determined not to move until I had a success in America, so I would know I wasn't running away."

Sherman's work isn't easy to categorize. Just try to find a link among *Messiah*, the tale of a 17th-century Polish woman who follows a rabbi to the ends of the earth, and his most recent play, *Some Sunny Day*, which embraces gay romance, wartime intrigue, and paranormal phenomena. Perhaps the common thread is that Sherman writes very funny plays about life-and-death issues.

Take, for instance, *A Madhouse in Goa*, a pair of linked comedies that revolve around some eccentric American travelers in the Greek islands. Its humor notwithstanding, it reflects what Sherman

describes as the enormous pessimism and despair that for him marked 1987, the year he wrote it. "AIDS was raging, and the full awareness of what was happening was upon us; it was also the year after Chernobyl, and the world in general seemed to be going down the tubes," he recalls. The secret to his particular blend of humor and melancholy: a Yiddish sensibility. "I think the only things that are funny are difficult things," Sherman says. "Happiness is great, but it doesn't have any jokes in it." —GERARD RAYMOND

Off the Straight and Narrow: Richard Gere played Max in 1979's *Bent*.

