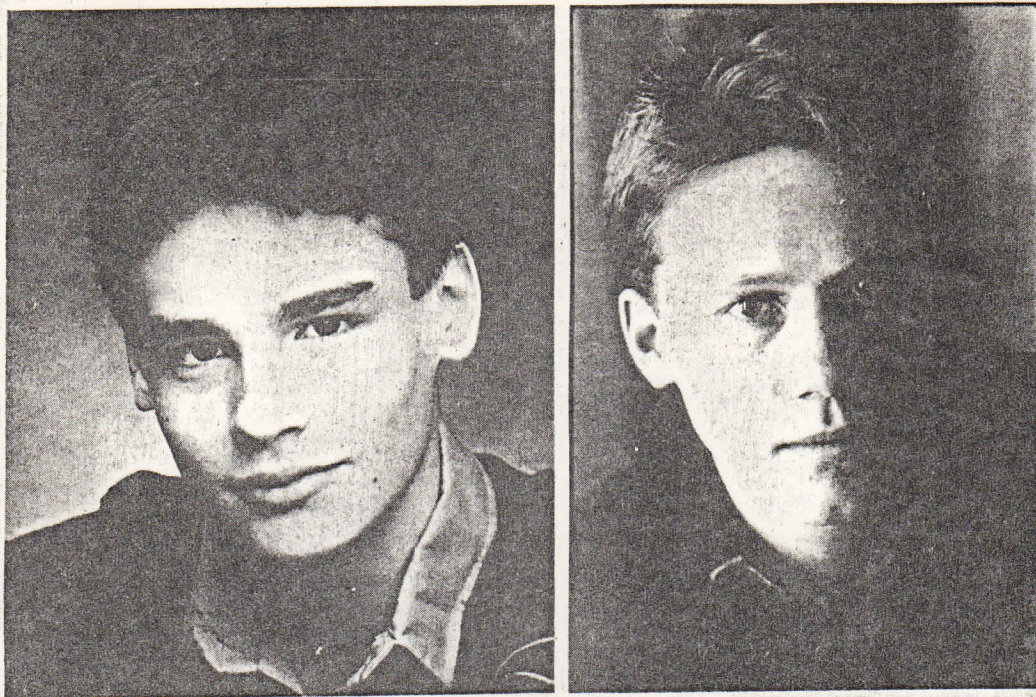


# NEW FACES

by Gerard Raymond



Robert Sean Leonard and Michael Dolan

## Breaking In With *Breaking the Code*

*Three young actors are making their marks  
in the provocative drama opposite Derek Jacobi*

**D**erek Jacobi is currently receiving standing ovations for one of the finest performances of the season. His tour-de-force portrayal of Alan Turing, the mathematical genius who is the subject of Hugh Whitmore's *Breaking the Code*, is so dazzling that it is sometimes possible to overlook the quality of the production's impressive supporting cast. In this group are three young actors, each of whom has brief yet crucial scenes with Jacobi. *Theater Week* recently chatted with Michael Dolan, Robert Sean Leonard, and Andreas Manolikakais, the three new faces in *Breaking the Code*, between shows at the Neil Simon Theater.

Michael Dolan, born in New Mexico, makes his first appearance on Broadway in *Breaking the Code*. He made his professional stage debut in New York at the Public Theater in 1984 in Albert Innaurato's *Coming of Age in Soho*. In *Breaking the Code*, Dolan plays the part of Ron Miller, an out-of-work Manchester hustler, who meets Alan Turing (Jacobi) in 1951 in a pub. Miller readily accepts Turing's invitation to dinner with its clear implications of sex to

follow. He has no scruples about stealing money from the older man, and when Turing's homosexuality is later investigated by the police, gives evidence regarding the "crime" of "gross indecency." "Someone asked me what kind of role I play; I like to think of myself as the romantic villain," says Dolan with a laugh.

His previous roles had usually been that of "sensitive sons," so when he read this part, he wanted very much to do it. He had to master a Manchester accent for the play, which he did by listening over and over again to a tape provided by his dialogue coach. The only thing he finds "a real drag" about working in *Breaking the Code* is the time he has to spend sitting on the stage doing absolutely nothing. He sits in the background, barely noticeable, while Turing has his first encounter with the police. "There is a lot of bad shit you can think about when you have to sit on stage like that for over fifteen minutes."

Robert Sean Leonard, a native of New Jersey, began his professional career at the age of fifteen, as an understudy in *Coming of Age in*



Encoded: Andreas Manolikakis and Derek Jacobi

Soho. He made his first Broadway appearance in *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and subsequently toured with the Neil Simon play as well as its sequel, *Biloxi Blues*. He plays the part of Christopher Morcom, Turing's boyhood friend who died at an early age. Leonard has just one scene with Jacobi, set in 1929. However, his character's presence is felt—and on a couple of occasions seen—throughout the play, as Morcom was obviously idealized and worshipped by Turing for the rest of his life. A friend who saw the play in London had told Leonard that he would be right for the part. When he read the script, however, he couldn't imagine how it could work on stage: "All those passages about math." But Jacobi's performance of the central role convinced him that it would work. He had seen Jacobi in *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Much Ado About Nothing* (Tony award for Best Actor, 1985) and was thrilled to be in the same production with him. "It's not even one of those things you think will never happen, because it's

the sort of thing you never think about at all," explains Leonard.

Andreas Manolikakis was born in Greece and came to New York eight years ago in order to work with the Actors Studio. He made his professional debut in 1979, performing in French in Paris. He also directed a play for the National Theater of East Paris. Manolikakis was working on a scene at the Actors Studio, when an actress friend saw him and recommended him to an agent. He was sent in to audition and found himself with his first Broadway role, playing opposite Jacobi, who is something of a hero in Athens ever since he played *Hamlet* there some ten years ago. Manolikakis does not appear in *Breaking the Code* until the penultimate scene. It is an idyllic scene, set in 1953, during which Turing can enjoy being with another man in a foreign country lacking the pressure of the repressive English society of the day and

without the possibility of criminal prosecution. The scene is also humorous and touching, because Turing does not know the Greek language and his lover Nikos (Manolikakis) doesn't understand English. It is to Nikos that Turing ironically reveals the secret of how he broke the Nazi's Enigma code, a secret that the British government was anxious to protect.

Manolikakis was particularly attracted to the role because of the chance to play entirely in Greek. "It seems easy, but it really isn't," he explains. "Playing to all these people in a foreign language means I have to find other ways to communicate to them." He does this by emphasizing movement and by changing the rhythms of his speech, something which he says could get very tiring. "When you say something in a language someone understands," he points out, "the words will supply fifty percent to the audience, and you supply the other fifty percent with feelings. In this case, I have to provide a hundred percent with feelings, movements, and

Martha Swope

# "When you are in a play, you have your whole life. You are a whole person."

speech patterns in order to show that I regard Turing as my friend and that I have tender feelings for him."

The opportunity to work with an actor of Jacobi's caliber is something that all three of these young actors cherish. "For me, its like finishing another school," says Manolikakis. "He's a totally free actor," Dolan remarks. "The form of the play is such that it is open to change. The audience may not notice it, but you can always keep the role fresh for yourself. Derek is excited by this and whatever you do or change, he'll go along with it. You don't have to worry, he's so generous." Manolikakis elaborates: "Derek Jacobi is so *there*. He deals with every second's reality on stage."

Contrary to any expectations they may have had, these actors did not find working with a partly English cast traumatic. Dolan feels that tension on any production is a direct reflection of the quality of the project. He says he has found that "If the project wasn't so great to begin with, people didn't seem to get along. It all depends on the magic of the piece you are doing. When everyone has a good part, everyone is satisfied." Both he and Leonard, however, initially had some difficulty adjusting to the playing styles of the British actors. "I remember I was rather freaked out because they are so strong vocally—I had never acted with people like this before," says Dolan.

Leonard too "had a problem with the color of the language." He describes the voices of Jacobi and Michael Gough [the noted British actor who plays Dillwyn Knox, the head of the code-breaking operation that Turing worked with during the war] as being extremely "colorful." "If you listen to them, they go up the scale, down the scale, and up the scale in a matter of two sentences. And when you first do it, it feels fake, as if it is put on. It took a little while before I was able to do it and stop thinking about how I was sounding."

Dolan, Leonard, and Manolikakis have also had experience in films and television. Manolikakis appeared in the English feature film *The Girl from Mani* and the Greek television series *Vendetta* and *Stella Greca*. Leonard's first film was *The Manhattan Project* and he has been seen on television in *Bluffing It* and *My Two Loves*. His latest film, titled *My Best Friend Is a Vampire*, is scheduled for release shortly. Dolan has made three films in a row, including last year's Vietnam action adventure *Hamburger Hill* and the forthcoming Mike Nichols film version of *Biloxi Blues*. However, after three films Dolan was anxious to return to the stage, and *Breaking the Code* came at an opportune moment. Leonard describes the conflict between working on film and on stage as "When you are doing one thing, you can't wait to do the one you are not doing. When I was working on films, I was wishing to God I would get a play. Now that I am involved in a

play, I'm starting to think about doing films again."

It is a symptom of growing up in America, Leonard feels, that the success of actors is measured by their films: "Any time you say you are an actor, people always ask what films you have done." Dolan deploras the dearth of acting roles for young actors in the movies, since "all you get is the leading man and his funny friend." He would like to consider himself as a character actor and feels that most of the young actors in films who have the ability to choose their own roles choose parts exclusively for their popular appeal. "There is very little interesting work from an actor's point of view," he states. On the stage, however, he feels that "You can change things, you have to keep it fresh—that's acting. Doing that builds your acting muscles." Leonard mentions that it is very strange to grow up "just doubting that you'll ever get a chance to do worthwhile roles."

One difference between a life in the movies and a life on the stage is in the amount of time each consumes. Leonard recalls that when he was working on a film, it seemed he was working 16 hours a day, and literally living the film, "whereas when you are in a play, you have your life—you have the play at nights and you have all day to deal with your life. You are a whole person." Because of the flashback structure of *Breaking the Code*, these actors have much time on their hands during the show itself. Jacobi is in every scene, but with rarely more than two other actors at any given

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moment. "I could go through an entire show without ever seeing Jenny Agutter [who plays Turing's co-worker on the Enigma code project] or Michael Gough except at the curtain call," says Leonard. "At first it seems like you are going crazy, because you get so excited about your scene and then it's over. The real thing is what you do to help along the text. After a few months it starts to become more of a job and it's kind of nice to have this time where you have to be somewhere with nothing to do. You have an excuse to read, or do something you wouldn't normally do." With a mischievous dig at Manolikakis, Leonard claims "I'm becoming a method actor during my time offstage. I should be done in a week!" In fact, Leonard has just started school at Fordham, so his studies will occupy his time when he is not on stage. For Manolikakis, whose scene doesn't occur until close to two hours into the play, the Neil Simon has become "almost like home—a second apartment, in fact." For Dolan, Leonard, and Manolikakis, the experience of working with Derek Jacobi in *Breaking the Code* will undoubtedly be a milestone in both their personal growth as actors, as well as in their up and coming careers. "It is nice to walk in somewhere and have a Broadway credit. It doesn't really mean anything except to casting directors. But being in a show like this is wonderful, because anyone who is serious about theater in New York will see this show," says Leonard. The learning experience from *Breaking the Code* is bound to prove invaluable. Leonard recalls something that Jacobi said to him once: "Complete mental energy, complete mental agility is one of the keys to great acting."

Joan Marcus



Decoded: Robert Sean Leonard, Rachel Gurney, and Derek Jacobi

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