

In an exclusive celebrity interview for Apollo Executive Review,

Stuart Rowlands talks to

Michael York

If the answer is “YES!” to the question “do you want to act” and you are aged between 13 and 21, the National Youth Theatre, Britain's Premiere youth theatre company, is just the place for you!

For a sixteen year old schoolboy from Bromley, Kent, the school board notice was a siren song to the start of a career that has spanned nearly 45 years and shows absolutely no signs of slowing down. In fact Michael York has no plans to retire. In late December, a few days before Christmas, he has finally returned to his home high in the Hollywood Hills above Los Angeles overlooking the Sunset Strip, where this interview took place, after a charged but enjoyable 2008. “My father had a successful career at Marks & Spencer” says Michael, by way of explaining his own personal work ethic, “But 60 was the mandatory retiring age in those days in Britain and the emotional stress of giving it all up was considerable.”

In a profession with no cut-off point, Michael is driven to stretch and practice the actor's art constantly, almost without pausing to take a breath. Unsurprisingly, he looked a little weary but still slim and fit while recounting a 12-month work schedule that would stun an ox.

“In late December 2007 I got back to Los Angeles after filming in Russia, Germany, Poland and Israel”, he remembers. “2008 got off to a quick start with the continued narration of a new audio version of the entire Bible – a huge undertaking that would take most of the year to complete. This was followed by a recording of Alan Paton's extraordinary classic tale of apartheid in South Africa, *Cry the Beloved Country*. Next was a project very dear to my heart - performing with the Long Beach Opera company on a very daring double bill, *Strauss Meets Frankenstein*”.

By March, Michael and his wife Pat were headed east to Maine where Pat, a celebrated and published photographer, was shooting renowned American ‘pop art movement icon’ artist Robert Indiana for a new book.

June and July were spent in England near Bath filming part one of a German backed mini-series for television telling the tale of author Rosamunde Pilcher's *Four Seasons*, with Michael co-starring with Senta Berger, Tom Conti and Juliet Mills and “luxuriating in the wonderful Englishness of it all”. Mid August saw Michael and Pat back in the USA with Michael performing at the Bard Festival in up-state New York followed by the Ravinia Festival outside Chicago where he teamed up with old friend and Ravinia's music director, James Conlon, who is also the current music director of the Los Angeles Opera.



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Late August saw Michael in Merida, Spain performing in *Antony & Cleopatra* with Susannah York in the Roman arena (5000 spectators, no microphone and perfect acoustics!), before he and Pat flew to Venice in early October for the Pordenone International Silent Film Festival which featured the European Premiere of the documentary *Mary Pickford, The Muse of the Movies*, narrated by Michael. With a quick break to host an acting Master Class in Antalya, Turkey, Michael then winged his way back to Italy for an audience with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican where he presented a documentary about Pope John

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Paul 11. Among other extraordinary locations, it had involved spending a day in a Sistine Chapel brightly illuminated with movie lights. When asked if he was Catholic Michael laughed, replied no, but said he wasn’t asked for credentials before signing on.

Still in October and only three days after his Papal encounter, Michael flew back to the United States to make a guest appearance at the 2008 Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival in Arkansas. November saw him in a ‘chilly’ Poland shooting *The Mill and the Cross* with Charlotte Rampling and Rutger Hauer, scheduled for release in 2009. Afterwards Michael and Pat returned to Los Angeles for a brief three day visit before winging their way back to New York for the launch of Pat’s latest photographic tome, *Fame and Frame*, featuring stunning photographs of the art and entertainment worlds, including a young Albert Finney, David Bailey, David Hockney and Michael... whew!

“I like to keep busy” says Michael rather redundantly, “Many actors don’t, but I like to keep testing the waters.” And happily his bent for pastures new is shared by Pat as they travel together constantly, most recently for her exhibitions in Hong Kong and Abu Dhabi. For Michael York it’s now been more than 60 movies and 80 television productions plus numerous stage performances, recordings and the writing of five books. When asked if there were roles he regretted turning down or roles he had accepted but regretted, he says “I don’t think you can live by those standards of



logic. For example I turned down the role opposite the lovely Ali MacGraw in *Love Story*. If I had been in that role it wouldn't have been the same film and perhaps not as successful. I go by my instincts, if it doesn't work out you have nothing to regret. You have made the choice and you live by it."

Michael has played some memorable roles in such films as *Cabaret* with Liza Minnelli, or the swashbuckling D'Artagnan in *The Three Musketeers* with the irrepressible Oliver Reed; *Murder on the Orient Express* with an all-star cast was another success, as was *Logan's Run* with Jenny Agutter and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, where he starred opposite Burt Lancaster and a sometimes overly friendly 10 foot tall Kodiak Bear. His most recent movie role successes include all three Austin Powers movies.

These days Michael takes pleasure in narrating with great orchestras such as the Fort Worth, Los Angeles or Chicago Symphonies. He conducts his Master Classes in acting several times a year all over the globe and continues to take on stage, TV and movie roles. However, says Michael whose classic, recognizable English accent is in great demand to narrate audio books including recordings of C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and a new version of *Alice in Wonderland*. "Of every expression of acting that I undertake today", says Michael, "audio recording takes

the most punishing concentration work of all especially if I have a book with numerous characters. If it's a really great book it's an almost excessive responsibility to do it justice – but its rewards are in equal proportion. I'm happy to say that *Cry the Beloved Country* made the list of recommended audio books for 2008, which is always a nice pat on the head. However, although it's pleasant to look back on things, what really turns me on is looking forward to what lies ahead." 

Stuart Rowlands is a Welsh born publicist living in the Hollywood Hills and the former head of Global PR for IMG. His clients have included the Nobel Peace Institute, the Quebec Tourist Board, the Government of Ghana, Island Records and Honda's international motorcycle racing programme. He is a former rock concert publicist who lists some of the bigger riots to his credit.

Michael York sat for this exclusive interview on the morning of New Year's Eve 2008. His 2009 schedule is already shaping up nicely with at least four trips to Europe on the calendar including production of Part 2 of 'The Four Seasons' mini-series back in England. However before he leaves Los Angeles yet again he is scheduled to play the composer in 'Intimate Letters', a play based on the letters of Leos Janacek to his young muse, again for the Long Beach Opera.

