

'IT'S THE CLOSEST I'LL EVER GET TO BEATLEMANIA'

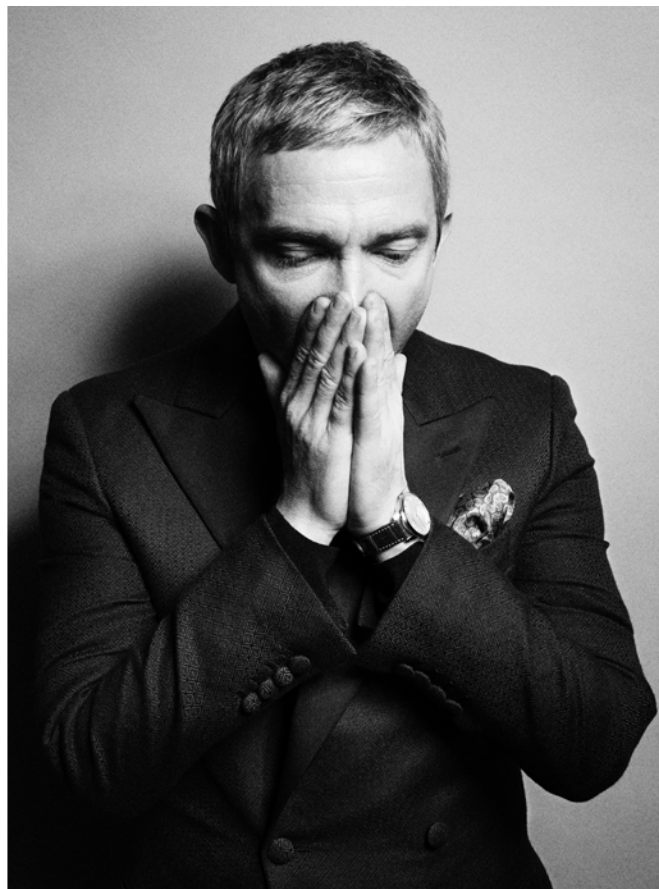
*And to think he used to be just Tim from The Office. If ordinariness is what Martin Freeman wants, he needs to stop being so damned talented. His prowess lies in his ability, as the director Peter Jackson put it, to have 'one foot in the dramatic world and one foot in the comedic world'. All of which means, writes **NICK SCOTT**, that Freeman's star is on a trajectory out of this world ...*

*photography **simon emmett** fashion and art direction **sarah ann murray***



Grey Vitale Barberis Canonico flannel made-to-measure three-piece suit, Edward Sexton; sky-blue cotton shirt, Emmett London; steel-blue silk knitted tie, Budd Shirtmakers; navy wool and cashmere pocket handkerchief with white spots, Anderson & Sheppard Haberdashery.

Vintage black acetate frames, USS, property of Martin Freeman.



In a video doing the rounds on the web at the time of writing, an enraged Martin Freeman pulverises a cake and a typewriter with a sledgehammer, then turns a garden shed into kindling with a chainsaw. The actor might harbour a little simmering existential angst from time to time — more on that later — but fans of Freeman and his burgeoning body of work needn't be alarmed: the violent tantrum in question was the climactic point in the video (a vignette documenting a D.I.Y. enthusiast's implosion under the pressure of suburban banality) for Paul Weller's slow-burn funk single *Pick it Up*.

The collaboration is not Freeman and Weller's only connection. Alongside Bradley Wiggins and Soho tailor Mark Powell, the pair make up what some eager fashion nomenclaturists in the press have dubbed the 'Mod Squad'. There's some truth in it — as evidenced by the dapper outfits, made by Powell, that Freeman wore to the New Zealand, New York and Tokyo premieres of *The Hobbit* as well as this issue's photoshoot — but just don't call him, or even the Modfather, a 'style icon'. "The word 'icon' has just become meaningless," Freeman says. "It's like 'legend' — everyone's a 'legend'. Whereas, I'm sorry, but unless you're talking about King Arthur ... Elvis, maybe. There are very few actual legends about. When people say to me, 'Ah, mate, you're a legend', I think, 'Well, you should probably read more, get out more'"

Disdain for lazy hyperbole notwithstanding, Martin Freeman is in a very good place right now — professionally, as all readers this side of the moon are aware, but also literally, when it comes to the setting of this interview: the rustic cottage in a not-so-remote corner of Hertfordshire in which Freeman lives with his partner (and on-screen wife in the case of *Sherlock*), Amanda Abbington, and the other seven beings (three of whom are canine, one feline and one arachnid) who make up the family. Unfussy but cosily appointed, and sprinkled with eclectic art prints and comfy furniture, it's a home with an air of unassuming domestic conviviality.

Which it would be, because ordinariness is what this 44-year-old from Aldershot craves the most, and finds more and more elusive as his film and television career makes its way towards the nearer reaches of the thermosphere. "[Happiness] is about doing stuff normal people do, but acknowledging that your life is not normal any more," he says. "Because it's not. As much as I like to think 'I'm a normal guy', I'm reminded 18 times a day that I'm not a normal guy because people are wanting something of me that they're not wanting of my cousin. Everything you say, every utterance, is broadcast as if you've issued a press statement. Even now, talking to you, I'm self-editing, because generally I'm quite loose-lipped, and I bore myself quite easily, so I tend to tell the truth — I don't want to do the party line — but I've come a cropper with that before. Anything you say is picked up and run with" — he pulls an impish smile — "as I'll find out when I read *The Rake* and you've portrayed me as a communist Nazi."

Given his wariness of his own scattergun candour, as well as the public's hunger for under-contextualised nuggets of controversy, it's no surprise Freeman avoids social media. He says: "People use Twitter like they used to write diaries — 'This is how I feel, this is how I think'. If I did that I would be fucked. FUCKED! My career would be over in minutes. Besides, I just don't need or want it in my life.

Part of it is certainly a privacy, self-preservation thing — I've always been quite militant about guarding privacy. Amanda is an actor, too, obviously, so we're kind of fair game for publicity, but my kids and the rest of my family aren't. I know that once that's out of the bottle, you don't get it back. You learn from other people's journeys."

Part of the problem, he says, is how much verbal invective people are prepared to fire off when they're not going to witness the victim's reaction: "Louis C.K. said this very effectively: when you say horrible things directly to a person, you'll get their reaction. Whereas [on social media] you can say, 'This guy's a prick, he's a twat, she's a cunt' and you're not getting any reaction to it. There's no cost. There's a danger of becoming inured to the unpleasantness of what you're doing and saying to people, and cruelty. That's not progress. There's a Jon Ronson book called *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, and it's a really good book for outlining the fact that what can start as righteous indignation — 'That's terrible, I'm going to call that person out' — can quickly become baiting, cruelty and bullying. That's not the best side of us, and I don't really want to be part of it. If we knew what people were thinking about us all the time, that'd be terrible, wouldn't it? The world would come to an end, it'd be chaos. We're primates and we learn to hide things and disguise them."

As well as social media, he also averts his gaze from reviews, along with the fatuous attentions of the tabloid press. In truth, he's a lot more thin-skinned than one might expect a professional actor to be. "I don't need to read people being horrible about me," he says. "I know there are people who don't like me. I'm just not that robust that I can read the ways in which people hate me and it be water off a duck's back. I'm too sensitive for that. I'm fragile enough as it is, mentally and emotionally."

Just as, on-screen, Freeman can convey a cocktail of emotions in an instant with a furrow of the brow, a flinch of the head and a whetting of that quizzical gaze, when playing himself he is markedly expressive. He deliberates over every word — partly, as he's already admitted, because talking to the media can be a perilous business — but you also get the impression that he's ruminative and meticulous out of respect for his co-conversant and because he cares — deeply, about most things — and is determined to express sentiments, all of which are important to him, accurately.

He's certainly animated on the subject of clothing. Dressed today in a smart, subtly patterned long-sleeved T-shirt, slim-cut dark blue jeans and upmarket blue desert boots, he packs a sartorial punch, and has taken an interest in style for most of his 44 years. "An awareness of clothes for me came with [late-1970s ska revival] Two Tone," he says. "I was about nine years old when I first saw Madness, The Specials, The Selector and The Beat and so on, and it awoke something in me. I don't have to get dressed up like Jerry Dammers to enjoy The Specials, so perhaps the music is closely followed by clothes. As far as that slightly more dandy element, that probably hit me when The Style Council came along. Paul [Weller] and Mick [Talbot] ponced about with the best of them."

As the photographs on these pages attest — a few of which feature Freeman's own clothing — classic male elegance becomes him. But his approach to style is multi-dimensional. "I've always liked very male and masculine looks that have a touch of feminine in them," he says. "The mod movement wouldn't have happened without a homosexual influence, as well as the West Indian one,



Previous page and this page:
Black silk roll-neck jumper, **Kilgour**; navy silk jacquard made-to-measure double-breasted evening jacket and black corduroy trousers, both **Gieves & Hawkes**; blue paisley madder-silk vegetable-dyed pocket handkerchief, **Budd Shirtmakers**; L.U.C XPS timepiece in white gold with a blue alligator-leather strap, **Chopard**.

Blue lens eye frames, **Ralph Lauren**, property of Martin Freeman.

and yes, I'm sure most of the people who called themselves mods in 1965 weren't necessarily thinking, 'Oh, I must read that Oscar Wilde book', but without that kind of innate femininity to it ... Blokes before that didn't wear those colours, or pay that amount of attention to cloth — either would have been seen as innately female. We're talking about boys carrying hammers around to smash people's faces in wearing immaculately tailored clothes. I don't like violence, but I slightly miss the youth tribe thing. I liked going, 'He's a this' and 'He's a that' — as long as no one's stabbing each other, I like the differences."

For all the 'mod' tags applied to him in the press, retrospective pop culture movements are, for Freeman, anathema. "I have a lot of conversations with dodgy old mods, and there's nothing more depressing than someone who insists that it's still 1966 and everything that's happened since is shit," he says. "It's the polar opposite of modernism — of embracing the new, embracing now." So where does all this leave the distinctive, distinctly non-violent but arguably very backward-looking Hoxton hipster look? "People looking like a gold prospector from 1849?" he says. "It's more interesting to me aesthetically than jogging pants and hoodies, but instinctively I always feel that when an interesting look becomes a uniform, you've got to get off the bus. I like it as a look, these guys dressing like The Band, but it's become a bit too ubiquitous in certain parts of London."

THE TOLKIEN INFLUENCE

Given his taste for variety and progress, Martin Freeman has a right to be pretty proud of his screen career to date. Although he already had 16 credits in notable films on his C.V. by the time Peter Jackson cast him in the lead role in *The Hobbit* — including *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (2005) and *Hot Fuzz* (2007) — it was the Tolkien trilogy that made Freeman an international megastar. The franchise also showcased his range: as the director Jackson put it, his "ability to have one foot in the dramatic world and one in the comedic world". But it's fair to surmise that Freeman is glad to have hung up his acorn-buttoned waistcoat once and for all.

A consistently sharp conversationalist, he is particularly compelling when discussing the projects that most engage his intellect — not least the British sitcom that launched his career, *The Office*. Freeman was a vaguely recognisable T.V. actor when Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant cast him as the unassuming, smart-bloke-among-imbeciles Tim Canterbury. Understandably, in the wake of the show's gargantuan success, he suffered as much ennui with all things Wernham Hogg as his fictional counterpart. However, 12 years after the show saturated, then changed, his life, Freeman is genuinely enamoured of the fact he was involved at all. "In all honesty, at the risk of sounding vain, it's one of my favourite

comedy shows," he says. "I love not just the firework, grandstand moments like the Comic Relief dance — although that is hilarious — but just all the moments of truth in it."

"There aren't any lies in *The Office*. There was less telegraphing of the jokes than any other mockumentary T.V. show — we gave the audience credit for having intelligence — and as it turned out, BBC Four lovers and 'white van man' both loved it. It wasn't too university, too 'in'. It was very democratic yet super-smart. I spend a lot of my life saying, 'Christ, we're all so fucking thick'. I get depressed by how stupid humans let ourselves be. But *The Office* is an example of the fact that, actually, if you give people respect, I honestly think they rise to it. Every tiny detail with that show was lasered in. I've met a lot of very, very Brent-y types of people who love him and think he's great because they don't recognise themselves as know-all, invulnerable twats who never want to admit they're wrong."

"There's nothing more depressing than someone who insists that it's still 1966 and that everything since is shit."

He also counts among his most satisfactory vocational experiences his latest television role, and his first set in the United States: insurance salesman and perennial life victim Lester Nygaard in the first series of *Fargo*, the black-comedy/crime show inspired by the 1996 Coen brothers movie of the same name. "It's one of

the few jobs I've done which has absolutely had no downside to it at all — even being cold for nine months every day in Calgary, which they use to double as Minnesota," he says of playing a man who is described in the script as "the sort of person who apologises if you step on his foot".

"It's well written and beautifully shot. Each episode you read the script, and you were thinking, 'This one is even better'. Noah Hawley is a brilliant, atmospheric writer, and he's tapped into something very Coen-y about it without aping the movie, and without any input from them." The Coen brothers are executive producers — nominally, at least. "When I started doing it people here [in Britain] were saying, 'Wow, you're going to meet the Coen brothers' — I've not met the Coen brothers any more than I've flown to the moon. No involvement at all, bar, I think, seeing Noah's first script. As long as you don't completely fuck it up, they're not interested. They essentially give it their blessing — that's it."

A part for a Briton in an American television show should be a career-definer — just ask Hugh Laurie or Andrew Lincoln — but for Martin Freeman, of course, the T.V. phenomenon making him a globally recognised face was made more than a little closer to home. *Sherlock* is the contemporary adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novels, co-penned by *Doctor Who* and *Jekyll* writers Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss and starring Benedict Cumberbatch as Holmes. The numbers for the show speak for themselves: 9.2 million British people tuned into the first episode of the third series when it aired in early 2014; 69 million viewers in China, all illegally streaming it online due to Chinese authorities deeming it too risqué



White cotton shirt; Brooks Brothers; forest-green knitted tie, Ralph Lauren Purple Label; white wool and cashmere printed pocket handkerchief, Anderson & Sheppard Haberdashery; brown leather loafers, Crockett & Jones.

Navy wool chalk-stripe three-piece suit, Mark Powell, property of Martin Freeman.



Clockwise from top left: Freeman in *The Office* with Ricky Gervais and Mackenzie Crook, 2002; as Rembrandt in *Nightwatching*, 2007; with Joanna Page in *Love Actually*, 2003; with Penelope Cruz in *The Good Night*, 2007; with Nick Frost, Eddie Marsan, Simon Pegg and Paddy Considine in *The World's End*, 2013; in *Wild Target*, 2010; and in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, 2005.



Clockwise from top left: Freeman starring in *Fargo*, 2014; on the set of *Sherlock*, 2015; as Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*, 2013; during a TV. interview in 2014; and with co-star Benedict Cumberbatch on the set of *Sherlock*, 2014.



Grey Vitale Barberis Canonico flannel made-to-measure three-piece suit, Edward Sexton; sky-blue cotton shirt, Emmett London; steel-blue silk knitted tie, Budd Shirtmakers; navy wool and cashmere pocket handkerchief with white spots, Anderson & Sheppard Haberdashery.

Vintage black acetate frames, USS, property of Martin Freeman.

for the Chinese Central Television network; and the first two series holding a highly unusual 100 per cent rating at the often crabby critical aggregator site Rotten Tomatoes.

So obsessive are some of the show's followers, it's even sparked a revival in deductive endeavour ("Where did he even get the eggs for that cake? There were no eggs in that fridge [earlier in the clip]," posts one amateur cyber-sleuth beneath that Paul Weller video on YouTube). Freeman says: "Our fake Baker Street set has become like a shrine — a Mecca for *Sherlock* fans — and filming there is like trying to film a scene while there's a movie premiere going on in the background. It's the closest I'll ever get to a small taste of Beatlemania. To a certain type of fan, we're like a band. They're very, very good fans, but ... I've never known anything like it. I've never known anything like the devotion and the loyalty."

Is he able to put his finger on the appeal? "No, and I'm glad I'm not. Again, as with *The Office*, I'm very proud of it. It's beautifully written and shot. Mark and Steven, the co-creators, are fanatics of Arthur Conan Doyle, who was no slouch, either. None of us could have anticipated the life it would take on, even though we all knew we liked it." The dynamic between his own Watson and Cumberbatch's Holmes, he says, is a stroke of good fortune. "You could get the two most fantastic actors in the world, but if the chemistry's not there, it's not there," Freeman says. "There's a lot of luck. It was immediately apparent to us, when we started reading — they already knew they wanted Ben for it, but I think they'd seen a few Dr. Watsons, of which I was one — it was just apparent that it lifted the whole thing. Great writing got even better. We both keyed into something that the other one was doing."

A special inter-series episode — *Sherlock: The Abominable Bride*, which will air on January 1 in Britain — has set *Sherlock*-mania alight all over again: can he tell us anything about it? "Nothing that you can't find in the trailers — what it looks like; the fact that it's going back to Conan Doyle's Victorian setting and aesthetic," he says. "Other than that ... Really, it's like signing up for the F.B.I. You can't give anything away, and I wouldn't want to. It's still our take on the premise, our pace, spirit and style — it won't be shot like the Jeremy Brett or Basil Rathbone ones — but transposed back to the original Victorian setting."

He's less tight-lipped about *Fun House*, a comedy about wartime media coverage in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which was originally to be called *The Taliban Shuffle* and also stars Tina Fey and Billy Bob Thornton. "It's about journalists and expats in that part of the world, and a clubhouse they called the 'Fun House' because it's where all this last-days-of-Rome debauchery, drugs, drink and sex happens, as a kind of relief from the horror and fucking horrendous things happening that they're seeing and reporting on." Marvel sci-fi thriller *Captain America: Civil War*, with Scarlett Johansson, is also in the pipeline (Marvel, sneakily but brilliantly, have generated a hefty amount of advance buzz by refusing to reveal whom Freeman will play — testimony, surely, to his bankability right now). And there is *Funny Cow*, a Brit-flick set in northern England's stand-up comedy scene.

But the film project that most brings out the loquaciousness in

Freeman — and with it his deepest ideological and moral feelings — is a TV movie that aired on BBC Two at the start of 2015, in which Freeman starred as Milton Fruchtman, the American television producer who masterminded the filming of the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann. "The Holocaust is a subject that's never very far from me," Freeman says. "I don't think a day goes by without me thinking about it, and that's not because I'm a really sensitive, lovely human being ... Maybe it's why I'm not a very easily happy person. Of my own volition, I'd watched parts of the Eichmann trial over the years just because I was interested — there's a lot of very interesting stuff on YouTube, as well as banal stuff."

The Eichmann Show is an exceptionally important movie, Freeman says, because it depicts the TV event that really embedded the horrors of the Holocaust into the world's consciousness. "His trial was [the moment] when it all passed over into something ... almost much more reverential, I suppose, into that 'never again' territory that we're in

"I wanted real horror. And not, I hope, from a wanky actor point of view, but from a respecting the theme point of view."

now, although obviously it has been happening on a smaller scale since then and I expect it always will. When we were filming it, and filming our characters' reactions to the footage — it's fucking hard; awful to listen to." Freeman persuaded Paul Andrew Williams, the director, to make the actual takes of *The Eichmann Show* the first time the cast had watched footage of the real-life trial. "I wanted our reactions to be real," Freeman says. "I wanted real horror. And not, I hope, from a wanky actor point of view, but from a respecting the theme point of view. Why give yourself a heads-up when you can be a normal witness to it? Because the audience watching it on BBC are going to be fucking horrified by it — hopefully — so why not us?"

The project brought out the autodidact in Freeman. "One of the best parts of my job — and maybe yours, too — is how much you learn," he says. "How often you say, 'I didn't fucking know that'. I didn't know that in the early days of Israel, a lot of people didn't want to hear about [the Holocaust]. They kind of didn't believe it, or the extent of it, when witnesses and survivors told them, 'You'll never guess what' ... 'Surely not. That couldn't have happened.'" Not for the first or last time during our conversation, he looks to the middle-distance with an incredulous frown.

RED VERSUS BLUE

Somehow, amid all the screenwork outlined above, for three months late last year Freeman found time to play the lead in Shakespeare's *Richard III* in a production at London's Trafalgar Studios. On the wall of his dressing room, as a source of inspiration, he kept a magazine cover Blu-Tacked to his wall: the April 2014 issue of *The Rake* featuring Prince Michael of Kent. "That was the jumping-off point for my look for the character," he says. "My Richard wasn't as dandy as [Prince Michael], but I loved the duality of his look — of being immaculately dressed and clearly having blood bluer than possible. Shakespeare's Richard was a dictator, and our Richard was a fascist, right-of-the-Conservative-party dictator, and generally speaking, from a tailoring point of view, my team aren't the best dressed."



Opposite:
Cream cotton shirt, **Mark Powell**;
navy silk knitted tie, **Ralph
Lauren Purple Label**; dark green
silk pocket handkerchief, **Budd
Shirtmakers**; black leather
brogues, **Gaziano & Girling**.

Red and black houndstooth wool
suit, **Mark Powell**, property of
Martin Freeman.

This page:
White cotton shirt; **Brooks
Brothers**; forest-green knitted
tie, **Ralph Lauren Purple Label**;
white wool and cashmere printed
pocket handkerchief, **Anderson
& Sheppard Haberdashery**.

Navy wool chalk-stripe three-
piece suit, **Mark Powell**,
property of Martin Freeman.





Grey Vitale Barberis Canonico flannel made-to-measure three-piece suit, **Edward Sexton**; sky-blue cotton shirt, **Emmett London**; steel-blue silk knitted tie, **Budd Shirtmakers**; navy wool and cashmere pocket handkerchief with white spots, **Anderson & Sheppard Haberdashery**.

Vintage black acetate frames, **USS**, property of Martin Freeman.

When Freeman talks about his ‘team’, he’s referring to his political allegiance. In early 2015, in the run-up to the British general election in May, Freeman and fellow actor David Tennant starred in a party political broadcast for the Labour Party. It’s fair to say he’s not lacking in political conviction (“You know, if the police are being cut back severely — the *police* — what the *fuck* is the plan for the BBC, the NHS, the arts?”) and yet, for Freeman, uncertainty is the hallmark of wisdom. “The older you get the more you realise you don’t fucking know anything,” he says. “There’s nothing more tedious than someone at my age still speaking like a sixth-former of ‘certainties’. When I was 18, the way I saw the world, everything was very clear — enemy versus friend. But go round the block a couple of times, fall in love, have kids, get your arse kicked, and you realise that everyone’s just trying. I know Tories aren’t all bastards. I wouldn’t say that any individual in the cabinet or Conservative Party is inherently evil. I just don’t agree with them — I think they see the world very, very differently to me. The ‘evil’ tag isn’t helpful. Actually, if we’re talking teams, and we’re talking evil bastards, my team — the left, generally — has been responsible for more murders in the last century than the other team if you count Stalin, Mao, the Khmer Rouge, the Shining Path ... That’s not a good team. The left is quite at home with evil bastards, actually. Religion doesn’t have a downpayment on genocide: there are atheist, materialists and socialists who have gone along quite happily with rape and mass murder.”

For a man with such a strong sense of right and wrong, Freeman is charitable about the motives of the statesmen who, for him, get things wrong. “I honestly don’t believe that [the British chancellor] George Osborne is waking up in the morning thinking, ‘How can I fuck the poor today?’ It’s just that his values are not mine,” he says. “Most people think — or at least think that they think — things should be fairer. I think I think it, and hope I really think it, and I hope I live by it. I’m hopefully a bit less naïve than I was at 17, and I know things are more grey now, but my general politics haven’t changed. Of course, I know I live in a big house, and have a much more privileged life than a lot of people I know. But short of moving to a hovel, I can’t undo it. Like most people with my way of thinking, you try and balance it with other stuff. Time given to other things. I don’t think I’m an intrinsically selfish person, but I do a job that rewards you well financially if you’re doing well.”

Judging by online comments in Britain’s right-wing media, much of middle-England was unimpressed with Freeman’s involvement in Labour’s campaign. Did it worry him? Did he fear alienating his audience? “I wouldn’t happily alienate anybody, but Labour is my team,” he says. “The Tories who went off me when I did a Labour party political broadcast, I understand that, but ... I love Michael Caine — fucking love him — and he’s always been a Tory. So we don’t share the same politics! He’s still one of the reasons I became an actor.”

As everyone who follows British politics is aware, four months after their election drubbing, the Labour Party elected Jeremy Corbyn as their most left-wing leader since Michael Foot in the eighties: a decades-overdue return to core values for some party supporters, a blow to Labour’s chances of an imminent return to


power to others. How did Freeman feel about it? “I’ve been really encouraged by Corbyn, because he uses the word ‘kindness’ a lot,” he says. “Everything he says flies in the face of where British culture’s been moving for the last 20 years. A lot more people are in chime with people telling the truth than we thought. Isn’t honesty what everyone, left and right, has been asking for for so long? That’s something me and *The Daily Mail* have in common. ‘Where’s the honesty, when will someone tell us the truth?’ Despite all my mod ideals, when it comes to politics I don’t necessarily want the guy with the best tie. I want the one who dresses and sounds like himself.”

“Surely, both Tory and Labour voters who dislike [Corbyn’s] policies would have to admit, ‘This is a man who is going to put his money where his mouth is, whether you like him or not’. He believes in things I believe in. I find it encouraging he hasn’t gone through a media school, because he’s got a natural charisma I believe in. Do I agree with everything he says? No. He’s not all fireworks, he’s not sexy, but does he advocate things I’d like to happen? Yes. Do I believe he’s telling the truth at all times? Yes. I’ve also always admired

Tory politicians who had that honesty. Since he hasn’t been leader [of the Conservatives], I’ve actually had quite an admiration for William Hague as a parliamentarian.”

For all the enthusiasm, warm humour and domestic felicity, Freeman hinted at discontent earlier, and at least one newspaper profile has hinted at his acting as being a form of escape. Pure psychobabble, it would seem. “One of the truest things I ever heard was at drama school,” Freeman says, “when one teacher said to us, ‘If you think that being an actor is a way of escaping the world, you’re in the wrong business — it’s the polar opposite’. If you’re an honest actor — and, like being a priest, that’s a lifelong mission — you don’t retire; you’re always trying to be better. You don’t escape from yourself, you learn a lot about yourself that isn’t necessarily nice. It’s part art, part expression, part therapy, part all sorts of things. If you’re doing a scene and you allow yourself to be surprised in the moment, you’ll react to things in ways that will reveal new ways of your own thinking.”

“You know that E.M. Forster quote — ‘How do I know what I think until I hear what I say?’ I’ve always been interested in that, in life and in art — in not knowing. We don’t know. That’s why I like conversations about religion. Who knows? I don’t know. I happen not to be an atheist, but I get atheism completely — I’m not one but I’m nearly one, and I like the conversation that happens around that. I don’t like certainty on either side — there’s something very unattractive about it to me.” Freeman was brought up in a Catholic family, and has described himself as “one of the few people I know who believes in God”, but he is spiritually ambivalent now. “I’m a very bad Catholic,” he says. “It’d always be a Catholic church, if any, that I went into, as I have more familiarity with that — but if I’d been born in Pakistan I’d have a sneaking admiration for Islam. If Tibet, it’d be Buddhism.”

And with this admission of cultural conditioning, there, in a nutshell, you have Martin Freeman’s approach to his craft: agnostic, sympathetic, meticulously considered, and highly attuned to life’s whimsical rips and tides and their effect on the human condition. 

“If you’re an honest actor — and, like being a priest, that’s a lifelong mission — you don’t retire; you’re always trying to be better.”

White cotton dress shirt, **Budd Shirtmakers**; black silk bow tie and ivory silk pocket square, both **Emma Willis**. Avocado-green dinner jacket with emerald-green velvet shawl lapels, **Nick Tentis**; and vintage gold timepiece, **Rolex** property of Martin Freeman.

Vintage gold cufflinks, property of *The Rake*.



DIGITAL ASSISTANT: SAM FORD
PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANTS: TOM FRIMLEY AND MIKE JENKINSON
FASHION STYLIST: JO GRZESZCZUK
FASHION ASSISTANTS: MILLIE BRADSHAW AND CHARLE THOMAS
TAILORING CONSULTANT: FRANCIS PALEY - CHITTLBOROUGH AND MORGAN
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WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO THE HOTEL CAFE ROYAL FOR THE KIND USE OF THEIR HOTEL AND SUITES