



John in one of his "alpha male" roles [courtesy of Channel Seven].

# TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE!

As he takes on arguably the greatest play in history, John Adam talks about the possibility Shakespeare was gay and why he hasn't checked into Ramsay Street... just yet.

**DNA: You're playing Claudius in *Hamlet*.**

**How would you describe your character?**

**John:** I try to play him with a bit more colour and humanity. He's not squeaky clean, but one of the reasons people commit crimes like that is not just for the power, but for love. He actually loves the woman he married. It's not great that he killed his brother to get her, but the love part is something that I'm focusing on.

**Do you feel a buzz taking part in this?**

Yes, without a doubt. I'm a Shakespeare buff, full-stop. *King Lear* is probably my favourite, but not far behind would be both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Virtually every line of *Hamlet* is so profound – and funny, as well. In fact, they are so profound that a lot of them have become clichés. To thine own self be true – you always think, so that's where that came from!

**Do you watch film versions before the play?**

You can approach it two ways. Ewen Leslie, who plays Hamlet, has watched every version of *Hamlet* there is, so it all kind of goes into the melting pot in a mashed-up imaginative way, like grist to the mill. But I prefer to try and put myself in the position of the character.

**Have you been to Denmark or seen a ghost?**

I have been to Denmark, many years ago when I went on a trip around all the Scandinavian countries. I recall seeing what at least I thought was a ghost, when I was about seven years old and living in the States. I used to fish through a hole in the ice at a little cabin on the frozen lakes. There were four of us all about the same age, revving each other up with scary stories. So it was probably more likely to have been imagination. It certainly felt real at the time!

**Have you heard the theory that William Shakespeare was gay?**

Oh yes. There've been lots of Shakespeare productions that have been slanted to the gay side because they are definitely open to that interpretation. For instance, I played a gay Bassanio in *The Merchant Of Venice*, who strangely came out of the closet as straight! And a lot of his sonnets have been described as love poems to a young boy or man. There is a

lot of cross-dressing and cross-sex play in his productions. Shakespeare certainly covers the full gamut of relations.

**Have you played any other gay characters?**

I played a detective that came out during the course of a play called *Fred*. My character, Detective Rose, falls in love with a guy played by Yasti Collen. I'm the only person in Australia that has kissed both Jacek Koman and Catherine McClements.

**Have you ever been mistaken as gay?**

Yes. I was approached in my younger days many times, but nobody cracks onto me anymore.

**If you were gay, who would you hit on?**

I've got a major acting crush on George Clooney.

**You've been on GP, Stingers, All Saints, Always Greener, Home And Away, City Homicide, Underbelly... Do you have one particular favourite?**

I had a role many moons ago in *A Country Practice*, which some of the readers may not even remember, as the brother to one of the main cast. This character was a damaged person and I really enjoyed playing him. I mostly get cast as strong alpha male characters when I do telly, so I enjoyed that little departure. As a general experience, I'd have to say the stint I just completed on *City Homicide*. That group of people were fantastic to work with.

**The only soap you're missing is Neighbours. Is it something you now want to tick off?**

I'm originally a Sydney-sider, so I've basically done everything that is made in Sydney while I was there. I was brought down to Melbourne for *Stingers* and *City Homicide*, but that's the only reason *Neighbours* has escaped me. If they offered it to me, I'd probably take it because I'm a bit of slut when it comes to work!

**You attended NIDA. What advice do you have for budding actors?**

My experience at drama school is that you're acting every day. You keep doing it and learn from your mistakes. Some people, though, don't relate to the institutional element that creeps into an acting school, and that natural sense of rebellion can knock the system. I suffered from that a little bit. So it's not for

everyone, but it does wonders for some people.

**Which school are you – Madonna, Streisand, Kylie, Britney or Gaga?**

Madonna! I think she's great and she's the original Lady Gaga. My favourite Madonna song would be *Burning Up*. I was a big fan as an 18-year-old when she first came out with *Holiday*, *Borderline*, all those ones.

**If you could bring any dead actor back to life to have a beer with, who would it be?**

I've read a few actors' autobiographies and the one that has stuck with me for a long time is *Blessings In Disguise* by Alec Guinness, the original Obi-Wan Kenobi. The wisdom, humility and generosity of spirit that came through those pages had a far more profound effect on me than any number of anecdotes from other autobiographies.

**What's the campest thing in your house?**

I've got an emerald green velvet shirt that I used to wear out to nightclubs all the time in my early 20s. I don't know why I've still got it, as I haven't worn it for years, but I can't bring myself to throw it out. I think it's because I had such a fun time when I wore it. It's very shiny and camp.

**What's your porn name (your first pet and the street your grew up in)?**

Bruiser Carr!

**That sounds like a character from Prisoner. A rival to Bea Smith!**

(Laughing) I'll take that!

**Jocks, boxers or freeball?**

Fitted boxers and I freeball occasionally. Whenever I'm at work I do them the courtesy of wearing underpants.

**What about in the world of Shakespeare?**

No, this production of *Hamlet* is completely contemporary. You'll find the suits in any corporate office in Australia. I'm afraid there's no special underwear in this production.

**No codpiece?**

(Laughing) Well, you never know. Our director, Simon Phillips, might throw it in just to keep you guys happy.

*Hamlet* is currently running at the Melbourne Theatre Company until August 31