



CV Stuart Piper

Born: 1982, Surrey

Training: National Youth Music Theatre, Arts Educational Schools London, Stagecoach

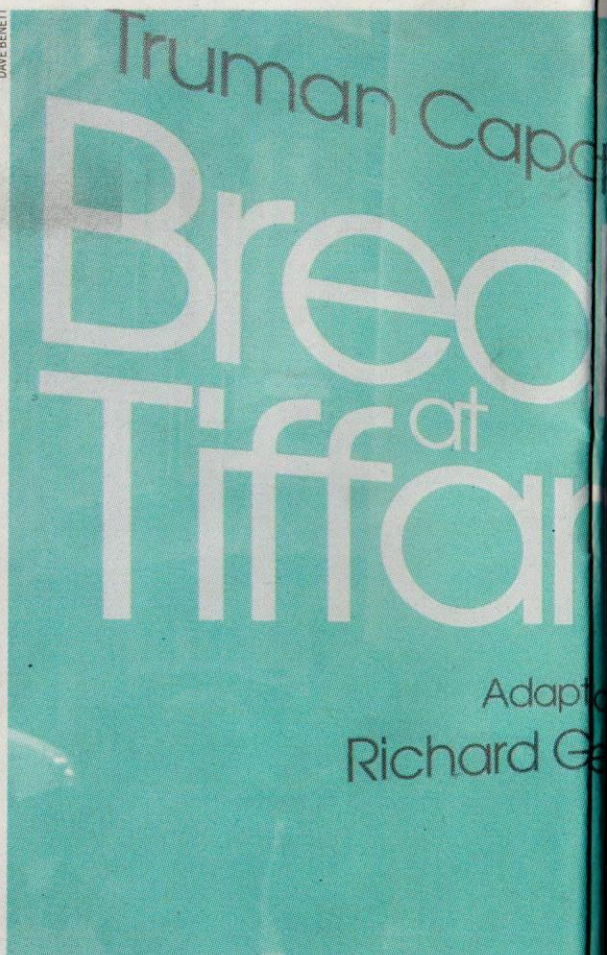
Career highlights:

- Playing the son of Juliet Stevenson and Trevor Eve in *The Politician's Wife*, Channel 4 (1994)
- Dandy Dan in *Bugsy Malone* (1998)
- Producer, *Snoopy the Musical* (2004)
- Founded Cole Kitchenn Personal Management (2005)
- Producer, *Lifecoach* (2008/9)
- Partnership with Jonathan Shalit's Roar Group (2010)



Agent Stuart Piper

DAVE BENNETT



Adapted by
Richard G.

GROCKETT

'Being an agent is like a game of poker'

Stuart Piper, managing director of Cole Kitchenn Personal Management, talks to **Nick Smurthwaite** about what it takes to be a great theatrical agent and why it is never a wise move to overplay your hand

Few jobs require people skills to the same extent as a theatrical agent. As well as having to reassure anxious clients on a daily basis, you must know how to sweet-talk intransigent producers and casting directors while simultaneously holding out for the best deal for your client. Balancing acts don't get any more delicate.

So, it is no surprise then that Stuart Piper, managing director of Cole Kitchenn Personal Management and occasional columnist for *The Stage*, turns out to be affable, accommodating and relaxed in shorts, flip-flops and snazzy shirt when we meet at his office, the wonderfully named Roar House in the heart of the West End. He may be up to his Ray-Bans in tricky deals and knife-edge negotiations, but Piper gives the impression he has all the time in the world.

Piper hasn't always been an agent. He started out as a starstruck child actor from Cobham who would rush to the local newsagents every Thursday to buy his copy of *The Stage*. He attended the first ever Stagecoach in nearby Weybridge, run by Stephanie Manuel, who sent him

up for an audition for the chorus of *Annie Get Your Gun*, aged nine.

"I stood in a long line of kids outside the theatre, dreaming of stardom," he recalls. "After I got a part in the chorus, I would stand in the wings every night watching it all happen and thinking, 'This is what I want to do'."

So for the next 10 years he continued to act, mostly doing TV, playing the son of John Thaw, Penelope Wilton, Juliet Stevenson, Trevor Eve et al. He also played Dandy Dan in *Bugsy Malone*, opposite the unknown Sheridan Smith as Tallulah, for the National Youth Music Theatre.

There were early intimations of the career change to come. "I could always spot the people who were special, the future stars. When I did *The Famous Five*, I knew Jemima Rooper had star quality, and it wasn't hard to see that Sheridan Smith had the makings of something extraordinary. People like that trigger an emotional rather than an intellectual reaction. It's an instinctive thing."

Piper started on the road to giving up acting at 18 when he co-produced a revival of the musical *Snoopy* at the Jermyn Street



Client Amy Lennox will take the lead in the musical *Kinky Boots* for which previews start in August at London's Adelphi Theatre

Theatre with fellow actor Stephen Carlile. "It went so well the owners of the rights contacted us to ask if we'd like to transfer it into the West End. So I called the Duchess Theatre, where it was done originally, in order to find out how I could go about hiring the theatre. I was put through to [theatre owner] Nica Burns, who called Stephen and me in for a meeting."

Because of their age and inexperience, Burns put them in touch with the management agency Cole Kitchenn. The show wasn't a financial success, but for Piper "it was a brilliant learning experience". When it was

over, Guy Kitchenn offered him a job as general manager of Cole Kitchenn. "I hadn't even given up acting at that point, but I didn't think I'd get a better offer, so I said yes."

In his early 20s, the whizz-kid Piper was general-managing West End shows, forward-planning productions, managing talent and running a small agency pretty much single-handed. "It wasn't easy but I was single and eager to make my way in the world. In the early days my ambition was to have a small list of actors, but the more I went on, the more I realised that you need a varied pool of talent to get



Client Pixie Lott will star in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* next year in the West End

showpeople



Julia Pascal – playwright/director

Julia Pascal says she has spent her life observing people and situations, all of which have become fodder for her plays, which often examine personal relationships in political situations. She is currently directing a revival of her 2003 play, *Crossing Jerusalem*, at the Park Theatre, north London

What led you to write for theatre?

I was an actor first. I trained as an actor and then I directed. In my mid-20s I stopped writing and did directing, at the National Theatre and then at the Orange Tree. I eventually formed my own company to try to find funds to put plays on by other writers and I realised that I wanted to write for

Q&A

enough information and intelligence coming into the office."

So he expanded the client list, and brought in other staff to fill the gaps in his knowledge. In a few short years it went from being a one-man show to being what he calls "a proper talent agency".

The real turning point came in 2010 when Cole Kitchenn was invited to become part of entrepreneur Jonathan Shalit's Roar Group of talent management companies that encompasses music, digital, comedy, sports, broadcast and branding. "Working with Jonathan has revolutionised everything we do," says Piper. "On my own I'd never have signed a music artist like Pixie Lott, but now here we are presenting her in Breakfast at Tiffany's next year in the West End."

"I guess I'm quite a traditional theatre creature but working with Jonathan has made me bolder and more forward-thinking. We were the first agency on Facebook and Twitter, for instance, and I'm very open about publishing our client list online. Being able to see where all your agents are every night is helpful."

The agency is also branching out overseas, especially the US, where Piper goes twice a year in search of work for his British clients, as well as US talent who may wish to work over here.

"The talents that interest me are the ones who can do more than one thing," he says. "I find the James Corden career trajectory very interesting, and I'm convinced the future for artists is to do as many things as possible. My job is to create opportunities for them, to connect producing talent with the right partners."

Just because Cole Kitchenn is now supplying headliners for stage and TV is no

excuse for it to be complacent, he says. "I know of a big London agency that told one of its interns, 'We don't call people, they call us.' I'd never want to be like that. Even now that we represent stars who are constantly in demand, we're still not slow in being proactive."

"After 10 years, we're not the new kids on the block any more, but we remain a young, energetic team of six agents, and we're still evolving."

As agent and manager to his clients, Piper's approach to the job could be described as holistic, yet he insists he doesn't see his job as telling them what to do. "My job is to advise and consult. We never make false promises. Some agents seem to think it is just about being as bullish as possible, but to me it is like a game of poker. If you overplay your hand you can lose a job for the client. You have to be realistic about negotiating terms. The fact that I've managed and produced West End shows helps me to understand the economics of producing."

What sort of person is suited to becoming a theatrical agent?

"If you're the kind of person who likes to leave the job behind you at six o'clock, then don't become an agent. It's true I live and breathe it, and I look forward to coming into work every day. I still get a huge buzz of excitement from seeing what my clients have achieved, both the new signings and the more established ones. But it is also important to have a life away from work."

"When I look at all the other agencies that were around when I started, they're all pretty much the same as they were, whereas I think Cole Kitchenn has evolved hugely. In five years' time I'd like to be representing film stars and Oscar winners."

What was your first non-theatre job?

I worked in a deli in Cobham.

What was your first theatre job?

Annie Get Your Gun at the Prince of Wales, aged nine.

What do you wish someone had told you when you were starting out?

Don't get so busy earning a living that you forget to have a life.

Who or what is your biggest influence?

Three people, all equally important: Guy Kitchenn, Jason Haigh-Ellery, Jonathan Shalit.

If you hadn't been an agent, what would you have been?

Probably a producer.

What is your best advice for auditions?

Identify the person whose career you'd like to have, then walk into the audition room like they would.

Further reading

- **Shark Infested Waters: Tales of an Actors' Agent** by Michael Whitehall (2013)
- **Cole Kitchenn website:** www.colekitchenn.com

from the play?

It's very much a family play that is set in Jerusalem in the last intifada of 2002. It is about how the politics and the personal are completely interconnected in life, probably more so in countries that are at war, where the act of going shopping is something that could be really threatening. It's about that interplay between the personal and the political, but it's also about identity and nationalism.

The play was first produced in 2003. Are there elements you have changed?

There are slight changes. I didn't direct the first production myself, which I am doing now, so I have my hands on it completely. I think the changes are more to do with how you use the actors on the stage, you get more daring I think. You make decisions about the text early on – am I going to keep it as it was or change it? Sometimes an actor can come up with something that's better.

Are there common themes in the plays you write?

I am a political writer, I don't know how not to be really. That's where I'm coming from. I don't think I am polemic in any way, what I am interested in is how we express our positions as political beings within the world. Getting on the tube on July 7, 2005 turns out to be a political act, when it's not really. Where the two worlds collide interests me very much.

ically from my life on the stage as an actor and a director, and it seemed like a natural transition. Also, very few women were writing and I wanted to be writing stories where women were strong characters and involved in political life, so it came from that impulse as much as from wanting to write.

Do you think the landscape is different for female writers now compared with when you started writing?

I don't think it is much better. I am very critical of the arts council for not pushing or making mandatory 50% quotas for women as writers and directors. I think it is a huge loss to our humanity and to our culture and to our theatre that the stories, and I hear them everyday, are not being presented. I think there is a huge absence of women's experience on the stage. There is a little bit of change, but it is minimal. Also, women are lumped in with diversity within the arts council papers. What the hell does that mean? We are not diversity, we are majority.

Georgia Snow

Crossing Jerusalem runs at the Park Theatre, London, from August 4-29. Details at: www.parktheatre.co.uk

CV: Julia Pascal

Training: East 15 Acting School (1967-70)

First professional job: Henry IV Part II, Traverse Theatre
Agent: United Agents

DAVE BENNETT

Truman Capote's Breakfast at Tiffany's

Adapted by
Richard Greenberg

astatiffanys.london



MATT CROCKETT



Client Pixie Lott will star in Breakfast at Tiffany's next year in the West End

enough information and intelligence coming into the office."

So he expanded the client list, and brought in other staff to fill the gaps in his knowledge. In a few short years it went from being a one-man show to being

excuse for it to be complacent, he says.

"I know of a big London agency that told one of its interns, 'We don't call people, they call us.' I'd never want to be like that. Even now that we represent stars who are

Q&A

What was your first non-theatre job?

I worked in a deli in Cobham.

What was your first theatre job?

Annie Get Your Gun at the