

DON'T CALL ME GARETH!

*He is best loved as the ebullient bon viveur of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. But, says Alison Jane Reid, the real Simon Callow is an even greater force of nature...*

SIMON CALLOW IS A VERY POPULAR man. Alas, when I tell him that at 61, he is more of a draw amongst my friends than Brad Pitt, and that they would love to have him over for dinner, he is having none of it.

His fine pair of intelligent blue eyes throw me a look that is a steely cocktail of worldliness and faint amusement, and then comes the booming, utterly familiar delivery: 'I don't know why they would want me as their ideal dinner guest,' he says. 'I suppose it's Gareth. Gareth was a small part of me; but a very large part of me isn't Gareth at all.'

His fans are unlikely to listen. The industrious Mr Callow is not going to be remembered for last year's quite clever, one-man show as the bard of Stratford, or for his ongoing, scholarly trilogy about the life of Orson Welles. No, for much of the world, he will always be Gareth: the ebullient, twinkling Scot, in one of the most successful British Films of all time, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. A man who just happens to be gay, like Callow himself, who embraces life with a charismatic and affecting abandon, and then is gone, snuffed out in the midst of a highland reel.

It is no exaggeration to say that Callow's portrayal of Gareth did more for gay rights than any protest march. 'At the time, playing Gareth was very important politically,' he says. 'It was the first time a film showed a gay man in an enduring, happy relationship who dies of a heart attack, rather than Aids. I always say it is a government health warning against the perils of



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