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Great British Hopes

**BYLINE:** Kate Bassett

Rising stars in the arts firmament. Tom Hollander. Profession: Actor  
Age: 28

Appearance: Cherub gone to seed.

Forté: **The comedy and charisma of villainy.**

Nasty pieces of work: He was Macheath in Brecht's Threepenny Opera, casually organising crime in 21st-century Soho. Then Baby, the dangerously mixed-up mafia kid in Mojo. And now? Tartuffe, Moliere's 17th-century spiritual conman, at the Almeida.

On Tartuffe: "It's a brilliantly constructed play," Hollander says, **"I like playing frightening megalomaniacs. I'm so unafraid of real life."**

Flexible: Hollander transformed into a sweet, cheeky yet vulnerable Celia in Cheek By Jowl's all-male As You Like It. In Peter Gill's Way of the World, he stole the show with a bit part as the flamboyant wit, Witwoud.

Family: The Hollanders are not historically theatrical but have artistic genes: a Czech grandfather was a celebrated authority on Janacek in bohemian Vienna. His sister is Julia Hollander, the ENO's youngest woman director. At Cambridge, **Hollander was a zesty Cyrano** in Sam Mendes's Marlowe Society production and subsequently joined Mendes's company at Chichester.

The glories of Oxbridge: Hollander is soon to be seen as the cox in True Blue, Channel 4's Boat Race movie. "We spent hour after hour being rained on by huge hoses with a wind-chill factor of minus 35 degrees," he says. "It was like the retreat from Moscow, but all good fun."

On acting: "On stage, for a few hours, your life is formalised, no longer chaotic. That can be relaxing."

On himself: **"I'm ambitious," he says, "but quite lazy. On stage I think: 'This my chance to redeem a completely unimpressive existence.'"**