



# Spotlight on ... paul bettany

■ He might not be Rupert Everett, but he's got the talent to make it big as Hollywood's next treasure

BY MACKENZIE  
CLEMENTS  
THE GAMECOCK

Not many people have heard of Paul Bettany. "I'm a Brit, and I'm not Rupert Everett," he said. "So I'm an unknown."

But after his role in *A Knight's Tale*, Bettany might not be so unheard of, after all.

Though Heath Ledger is the movie's headliner, Bettany is its scene-stealer, with his combination of wit, charm and humor.

And audiences won't be able to avoid taking notice of the skinny British actor after catching him in the nude — a position he's frequently put in throughout the movie.

"No matter how many times you've done it before, you're still taking your clothes off in front of strangers," Bettany said.

"The most humiliating thing about the whole day was actually when they would come and say, 'We see your bollocks, frankly, when you sit down, so we're going to need to tape you up.'"

Ripping the tape off was the worst part of filming the movie for Bettany. Otherwise, he said, "It was like someone paying for a holiday ... It was fun. It was so much fun."

Most indicative of Bettany's talent, however, is how he was cast in *A Knight's Tale*.

"He's a great actor," director/writer Brian Helgeland said. "I knew he could pull it off."

Bettany had flown from London, where he was born and raised, to read for a part. While in the studio, he saw a copy of one of Helgeland's scripts lying on a coffee table.

He read for a part in the script, and Helgeland was in awe.

The studio, however, was less than impressed and refused to cast Bettany.

Both men seem to have enormous amounts of respect for each other's talents. Helgeland based an entire movie around Bettany's potential. And Bettany takes no compliments without crediting Helgeland's writing.

"Mostly, it's what was written," Bettany said. "I mean, there's a few things, which is me busting when they've left the cameras running."

In addition, Bettany says the movie works because of Helgeland's directing style.

Helgeland would work with the cast each week, showing them edited clips of their work.

He also made the main actors arrive in Prague weeks before filming started so they could "rehearse" — two weeks filled with more cheap beer than actual rehearsal for the movie.

"It was his ... sort of genius, really, to lie to us and get us all out there under false pretenses to enforce alcoholism on us," Bettany said. "People tend to bond quite quickly on alcohol."

Of course, according to Helgeland, Bettany wasn't all compliments when it came to his role.

"He called me up," Helgeland said, "and said, 'You bastard. I'm naked all the time.'"

Bettany is now filming Ron Howard's *A Beautiful Mind* with Russell Crowe.

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★ ★  
★ 'No matter how many times you've done it before, you're still taking your clothes off in front of strangers.'

Paul Bettany

Between those "creative differences" and financial problems, the movie was canned. Helgeland shifted focus and wrote a new script.

"I never, ever thought I'd get to say these words," Bettany said, "but he wrote it for me."

By attaching a great '80s soundtrack and the big name of Heath Ledger to the project, Helgeland was able to get studio approval to go forward with the movie.

"I guess there's a hidden agenda, which is that Brian and I wanted to work together again," Bettany said. "So he puts me in a film where the studio will let me be in that part, but he writes me lines that shine themselves. It'll be easier when he wants to work with me again to convince people."



**Filmography**

- *Morality Play* with Willem Dafoe
- *Kiss, Kiss, Bang Bang* with Stellan Skaarsgard
- *Dead Babies* with Olivia Williams


**Television Appearances**

- British television: *Coming Home*, *Killer Net* and *Every Woman Knows a Secret*
- American television: played Steerworth in the TNT production of *David Copperfield*

**Education and Beginnings**

- The Drama Centre in London
- Stage debut in West End production of *An Inspector Calls*
- Season with the Royal Shakespeare Company

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