

A GOOD WAY to get to know Peter O'Toole, star of "Lawrence of Arabia" and strong contender to win an Oscar Monday night for Best Actor of the Year, is to spend a relaxed evening with him. I did this in London a short while back.

I met O'Toole backstage after one of the most strenuous stage performances I have ever witnessed. In "Baal," a mediocre play that has become a huge success because of Peter's personal magnetism, he is on stage every minute the curtain is up.

Peter went into the play because "it solved in advance the question of what was going to happen after the premiere of 'Lawrence.' If it was a terrible failure, I'd be too busy to be depressed. If it was a success, the outside influences that can turn a bloke's head wouldn't apply to me because I'd be gainfully employed." He reconsidered his thoughts for a moment. "A lot of people keep talking about being ruined by success. Let's face it: more have been butchered by failure. I felt I'd be protected either way."

Yet this deliberate, look-ahead planning is not typical of Peter; he has the reputation of being one of the most devil-may-care citizens of London! Staying out all night and sleeping all day seems to have become his permanent routine.

I got to know him during a tour à la O'Toole of some of London's brightest night spots. In telling me about his early, formative years, he said: "As far back as I remember, my family told me that my life was my own to do with as I pleased. And they meant it, although my father assured me that if I ever needed help, he would give it to me whether he could afford it or not—and most of the time he couldn't."

At times Peter slept in a park. Another time he and a friend got a flat — then sneaked 18 other fellows in to help pay the rent. When the landlord realized the invasion, he threw them all out, which was strictly routine for Peter. "During one year I had 22 different addresses—one of which was a houseboat that slowly sank during a wild party. But I've made up for it today with a 14-room house in Hampstead."

ACCORDING to his official biography, Peter was born in Connemara, Ireland, Aug. 2, 1933, moved to Dublin when he was one year old, then to Gainsborough, Leeds, and finally London. His father, so the biography says, "... traveled wherever his accounting business took him." Peter claims his father was a bookie and was proud of his trade.

From his father, Peter inherited a love of gambling—and an Irish temper that has earned him a broken nose, a split lip, countless broken ribs, and several sessions in jail. Plastic surgery has repaired his nose—in fact, improved it.

Peter's formal education was limited to four years. His parents didn't object when he quit school at 13 to become a paperboy, and then, in turn, a cement mixer, mail carrier, Yo-yo demonstrator, ditch digger, and

reporter. He never held any job long, because he wasn't interested in anything—until he won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. There he applied himself vigorously, and he has kept it up. Producer Sam Spiegel calls him "the most disciplined actor I've ever met."

His "Hamlet" with the Bristol Old Vic Company first won him the attention of the London critics. After that, he scored in a number of other plays, including "The Holiday," in which an attractive young Welsh actress, Sian Phillips, played his sister. She is now his wife.

Peter admits Sian doesn't have an easy time with him. "But when aroused, she is quite capable of giving me the old ham-



Peter's actress-wife Sian was a welcome visitor on set of "Lawrence of Arabia."

mer throw out of the window and into the trees," he adds. Just what arouses her, he didn't say, but the fact that he often stays out all night gambling while she is home asleep, and sleeps all day while she is taking care of the house and their three-year-old daughter might give her some justification for an occasional hammer lock.

But in spite of Peter's frolicking about town, he and his wife seem to have a genuine fondness for each other and have worked out a relationship which appears to have some substance—even though Peter refuses to work with her any longer. "It led to nothing but fights."

He was delighted when Sian visited him on the Jordanian location of "Lawrence," and before he agreed to sign for the title role in Columbia's forthcoming "Lord Jim," he insisted the studio pay for his wife's round-trip fare to the Bangkok location at least once every six weeks.

Today, Peter O'Toole is considered the hottest property on either side of the Atlantic, but he chooses his scripts carefully. A grin formed on his handsome face when he told me: "I don't want much money—just enough to keep me in suffocating luxury for the rest of my life."



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