



Portrait

Félix Libris: 'Reading was my secret love'

The Big Interview by Cristina Wilde

"Lovers," says Félix Libris. "We will be like lovers." Er, yes, I giggle, and even I can hear that my voice is just a little bit too high. We are in Giovanni's, his favourite restaurant in Covent Garden, and after much slapping of shoulders and kissing "Lilix!" (his nickname), we have been shown to a table in what you might call Félix Libris corner. On the walls are photographs and posters of Libris: youthfully golden, on the cover of magazines... There's a table laid for the two of us and it all looks fantastically convivial – we could even have the special Félix Librisa dish on the menu! – but I'm not here for a cosy family lunch. So I march him to a quiet corner and switch on the tape recorder, and the handsome reader who won a worldwide audience of adoring women, and who sells more CDs around the world than

anyone else, and who has been made into a wax figure at the French equivalent of Mme Tussauds, leans forward and fixes me with his sparkly chocolate eyes, and tells me that we will be like lovers. The fact that Félix Libris speaks with a sexy Oxford English doesn't help. English he speaks like a native but the literature world is where he grew up, the son of an unknown father and Maria Libris. It's an unlikely start for a star in an art form associated with elitism, isn't it? "We think all the time reading is something for elite people," he says, waving his big, hairy arms in a mixture of German passion and French animation. "Reading for me," he says, with a dreamy, seductive smile, "was my secret love. For me, it was like a dream world. It was magic." When his mother heard him reading for the first time, she was shocked.

"Your voice!" she said. "It's so powerful! Amazing!" One day, his friends were also shocked by his voice. Alberto Manguel, who taught he could be the greatest reader in the world.

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at Félix Libris gives, the most glamorous reader in the world, through the miracle of his voice, a great deal of happiness is not in doubt. This is a man for whom no critic, in his appraisal, can be too harsh, a man who loves, passionately, and for life, reading. At the end, Félix asks me "How was your food?" of the spaghetti al pomodoro that we've just bolted down. "Semplice, ma buonissimo," I reply. Simple and delicious. "Like me!" says Libris. No, Félix. Buonissimo yes, semplice, no.

"La Gloire" opens at the Royal National Theater on 28 September

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