

Rising stars get a big break in play

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TWO pupils from the Swish of the Curtain drama school have been treading the boards this week with The Royal Shakespeare Company.

Stuart Neal, 12, and Ryan Clark, 13, are appearing in *Cyrano De Bergerac* all this week at Poole Arts Centre on this the first visit to Poole by the RSC since the award-winning *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* in 1992.

Flamboyant poet, courageous soldier, witty philosopher, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, with his enormous nose and his splendid panache, is brave in everything except his love for the beautiful Roxane.

On this the centenary of Rostand's play, one of the tragi-comic romances of all time, the great stage actor Anthony Sher returns to the RSC to play the legendary hero.

Ryan Clarke, a Summerbee School pupil, and Stuart Neal, who is at Bournemouth School for Boys, attended auditions along with other young hopefuls at the Arts Centre recently, and were offered their parts as two beggar boys-cum-pickpockets.

Stuart has already gained experience playing a pick-pocket - at the age of 10 he landed a part as one of Fagin's gang in the West End production of *Oliver!*

After that he also appeared

By Hilary Porter

in *Nine* in the West End and was one of the boys chosen to appear on stage with Michael Jackson at the Brit Awards in 1996 when Jarvis Cocker made his much-publicised interruption to the superstar's performance of *Earth Song*.

Stuart told me: "I was quite upset when Jarvis Cocker messed up the performance. We had rehearsed for weeks and weeks but we just carried on. Michael Jackson was a nice guy. He didn't speak much - he was a bit shy and I didn't think he was weird at all, like people say."

Stuart has also appeared in several TV commercials including the current Philips' TV wide screen advert but he also recently landed his biggest part yet on TV - playing the young Tom in the forthcoming BBC period drama, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* which will be screened on November 9.

Like Stuart, Ryan also has his sights set on becoming a professional actor. His claim to fame was playing an extra in the blockbuster movie *Evita* with Madonna.

"I stood and held a candle in the scene where Eva Peron faints," he said. He was also an extra in *Pie in the Sky*.



STARS IN THEIR EYES: Stuart Neal (left) and Ryan Clarke