



## Love Letters with Martin Shaw

John Cooper QC speaks to actor & Kalisher Trust patron Martin Shaw ahead of his performance at Middle Temple Hall

In 2006, the top British actor Martin Shaw was playing Sir Thomas More in *A Man For All Seasons* at the Haymarket when he got a call from Anne Rafferty, then a High Court judge, following a leading career at the criminal bar.

She wanted to know if she and a few others could meet him after the night's performance and Shaw, already holding a deep admiration for the law and its process, could hardly say no. Their friendship grew and although any similarity between Rafferty and Judge John Deed, a High Court judge created by GF Newman and portrayed by Shaw is not only coincidental, it is non-existent, those legal links continued to grow.

### The Kalisher Trust

I catch Martin Shaw having 'car trouble' at his home in deepest Norfolk and talk soon turns to his love of classic cars, but we soon progress to his invaluable work for the Kalisher Trust—set up in the name of Michael Kalisher QC, who died prematurely at 55 in 1996.

Kalisher was a talented and well-liked member of the criminal bar who had a driving ambition to help able young people from all social backgrounds get a chance to ply their career in crime, as it were. The trust was set up in his name to perpetuate this objective.

Twelve years on and Shaw is its patron

and describes the trust as 'an incredibly important and vital charity'. But he is not content with just being a name on a letterhead. On Sunday 27 March, both Shaw and his long-time friend and colleague Jenny Seagrove will be presenting a reading of the successful West End play *Love Letters*, in aid of the trust.

*“Shaw is not content with just being a name on a letterhead”*

As you might expect, after so many stellar years in the acting profession, Martin Shaw has an address book to die for [he did tell me how old he was, but I am not going to waive privilege], and he contacted his friend Bill Kenwright and asked for permission to perform *Love Letters*. Of course, Mr Kenwright was only too pleased to agree. The performance will take place at Middle Temple Hall, which has a long-standing pedigree when it comes to theatrical works, *Twelfth Night* being performed in the presence of Shakespeare being another first.

One of the things you very quickly pick up about Martin Shaw is that when he commits to something, he commits for life

and talking to him about the challenges facing the criminal bar, someone really must suggest that he becomes an honorary member of the profession.

'The criminal bar must be allowed to flourish and explore the enormous talent pool that is being choked off,' he tells me and reminds me of the many young people from diverse social backgrounds who have been given lifelines by the trust.

One of them is Tommy Seagull, just finishing a paralegal position on the Infected Blood Inquiry and soon off to Florida to work at a public defender's office on death row cases.

Tommy found out about Kalisher on Twitter and was soon provided with the chance to have advocacy training and be given an insight into the criminal bar which he found 'transformative'.

He explained to me that the three basic principles of the Kalisher Trust are the provision of skill, financial backing and confidence which enables 'young people like me, unlikely to be given access to the bar' to have a better chance.

I asked Tommy what he meant by 'people like him'. Tommy is a young man of Indian heritage, his mother is a carer for his disabled brother and his father is now retired from an accountancy firm. That able people like Tommy perceive that the criminal bar is a place which might not afford them 'access' without organisations like Kalisher is the stuff of another article and in itself, gravely concerning, but for now, let's give the Kalisher Trust the recognition it richly deserves. Without charities like Kalisher and others like Young Citizens, young talent from some social backgrounds, to use Martin Shaw's words, will be 'choked off' from the criminal bar, which ultimately is to the detriment of all of us.

Tommy told me that sometimes young people feel that they 'do not belong at the bar'. It is a sentiment that I was well aware of back in the early 1980s but it came as a shock to hear that perception still exists. But as he went on to tell me, through the opportunities and mentorship offered by Kalisher, it 'stopped that feeling'.

There is no better reason then, to put every bum upon every seat in Middle Temple Hall on Sunday night.

NLJ

**Kalisher Theatrical Evening 2022:** *Love Letters*, 27 March 2022. Doors Open 17.30. Starts 18.00. Book at [bit.ly/3JpMKzc](http://bit.ly/3JpMKzc)

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