

Gareth Hunt out to avenge his outdated TV image

By Paula Citron
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

For some TV fans, British actor **Gareth Hunt** is frozen in time.

In his 20s, Hunt played Frederick the Footman in *Upstairs, Downstairs*; in his 30s, he was Mike Gambit in *The New Avengers*.

The actor is now 48 and those two mega-hit TV series are far in his past. The tell-tale mop of curly hair is streaked with gray

and the rugged face is lined. Hunt opened in Anthony Shaffer's *Sleuth* at the Bayview Playhouse last night.

"I'm delighted to be back to Toronto because *New Avengers* was made here," says Hunt, taking a break from *Sleuth* rehearsals.

"Basically, an actor is a strolling player. We can go anywhere — just pitch the tent or put up a ring of stones, and we're home."

Hunt's career has

demonstrated this restless spirit.

"A London lad", as he calls himself, Hunt was born in Battersea. Because he didn't want a routine job, he joined the merchant navy after leaving school to see the world.

"When I was 24, I decided to try acting and auditioned for the Webber-Douglas Academy. I was a raw talent, but they must have spotted something in me."

Hunt's first role was with a student production of Pinter's

The Birthday Party which toured to the island of Malta. His second was four lines in a TV show called *Frontier* about the Indian army.

After that, it was honing his stagecraft with a repertory company in Ipswich.

"This is where my career really started," says the actor. "I earned six pounds a week, but I got to try lots of parts. I discovered that romantic leading roles or upper crust types weren't for me."

After Ipswich, Hunt moved on to England's big time theatre, spending time with companies like the Bristol Old Vic, Royal Shakespeare, National Theatre and Royal Court companies.

When he snared the part of Mike Gambit, Hunt was playing Guiderstern to Albert Finney's Hamlet.

His *New Avengers* co-star Patrick McNee told Hunt that more people would see one episode of the TV show than his

whole life in the theatre.

"He said I'd become a household name, and he was right. I also did a commercial for 10 years — I was Mr. Nescafe — so I'm known for that as well."

"In fame terms, your life means little unless you've been seen on the box. You want it, and then you spend the rest of your life fighting like mad to break the image. People expect you to always be the same."

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