

When the boys from

## Spandau Ballet

were cast to play **the Kray twins,**

Britain's most notorious criminals,  
critics snickered,

**"Pop stars can't act."**

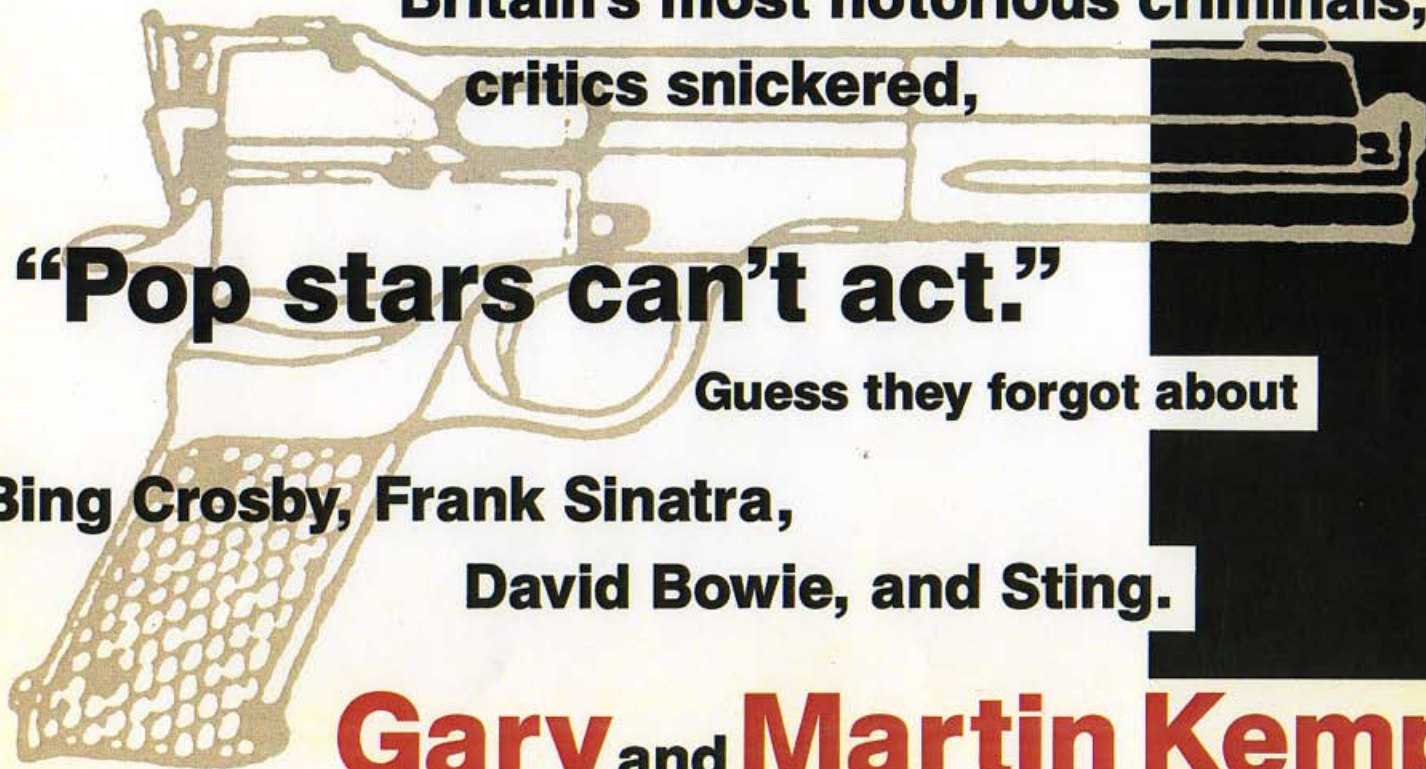
Guess they forgot about

Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra,

David Bowie, and Sting.

**Gary and Martin Kemp**

wear their characters  
as easily as their kilts.





BY  
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**Gary and Martin Kemp are not themselves today.** A little out of their heads. Gary keeps apologizing for sneezing in midsentence. Hay fever. Martin moans softly into a huge dish of vanilla ice cream. Hangover. "Load of bullocks, champagne cocktail. Still feels like the same cheap hangover the next day," the younger (29) founding member of Spandau Ballet mumbles good-naturedly to his older brother (31). "But once in a while it's good for you to get out of your head."

That depends on how far out. Reggie and Ronnie Kray took it to the limit. Though they were not infamous in America, in London during the late '50s and '60s the Krays luxuriated in the kind of garish celebrity the cocky, streetwise, mother-loving thugs

# Brotherhoods

Jimmy Cagney constantly portrayed only dreamed about. The brothers ran nightclubs and casinos and moved in the same circles as Judy Garland and Frank Sinatra. Grocers gave Reg's wife groceries for free. Extortion instead of sweat earned "the boys" and their organization, the Firm, a fortune. Top of the world, Mum.

Except the Krays made sure they stayed there by never firing blanks. The only dancing they liked to do was on someone's grave. And a grapefruit in the face was no match for a freshly sharpened razor. The twins ran other mobs off their turf in Bethnal Green by the sheer force of their fearless, vicious personalities. Retired from active duty, they're currently enjoying their twenty-first year of rent-free accommodations courtesy of Her Majesty: Reg is serving a life sentence at Gartree, a maximum-security prison, while Ron, a paranoid schizophrenic, is spending his life sentence at Broadmoor, a psychiatric hospital for the criminally insane. Their exploits, some real, many exaggerated, have become the stuff of another-brandy-by-the-fireside ghost stories only slightly less juicy than those starring Jack the Ripper. Their lives have been brilliantly chronicled in John Pearson's biography *The Profession of Violence*. And their story has



now been brought to the screen in Peter Medak's brutal film *The Krays*.

In Ron Kray's words, murder "felt fucking marvelous. I have never felt so good, so bloody alive before or since." No wonder the film immediately attracted attention in England when its producers set off the assumptive British press by selecting whom it termed two princes of pop rock to portray these legendary psychopaths. After all, regardless of Spandau Ballet's instant pop stardom due to a spontaneous string of hits in 1981 ("To Cut a Long Story Short," "Musclebound," and "Chant No. 1"), the band garnered more recognition for its eccentric costumes—kilts, ruffles, pseudo-pirate gear—marking them as standard-bearers of Britain's New Romantic movement, which also spawned Adam Ant, Boy George, and Duran Duran. If their tawdry finery seems laughable in retrospect, take a look at what M. C. Hammer wears in his videos. More important, Spandau has lasted. Gary's still writing most of the songs and playing guitar, while Martin plays bass.

The British press has since fallen all over itself with apology, for while *The Krays* has generated controversy—the glamour of crime once again—the Kemps have generated great reviews. They are not as surprised as the critics; to Gary and Martin the film was not a lark, but rather the chance to go back to careers that began 10 years before Spandau. Both were child actors. Gary was featured in the film *Hide and Seek* and Stephen Frears' *Playthings* for the BBC. Martin was seen on the BBC in *The Glittering Prizes* and in the series *Rumpole of the Bailey*.

The film was also a chance for the brothers to explore another path that at one time was not so far away. Martin and Gary Kemp grew up in circumstances not dissimilar to the Krays': working-class poor, their world was dominated by women. Gary, who used to sit up all night listening to the soused singers in the pub next door, as if he had much choice, remembers his father telling him about the notorious exploits of the nasty little Kray twins. The Kemps' syncretized, symbiotic, bad-brother-worse-brother tandem performance is what keeps pushing your face right back into the unbridled violence of the movie. They almost know too much about how these boys felt, what they saw. As Gary sits musing on his brother's hangover by claiming, "You need to laugh about rubbish," he unconsciously stares with the same chilling gaze he perfected in order to play Ron. One is reminded that one man's rubbish can be another man's gold record, or another man's body count, depending on how one makes one's music.

The Fop Five c. 1983  
(left to right): John  
Keeble, Gary Kemp,  
Tony Hadley,  
Martin Kemp, and  
Steve Norman.



DAVE HOGAN/LOI

## "I'm more excited about acting

KAREN: Islington, where you grew up, wasn't that far from the Krays' Bethnal Green.

GARY: We come from a very similar situation, a real working-class background. Our dad was a printer. We had some auntie living upstairs and others downstairs—11 people in the house. And no bathroom.

GARY: One toilet outside.

Very hygienic.

GARY: We didn't bathe. We went to the local bathhouse or swimming pool, or had what's called a "good wash" in the kitchen. When I was born we still had gas lighting—there was no electricity in the house. We didn't get an indoor toilet until I was 14.

That's 1973.

MARTIN: But we were lucky in one respect: when we left school our parents gave us the time to decide what we wanted to do. I'll never forget that. My dad found me work with a printer—a really good job for our area—and then had enough faith in me six months later to write this to my boss: "Martin wants to leave because he feels he wants to become a pop star." People laughed at him and me, but that's the sort of faith both our parents had in us.

One of my biggest worries is that my baby daughter, Harley [he is married to

Shirley Holliman, former backup singer for Wham! and now half of singing duo Pepsi & Shirley], won't grow up with those same values. I was on my way to a photo shoot recently in a big Cadillac limo and I'd strapped Harley in the backseat. As I saw her sitting there looking out the window I thought, "Oh no, my childhood was nothing like this."

But you were both child actors, right?

GARY: We studied at the Anna Scher Children's Theatre in Islington, North London, two days a week after school. Whenever a local cockney kid was needed for tv work she'd find one. For our first job—I was 10, Martin, eight—we played brothers.

MARTIN: It's incredible. Not only were we first cast together as brothers, but then were in the band together, and now have done our first feature together still playing brothers. I loved doing *The Krays* with Gary. I could look across the set and see him the same way I had for the past 28 years of my life. I couldn't believe we got that chance.

Don't you ever hate each other?

GARY: Sometimes, but we tend to respect and accept our differences. Ron and Reg Kray are very different because while we found it easy to act them as brothers, the telepathy, parallel emotions, everything

else was distorted as their relationship was one of violence, and this third character—the Twin—was a subconscious they both shared, a kind of choreographed duality that was very powerful, like Janus, the two-headed monster.

What about their menacing body language?

GARY: Once I put the clothes on I felt very confident. I already knew the body language of the working class, and we trained to box for six months. When you learn to center yourself—it's something to do with your shoulders—you can acquire the stance and power that they had. The way they'd gesticulate came from boxing. And Ronnie looked people straight in the eye. It was not nice.

Yet people in the East End revere the Krays. They'll still say that the streets were safer back then, that the twins always protected the women and children.

GARY: They only killed their own, is what most say. But just because football hooligans only beat up other football hooligans doesn't mean that innocent people don't get caught in the cross fire. They walked into pubs with firearms—that's hardly cleaning up the streets.

MARTIN: And though people say there weren't any muggings, extortion is just another word for mugging. Instead of saying, "Hand over your money" on the



street, they'd go into shops and say, "Give me 10 pounds." I'll bet everyone in the East End claims to have known them.

GARY: Especially the taxi drivers. They were always trying to give us advice; they'd all been in the gang or met the twins. But as we listened, we realized that this movie was going to be definitive because no real documentary was ever shot of them. One taxi driver said, "You know how they got their superpowers, don'tcha?" I said I didn't realize they had any superpowers. "Well," he went on, "the story is, their mum would get them to drink the juice she cooked the greens in." Oh. I see. Did you talk to the real Krays?

MARTIN: I didn't want to meet Reggie because I didn't feel that was the way into the character. He's not the same person he was 20 years ago. I wanted to capture his attitude without impersonating him, so I talked to other people who knew him, like his close family. We were lucky to meet their Aunt May, because she died two weeks after we met her. She was the only person who spoke about Ronnie and Reggie as if they were still just bad boys, the way they were when they had their shoes off and were watching tv. GARY: Aunt May is proof of how his family pandered to Ronnie's schizophrenia;

died—the Krays waned off. They were from the real world. That's how I had to play it.

Do they think they've done anything wrong? GARY: That's the thing. No. Ronnie doesn't believe he's bad. I had to find that third dimension, the imaginary side of him that wasn't the gangster, because he enjoyed the legend and the drama, the body language, and the powerful hierarchy he built around himself.

We've disturbed a lot of people here in England with this film. They all ask if we were glamorizing violence. Well, no, because the Krays don't come out at the end of the film as heroes, but yes, they were glamorous, they were charismatic, and that's why we were so interested in them. The movie has to show that, but I believe the film is moral in the end. It shows murder the way it truly is—horrific. It's very difficult to watch. But enough critics watched it closely enough to give it favorable reviews and eat their words as far as you were concerned, since they'd jumped all over your pop-star status before it was released.

GARY: It's very sad when people say pop stars can't act. You have to remember that 90 percent of all actors can't act, while a lot of lead singers—which I'm not—build up a persona or facade on-

But didn't Spandau Ballet go on tour shortly after you finished shooting?

GARY: Yes, and I was terrified I'd still be Ronnie Kray. Luckily, once I was doing my day job, as it were, I was okay. It should be like bike riding for you. You've been very successful, from your first hit single, "To Cut a Long Story Short."

MARTIN: I suppose so. Success when you're young doesn't surprise you. You expect it. And besides, bands are like gangs. You don't join when you're 30—you start off when you're 17 or 18 and you've all got the same ambition and energy. Bands become harder when you get older. Your whole scene back then—the Blitz club, Boy George—made such an impact on music and fashion. How did Spandau Ballet get its name?

GARY: God knows. We saw ourselves as vaguely European, very dark.

MARTIN: A friend of ours came back from Berlin and had seen the name written on a toilet wall somewhere. It's probably stolen from some other band that was less successful with it. [Actually, the name Spandau refers to the site of the Berlin prison that housed Rudolf Hess, its sole occupant when he died in 1987, after which the prison was immediately demolished.]

Who came up with the inspiration to dress

up?

GARY: If I find him I'll kill him! I haven't a clue. I guess it seemed right at the time—it was all ingrained in the London scene we were part of. Before the '80s and MTV, British youth culture no longer had an identity in the pop world, and the whole Blitz thing was the first time that what young people wore stepped back out onto a stage or tv in a long while. MARTIN: That whole period of my life is a complete haze. I remember we went to New York, and we were walking down the street with one of us dressed as Robin Hood, another as a monk, and another in a kilt. We told the press of America that this was the Future of Rock 'n' Roll! In all seriousness. They must have thought, "What is going on?" It was August and the sun was blazing, and we were walking along in our mum's curtain drapes.

GARY: But for 10 years it worked for us. Now it's time for something else. And flamboyant murderers seemed like a good idea.

MARTIN: For starters, anyway. Q



**because I'm not really a good musician and I don't write songs. I've not had real artistic fulfillment from being in the band."**—Martin Kemp

sometimes they'd treat him as the man of the house, but whenever he had an episode they'd gather round and protect him. Or sometimes treat him as a boy and say, "Oh, he doesn't mean it that way, he's ill."

When did he finally go off?

MARTIN: After his first time in prison. He'd never been separated from Reggie before, and when he came out he didn't recognize his mum or his brother. He thought they were all spies out to get him. After that they said he was never the same.

Did you eventually meet him?

GARY: I did, a couple of times. It was important for me to confirm that he was a human being, because he's such a myth. Unlike Marilyn Monroe or James Dean—who remained larger than life after they

stage. I lost my personality on this film. I didn't recognize myself with my hair dyed. I never enjoyed it until I read the reviews. It was so emotional, so heavy; we were playing serious characters. Luckily my wife [Sadie Frost] is an actress as well and knew what I was going through.

MARTIN: My daughter saved me. About four weeks before filming started Harley was born, so there was something in my life that was a million times more important than the film. I could come home, look at her, and forget I was Reggie Kray. However, I'm actually much more excited about acting than music because I'm not really a good musician, I don't write songs, so I've not had any real artistic fulfillment from being in the band. Acting's done that.