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**AFTER ONE OF THE DAMPEST SUMMERS IN MEMORY, THE LYRIC CELEBRATES... WATER**

**TACKLING THE ISSUE OF GLOBAL WARMING IS WHAT BOLD, INNOVATIVE THEATRE IS ALL ABOUT. CHRISTIAN McLAUGHLIN REPORTS ON A YOUNG ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S AMBITIOUS PROJECT**

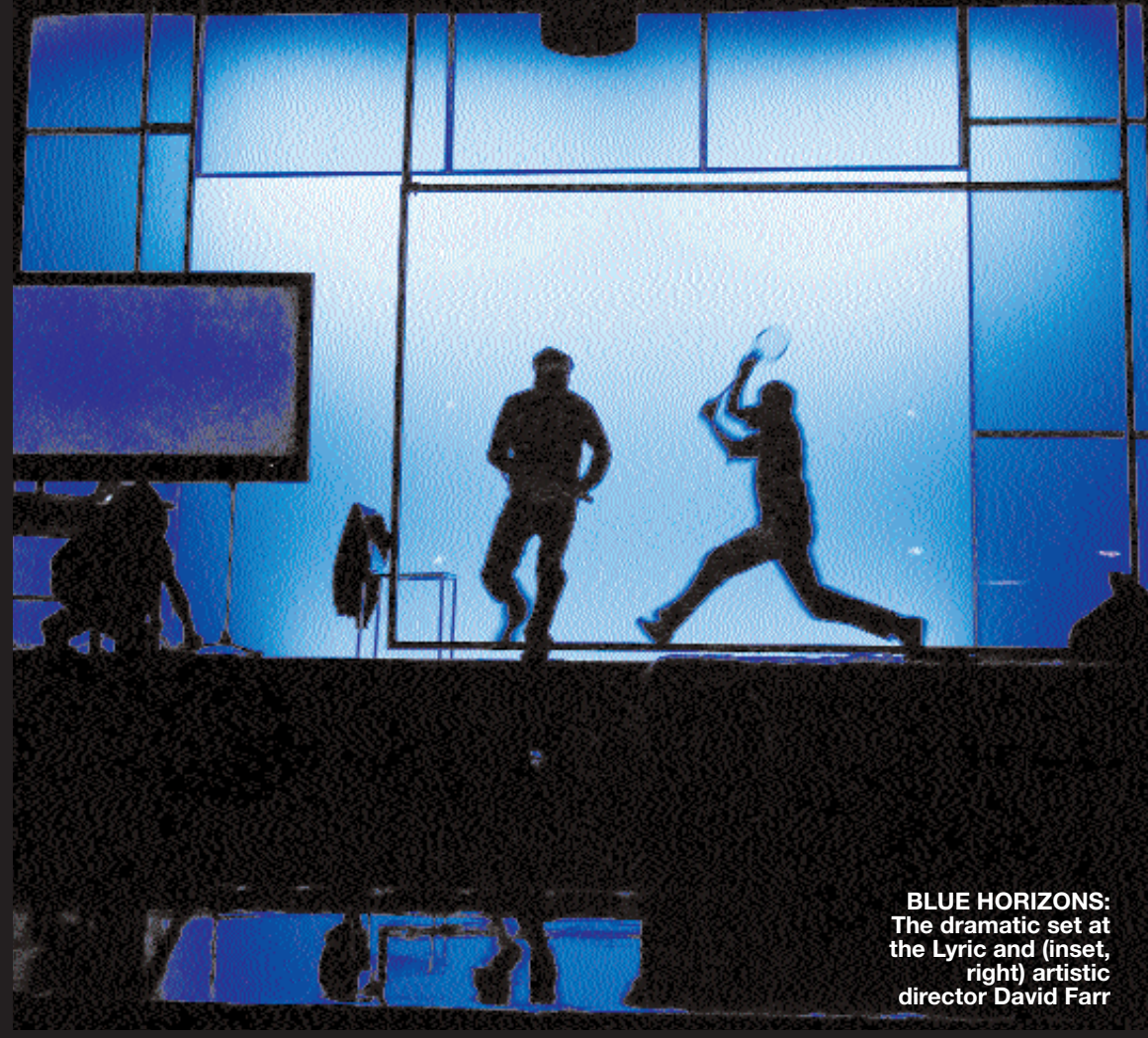
**AHOY THERE!** It's time to swap your suits and boots for swimsuits and boat shoes at one of London's most daring theatres.

The Lyric Hammersmith will shortly be taking the plunge with its latest production, *Water*.

Promising to take you deep into the

mystery of the big blue with enchanting visuals and sounds, the play will tell touching personal stories set against the rising water table caused by global warming.

It's a tall order by any venue's standards, but no feat of theatrical ingenuity seems beyond the Lyric's



**BLUE HORIZONS:** The dramatic set at the Lyric and (inset, right) artistic director David Farr

artistic director since 2005, David Farr. David, 37, of St Margaret's, Twickenham, is a man on mission to change the minds of Londoners who instinctively doubt they love theatre.

Blaming boring, 'naturalistic' acting that is the objective of more traditional productions, David says: "My type of theatre isn't about some stuffy bloke pretending to be someone else." Yet neither are his productions experimental for experimental's sake, David assures. "The play may not look exactly like real life, but the key is to tell a story in the most imaginative way without sacrificing any of its poignancy."

He has arguably already proved his point, directing the visually astonishing and hugely successful adaptation of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* with Icelandic troupe Vesturport, during his first year in charge.

In Kafka's claustrophobic tale the main character mutates from travelling salesman to housebound cockroach – a seemingly insuperable complication somehow turned to brilliance by the imaginative use of climbing props on the walls and springs in the floor of the set.

"Our budgets are never very big, but sometimes special effects don't need to be overly elaborate," David says, this time referring to *Water*.

Co-produced with British troupe Filter, and Radiohead's creative director Andi Watson, *Water* will make use of sound and visuals to such an extent that it might "feel more like a gig, but do not expect Rolling Stone-like multi-million pound pyrotechnics", David laughs.

Growing up without a theatrical background was perhaps the key to

**'I WANT TO CREATE GROUND-BREAKING REINVENTIVE THEATRE'**

his free approach within the industry. Having a father who was a surveyor and a mother who taught in primary school, the Cambridge University graduate admits to "having no clue" about what he wanted to do until very late on.

"All I knew was that I loved film and books thanks to an English teacher (the late Dr James Hansford) at Guildford Grammar School," he says.

"Dr Hansford ran an after-school club where he would play us Fellini films and also took us on occasional trips to the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square."

Inspired by a Sam Shepard play he saw there, David then went on to combine his dual loves of film and literature by forming a theatre group when studying English at Cambridge. He

teamed up with the now world-famous actress Rachel Weisz and

acclaimed TV writer Sasha Hails, with predictable results. Their troupe, Talking Tongues, won a *Guardian* drama award at the Edinburgh Festival in 1991. The experience "shot them into the limelight" and by the looks of things they are still firmly there.

David has put on productions at the National and the Barbican, and has been the artistic director of both the Gate Theatre in Notting Hill and the Bristol Old Vic.

Now running the Lyric – an opportunity he describes as a "dream come true" – one wonders whether he has anything left to aspire to.

"Of course," he replies. "I have a massive respect for the older generation of fiercely independent theatre companies such as Simon McBurney's Complicite and Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch's Improbable."

David even goes so far as to say that Complicite's *A Disappearing Number*, which recently ran at the Barbican, is the sort of performance *Water* is aiming to emulate.

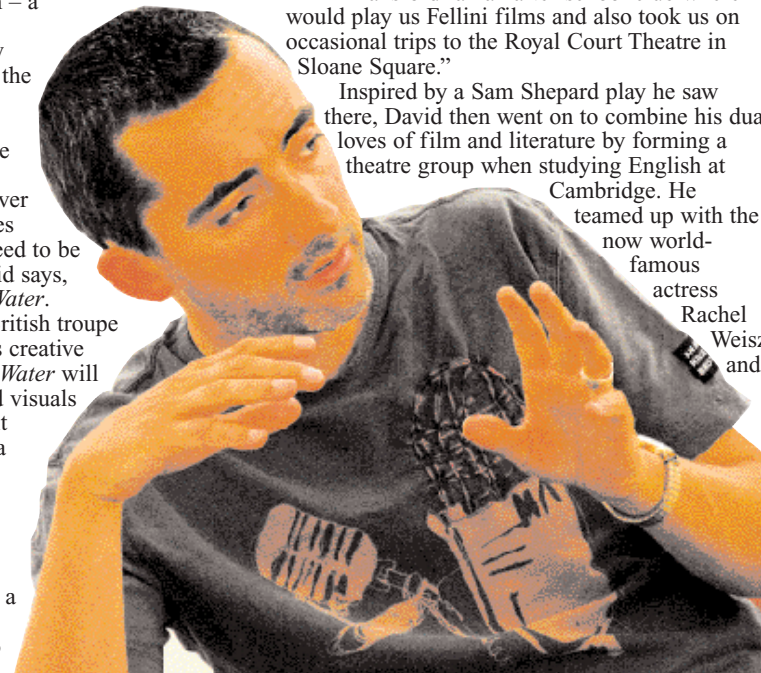
With *A Disappearing Number* widely regarded as the show of the year, *Water* has set itself a high standard. But this is exactly the sort of challenge David and the Lyric have never shied away from.

"I want to create ground-breaking, reinventive theatre that tells a 90-minute story in the way a film does," he says, describing how *Water*'s storyline will race from continent to continent using live internet-based telecommunication tools such as Skype.

Revolving around the tale of the two sons of marine biologist Peter Ball, who first publicised global warming in 1980, *Water* is a combination of classical storytelling and innovative theatrical techniques.

David describes the endeavour as both complicated and hard work. But if the reception in Southampton – where it previewed this week – is anything to go by, David's latest Lyric adventure could flow very smoothly indeed.

● *Water*, by Filter. Not recommended for under 14s. £9-27. 7.30pm daily. On Thursday (Oct 25), free post-show discussion. At the Lyric Theatre, Lyric Square, Hammersmith, until November 3. Saturday matinee on final day, 2.30pm. Call: 08700 500 511. See: [www.lyric.co.uk](http://www.lyric.co.uk)



## RESTORATION IS BACK IN VOGUE IN THE COUNTRY

### REVIEW

**THE COUNTRY WIFE**  
THEATRE ROYAL, HAYMARKET

WHAT PLAY could be deemed so corrupt that it remained unperformed for more than 170 years?

The answer is William Wycherley's restoration comedy *The Country Wife*, and it's back as the first production of the new Haymarket Theatre Company.

The story centres on Horner – a lascivious man-about-town – and his ingenious scheme for rampant mass-seduction of London's society women. By spreading false rumours of his own impotence, he gains the sympathy of the husbands of the town and, more importantly, access to their wives.

Directed by the former artistic director of the Almeida Theatre, Jonathan Kent, the show paints a decadent vision of a society steeped in hedonism, hypocrisy and cynicism. Decked-out in sumptuous period costume, some of the modernising touches, such as pool tables and bottles of beer on set, compromise the integrity.

Parallels between Wycherley's amoral 17th century society and our own are clear through the near-three-hour show.

Toby Stephens is excellent as the swaggering lust-bucket Horner, while newcomer Fiona Glascott is convincing as his prey. All in all, a cracking comedy well worth bringing back to life.

● *The Country Wife* runs at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket. Box office: 0844 844 2353. **Laurence Green**