

Landmark dance production

LINKED THEMES:
Liquid Landscape dancers at Smeaton's Tower



by **SU CARROLL**

Features Editor

IT TAKES a visitor to make you see things in a different way, and American Stephan Koplowitz is more than happy to share his excitement about being in the West Country.

He is thrilled to discover that Seymour House in Devonport has a Camera Obscura – they are a personal obsession of his – and he is fascinated by the way in which Sir Francis Drake was the first man to bring a water supply from the moor into the city.

And the fact that the Pilgrim Fathers set off for America from the Mayflower Steps in Plymouth hasn't passed him by either.

But Stephan is no ordinary tourist. When he looks at these locations and the iconic Smeaton's Tower, busy Armada Way and The Great Barn at Buckland Abbey, he sees them through the eyes of a choreographer.

He is sending more than a postcard home: this visitor is creating dance pieces that will be performed at eight sites in and around Plymouth and elsewhere in Devon with his TaskForce company.

The Liquid Landscapes project – which began last year in Los Angeles – is, to quote the literature, “a response to the extraordinary resource that shapes our environment from water access and rights driving the economy in Los Angeles, to the landscape of Plymouth and its community connected by the sea”.

Stephan is famous for putting dance where you never thought dance would go, with large-scale public art performances in New York's Grand Central Station, the British Library and the Natural History Museum.

He is bringing the second phase of his international outdoor dance project, Liquid Landscapes, to Devon, as part of Dartington's mission to develop exciting new art work outside the walls of the Dartington Hall Estate.

He has been working with professional performers in his own company as well as locally, and will work alongside local artists.

This week's programme of daily events culminates in promenade tours of the Tinside Lido.

The shows are all linked by the theme of water.

“We're carrying on from Los Angeles last year,” says Stephan in a break from his packed rehearsal schedule. “It's all about water and water-related stories.”

In Los Angeles, water has a political dimension. At the beginning of the 20th century, engineer William

Mulholland transformed the desert with the 233-mile Los Angeles Aqueduct which took water from the Owens Valley in Central California to the city.

It effectively drained Owens Lake within 20 years and started the California Water Wars, the inspiration for the storyline of the film Chinatown.

“Water is a vital part of the global economy. It's an issue that everyone needs to be aware of. Without water the economy of Plymouth would not exist.”

“One of the things that I believe as a site specific artist is that on some level the site is just the starting point. You can see the site in a new way, even if it's a site you know very well.”

“It's not my motivation to create something new from the place that I'm at. I have the site give me my instructions. Some sites do that with their history.”

“I did that with the Great Barn at Buckland Abbey, the home of Sir Francis Drake. In this case I felt the need to immerse myself in history. One of the pieces of information I found was that he was one of the people responsible for bringing water to Plymouth.”

“He was the William Mulholland of Plymouth. They were two men who had a certain amount of wealth and means.”

“And coming here, I learned a lot of things about Smeaton's Tower. Es-

entially, it's a lighthouse on The Hoe and on some level you don't really need to know more than that... but I did find out that the design of it became copied for all other lighthouses.

“Some place I approach the work visually, and in some place historically. Every site calls upon different levels of research. I get a real sense of a city from walking around.”

“Plymouth reminds me of some towns in Long Island which is near New York City with its working class population and its tourist population and its sense of history. Plymouth has this energy and it's great that we are going to be part of that community and that we will make our work on site at these places.”

Stephan and his dancers have spent three weeks in Devon on a tight schedule of daily rehearsals on location and in the studio.

Daily performances include film documentaries at the University of Plymouth and a show at the Barbican Theatre. The theatre's artistic director, Mark Laville, said they were really excited about Liquid Landscapes.

“Stephan Koplowitz is going to shake up the city, bringing pioneering public dance to the streets and people of Plymouth,” he said. “We expect big crowds and lots of buzz throughout the city.”

Stephan says he loves to do site specific work, even after more than ten years. “One of the reasons is that I just love being able to make work out of what people consider their daily life. The act of making art and artists is often, on some level, misunderstood. But we think about all the same things that workers in a factory think about – family, job security, whatever. We just manufacture what we make in different ways. Art can be made out of anything. There's no right or wrong about art-making. It's exciting. It's a chance to play. In the end that's what we're doing. That's what creativity is. It's play.”

For more information on the performances, see panel or visit www.dartington.org/arts/taskforce. Liquid Landscapes is part of the Plymouth Summer Festival, Dance-ing Devon and Respond!, an RSA initiative to highlight the arts' engagement with environmental issues.



PROJECT:
Stephan Koplowitz. Dancers in action, below



DATES: diary

■ **MONDAY JUNE 22**

There will be a screening of two original dance shorts created during last year's TaskForce USA – Kid Galahad Karaoke and Chinatown: Watermark (inspired by locations from Roman Polanski's film, Chinatown) plus a short documentary on the project in America, footage from the Plymouth rehearsals and a question and answer session with Stephan Koplowitz.

Jill Craigie Cinema, Roland Lewinsky Building, University of Plymouth at 7.30pm. Tickets £5 (concessions £3): 01752 585050.

■ **TUESDAY JUNE 23**

A Camera Obscura in Devonport, is part of a multi-site performance in different locations. Every half an hour, a small audience inside the Camera Obscura in Seymour House will be able to see the dancers some distance away. Performances are every 30 minutes.

Seymour House, Mount Wise, between 3pm and 6pm. Free tickets must be reserved online at www.dartington.org/taskforce.

■ **WEDNESDAY JUNE 24**

TaskForce moves into Plymouth City Centre and their first performance is down the centre of Armada Way, starting at the Copthorne Hotel and working down to the sundial.

Armada Way, 1pm and 5pm.

■ **THURSDAY JUNE 25**

Visual artist Ella Huhne will work with TaskForce to create a performance in and around Smeaton's Tower on Plymouth Hoe to mark its 250th anniversary year.

Smeaton's Tower, Plymouth, 1pm, 2pm and 3pm.

■ **FRIDAY JUNE 26**

Guest Helen Snell, a paper artist, will be involved in the performance to highlight the iconic status of the Mayflower Steps.

Pilgrims Point, The Barbican, 12pm, 1pm.

In the evening you can see TaskForce Remixed at The Barbican Theatre at 8pm. Tickets £5 (concessions £3), 01752 585050.

■ **SATURDAY/SUNDAY JUNE 27/28**

The week ends with a unique promenade tour of Tinside Lido on the Hoe.