

# THE INDEPENDENT

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## Dame Judi to narrate the first show on the Thames since 1717

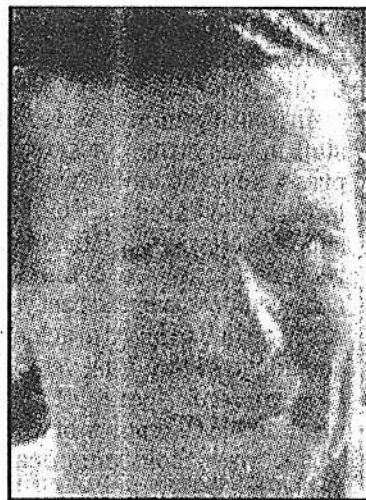
BY DAVID LISTER  
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AN ARTIST who lives on a houseboat on the Thames has persuaded the Oscar-winning actress Dame Judi Dench and the Royal Ballet star Deborah Bull to take part in the first cultural performance on the river since Handel's *Water Music* in the 18th century.

Max Couper, who exhibits installations on barges and tows them along the river, convinced Dame Judi with the idea of her narrating a mixed theatrical/opera/ballet performance, which he would largely write and choreograph.

He then won over the Royal Opera and Royal Ballet to take part in the free performance. Mr Couper will ensure that, as well as entertaining spectators along the river, the show will stop outside the Commons terrace and Lambeth Palace.

The story is of a pregnant



**Dame Judi Dench is to appear in a performance on the Thames of 'Fleeting Opera,' by Max Couper, right**

matriarch floating down the river. It will be in costume on two barges with 80ft masts and sumptuous sets. Narrating the piece will be Dame Judi's most bizarre role yet. But, she said, "Any opportunity to be part of Max Couper's waterborne artwork that brings together opera, ballet, and the spoken

word I find irresistible. The last time any such serious artistic statement was created and performed for the river was Handel's *Water Music* in 1717. I passionately believe the Thames is underused. This draws attention to it in a spirited way."

The show, *Fleeting Opera*, will

form part of the year-long String of Pearls festival, which has concentrated on the river and increasing public access to it and the institutions alongside it.