

## Metamorphosis

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### Patrick Marmion first night review

#### **METAMORPHOSIS**

Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith

**THIS** adaptation of Franz Kafka's bleak tale of a salesman who turns into a giant insect is one of London's hottest shows.

It features the exciting young Icelandic high-wire artist, Gisli Orn Gardarsson, who recently brought us an aerial *Romeo & Juliet* and it is directed by one of the best literary adaptors in the business, David Farr. And to cap it all, it has a haunting score by that cult musician and maestro of misery, Nick Cave.

In some ways it's a recipe for disaster. Too many cooks spoiling the broth. But in the event this is an 85-minute masterpiece which brings out all the sweetness and terror that lies at the heart of Kafka's parable of self loathing.

Gardarsson himself nimbly and athletically plays the hapless Gregor Samsa who finds himself transformed into a gigantic beetle one morning.

And although his sister Grete champions him in the way teenage girls champion anything against their parents, he becomes a detested burden which the family soon realise they must exterminate.

Parts of David Farr's spellbinding staging of the 1912 story presage the Holocaust and Gregor's father cheerfully calls out the motto which was to stand over the gates of Auschwitz: 'Work will set us free.'

But the genius of Farr's production is to locate the psychological pain that lies at the centre of this family tragedy.

The design, in particular, is crucial in echoing the story's terrible shift of perspective so that Gardarsson is forced to scuttle about upside down in his lair above the family living room. Occasionally he breaks out to plead for help, but only causes terror and panic, convincing his loved ones of the need for a final solution.

The most wonderful thing about this unsettling production is that it is, in the end, beautiful, eerie and terribly touching.

This is due in no small part to Cave's music. He uses a near constant polyphony of guitars and violins which duet intermittently with a melancholy piano.

This lends an epic, cinematic quality as well as a sense of dread and foreboding.

I came out wondering how to get hold of the CD. Let's hope Cave doesn't keep us waiting long.



*Exciting: Gisli  
Orn Gardarsson*