

Russell's HOMECOMING

Most Kiwis will know him as one of TV3's 'weather guys', but Russell Dixon – star of the upcoming New Zealand production of *Miss Saigon* – is the wearer of many other hats writes **Sarah Illingworth**.

Born and raised on the West Coast of Auckland, the actor returned to his home town from the UK in 2010 to get married and 'settle down' with his new wife after a three-year stint performing in acclaimed productions like the musical *Blood Brothers* and *The Witches of Eastwick*.

"I'd always had this boyhood dream of heading to the UK and treading the boards on the West End stage," says the actor, "and just seeing if I had what it took to mix with the best of them, in what can be described as one of the holy grails of theatre."

He certainly did. Within a week of settling in London, Dixon landed a top agent; he auditioned for *Blood Brothers* about a week and a half later, and was offered the dual role of Narrator and Mr Lyons about a week after that. He also performed in a 'star cast' run of the show at the Empire Theatre in Liverpool as part of the 20-year anniversary of the musical in 2008. That run was immediately followed by a 10-month tour of the UK as understudy to Marti Pellow of Wet Wet Wet fame, at the time performing in the lead role of Daryl van Horne in the equally storied production *The Witches of Eastwick*.

A veritable jack of all trades when it comes to the stage, Dixon has also performed in many productions throughout New Zealand. He's done mandatory time on *Shortland Street* as 'Paul the rollerblader', faced off against Jamie Oliver in the Pam's 'Duelling Chefs' commercials and had roles on *Hercules* and *Riverworld*. He sings, dances, acts and has even been known to pick up an instrument or two when a role calls for it.

In May, he'll take all that a step further when he appears alongside the inimitable Tina Cross in the David Atkins-directed New Zealand production of *Miss Saigon*, a legendary show that's been running in various guises for nigh on 20 years. Appearing in the lead role of Chris, a conflicted American GI who meets, and loses, the love of his life, Kim (played by rising star Christiana Zhu, pictured), in Saigon during the Vietnam War. Dixon is excited to bring his own flavour to the role.

"The role of Chris has been on my radar for about 10 years. It's a role that I've wanted to play because he's emotionally charged, he's an interesting character and he's also vocally demanding as well."

Having received mostly private training as a youngster, Dixon explains that for the most part his skills have been learnt on the job. "Every time you do a new show, whether it's a dancing show, or a singing show, or a show that combines all the three disciplines... you just grow as an actor in that way. That's been the biggest training ground for me."

Though he's clearly happy to be home, it's also obvious the itch to 'tread the boards' elsewhere is as strong as ever. One would be wise to see Dixon perform locally before the call of brighter lights draws him away from our shores once again.

MISS SAIGON

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RING OF FIRE

Tex Perkins and The Tennessee Four bring the life story of Johnny Cash to the stage in *The Man in Black*.

The two-hour show features *Ring of Fire*, *I Walk the Line*, *Folsom Prison Blues* and many more hits.

The show comes to New Zealand after an enormously successful tour across Australia last year.

Writer Robert Jarman of *The Mercury*, Hobart, said, "The tools of Perkins' trade are deep-felt emotion, fine-tuned expression and utter authenticity."

June Carter fans need not be concerned, Rachael Tidd is along for the ride as a feminine counterpart to Perkins' take on the deep tones of Johnny Cash.



THE MAN IN BLACK

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