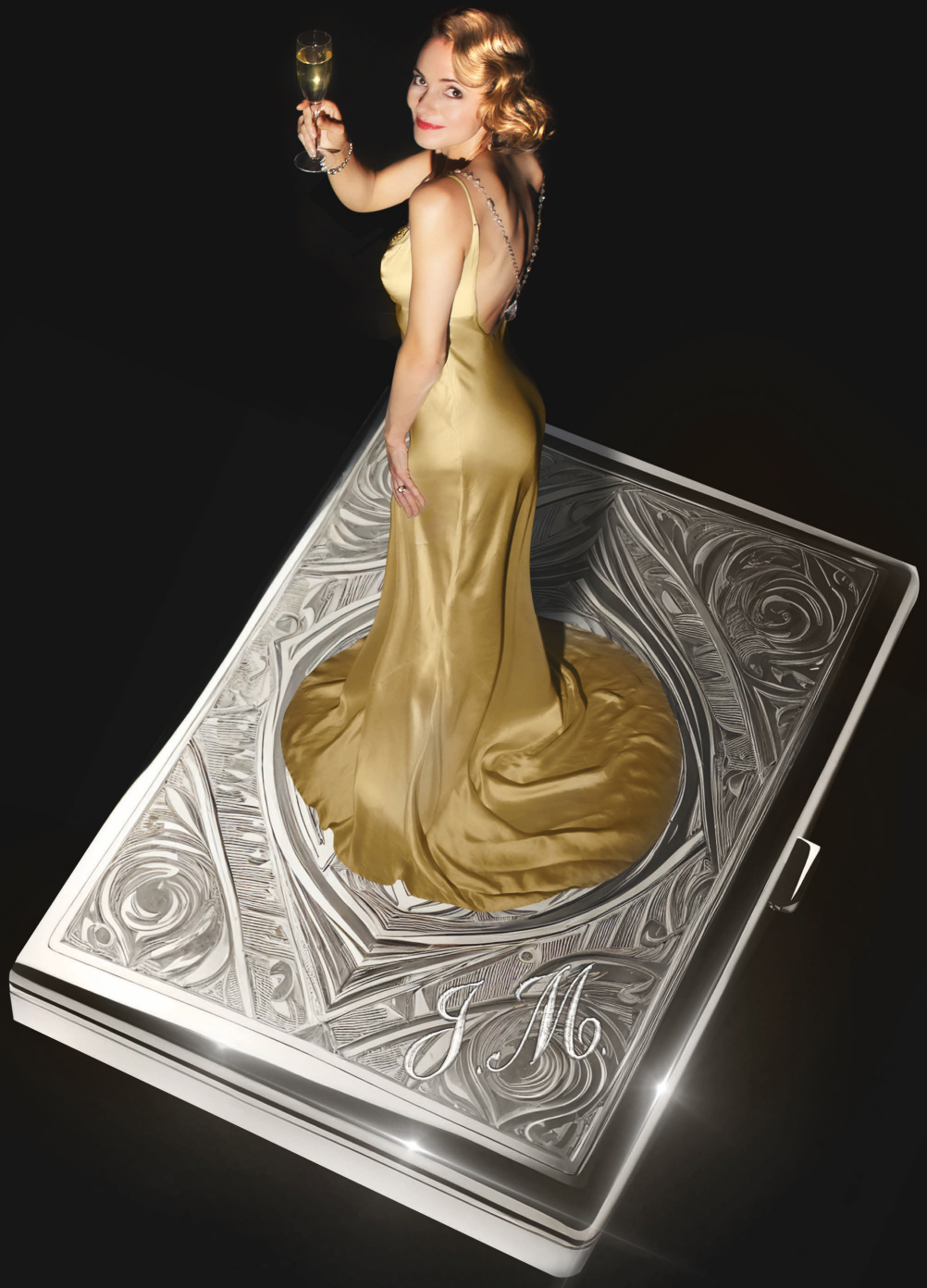
EDUCATION PACK



KARA TOINTON

David Pugh & Cunard present the Royal Shakespeare Company Production

THE CONSTANT WIFE

BY LAURA WADE BASED ON THE COMEDY BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

DIRECTED BY TAMARA HARVEY

EDUCATION PACK

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EDUCATION RESOURCE BY CARL WOODWARD

PRODUCTION DESIGN BY ANNA FLEISCHLE COSTUME DESIGN BY ANNA FLEISCHLE & CAT FULLER

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OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

The Constant Wife – Laura Wade's fresh remix of W. Somerset Maugham's subversive comedy appeared on the cusp of full suffrage in 1928 - brings a bold, modern energy to a timeless story about marriage, independence and social expectation. This incisive new production follows a woman who, after a life-altering discovery, takes control of her destiny and reclaims her independence. It marks a much-anticipated reunion between writer Laura Wade and Co-Artistic Director Tamara Harvey, whose previous collaboration, *Home, I'm Darling*, won them an Olivier Award.

Originally written at a transformative moment for women's rights and autonomy, *The Constant Wife* remains startlingly relevant. First staged in 1926 Wade's adaptation preserves Maugham's wit and sophistication while sharpening its radical edge for a contemporary audience. The production also features an original score by award-winning jazz artist Jamie Cullum - his first foray into composing for the stage - adding a fresh sound world to Maugham's glittering drawing room.

At its heart, *The Constant Wife* examines how we behave in relationships and what we expect from one another as spouses, partners and friends. Its questions feel universal: what would you do in Constance's situation? Would you respond differently? This education resource pack invites teachers and students alike to explore those dilemmas and discuss their resonance today.

Maugham's original play is a piquant comedy of marital dysfunction set among a chic London society. Infidelity and indiscretion come laced with droll repartee about occasional tables and elaborate subterfuge over cigarette cases. Yet beneath the sparkle lies something deeper. When Constance Middleton, the eponymous "constant" wife, discovers the truth about her husband's affair with her best friend, her response is startlingly smart, pragmatic and unorthodox. Rather than tears or revenge, she calmly takes control of her own financial and emotional future.

The writing sits closest to that of Noël Coward - witty, elegant and laced with bitter truths and rich psychological insight. But Constance herself is a singular creation: hugely intelligent, clear-eyed and decades ahead of her time. She proposes that men and women be measured by the same moral standards, and advocates for women's financial independence within marriage - ideas that were radical in the 1920s and still resonate now.

For all its surface sparkle, *The Constant Wife* keyed into a significant sociological shift. 1926 was the year British women were granted the same property rights as men; two years later they gained equal franchise. Maugham's comedy both reflected and challenged the gender politics of its day. A hundred years on, it is important not to take those rights for granted. Women remain economically disadvantaged, often in relationships they cannot afford to leave, or penalised for time taken out to have children or care for relatives. *The Constant Wife* reminds us that, despite progress, inequality persists.

This resource pack is designed to help teachers and students engage with Wade's adaptation and Maugham's original themes. It offers context, discussion prompts and classroom activities to support critical thinking and creative exploration - encouraging debate about love, loyalty, money and independence that still matters today.

THE PLAY

Harley Street, London, 1927.

Constance has everything. A loving family, a beautiful home, a fulfilling career, and a husband as devoted to her as he is to his mistress. When her way of living is threatened, Constance fights back but refuses to play by the rules. Can she withstand society's expectations? And can society withstand the force of a woman determined to do things her own way?

Tour model box. Design by Anna Fleischle.

WOMEN AND FEMINISM IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

When the First World War ended in 1918, Britain was a country in shock. Millions of lives had been lost, and the economy was struggling. But the war had also set huge social changes in motion – especially for women.

During the war, women had filled jobs and roles once reserved for men. After 1918, not everyone was ready to return to the old ways. Nearly two million women faced a future without the security of marriage because so many men had died. They had earned their own wages and tasted independence, and many wanted to keep it.

Maugham's play, despite its surface sparkle, tapped into a significant sociological shift. In 1926, British women were granted the same property rights as men, and two years later, they would gain equal franchise.

ACTIVE - BUT NOT EQUAL

Women's lives in the 1920s were a mix of progress and frustration. They were imagining new futures where love, work, sex, and independence could go together. For the first time, public discussions about birth control and sexual health - led by figures like Marie Stopes in Britain and Margaret Sanger in the US – gave women the tools to take control of their own bodies and relationships.

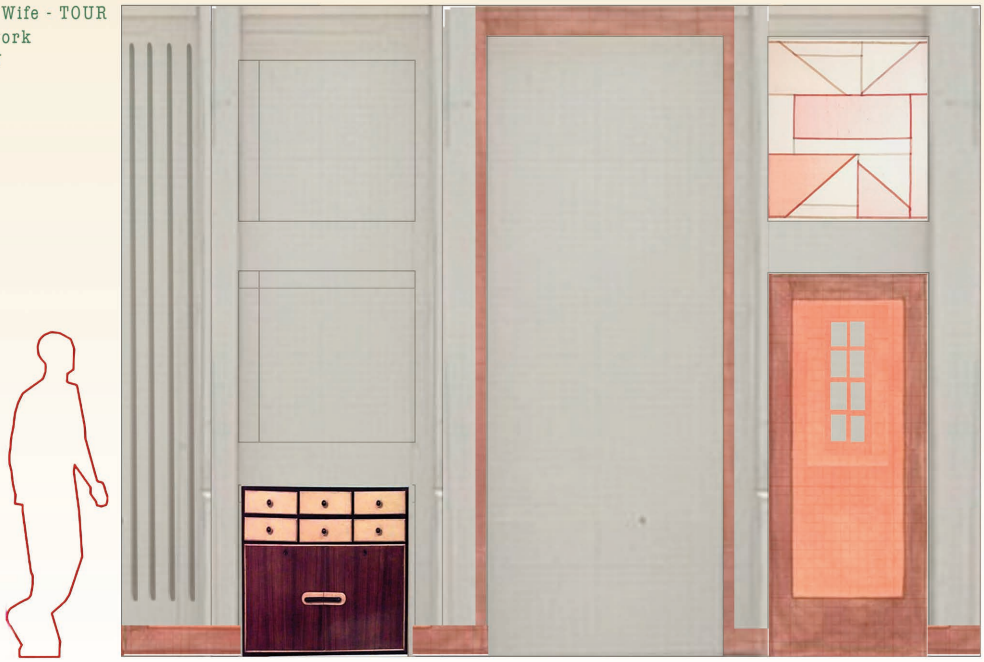
Some legal victories were achieved. In 1918, women over 30 who met certain property rules were allowed to vote. But it took another ten years of campaigning for the **Equal Franchise Act of 1928** to give the vote to all women over 21. Women could even be elected to Parliament - Nancy Astor became the first female MP in 1919 - but most still depended financially on men and had little legal protection.

Across the Atlantic, the US granted all women the vote in 1920. But everywhere the same question remained: what did political equality really mean in everyday life? Could women not only vote like men but live as equals too?

MARRIAGE REIMAGINED

One answer was the rise of the idea of "**companionate marriage**" – marriage as a partnership of equals, based on affection, respect, and choice rather than financial necessity. It sounded liberating. But critics pointed out that without economic equality, marriage could still be a trap. If a woman without property couldn't vote or earn her own living, was "freedom" in marriage really freedom at all?

The Constant Wife - TOUR
SL wall - artwork
PRESENT DAY



THE
CONSTANT WIFE

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THE FIGHT FOR ECONOMIC FREEDOM

Many feminists argued that real equality began with money. Divorce laws were reformed in 1923 to give women the same grounds as men, but without financial independence, leaving a marriage could still be impossible.

In 1924, feminist campaigner **Eleanor Rathbone** published *The Disinherited Family*, arguing that unpaid domestic work - especially motherhood - was essential to society and should be recognised by the state. She pushed for family allowances (early child benefits) to be paid directly to mothers, so women had their own income. Without this, she warned, women would remain "citizens in name only," trapped by men's control of money.

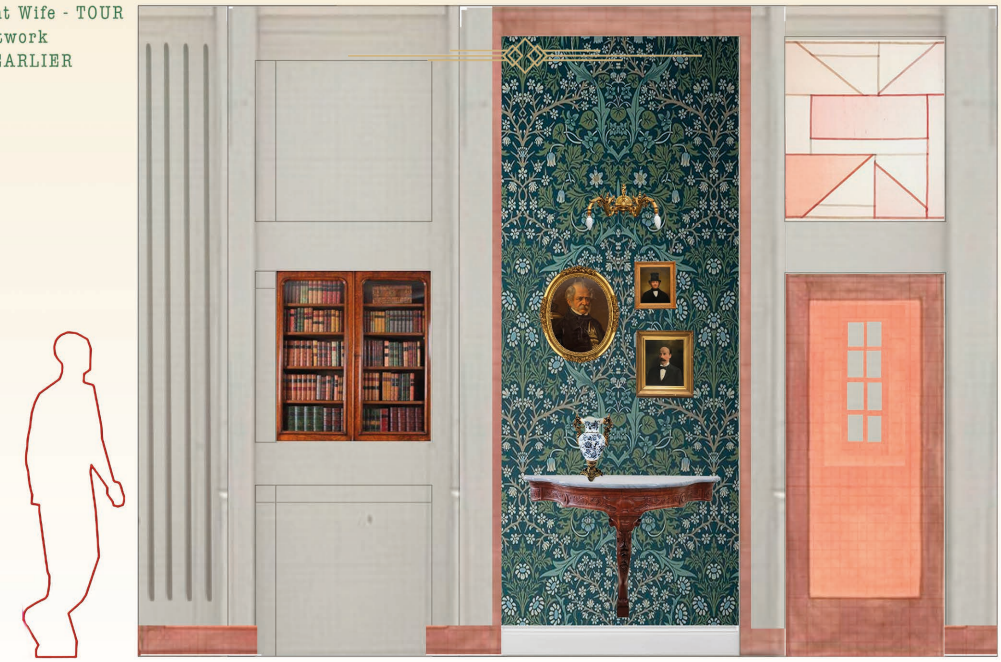
THE CONSTANT WIFE - COMEDY WITH A SHARP EDGE

It's in this world of half-won freedoms that W. Somerset Maugham wrote *The Constant Wife* (1926). The play premiered just two years before all British women finally gained the vote. It's a witty, stylish snapshot of a culture in transition, where women were starting to push against old rules.

The play's heroine, **Constance Middleton**, is an upper-class woman who discovers her husband's affair. But instead of collapsing or seeking revenge, she calmly rewrites the rules of her marriage. Constance earns her own income, declares her independence, and takes control of her personal life on her own terms.

First performed almost 50 years after Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) shocked audiences with Nora's dramatic exit, *The Constant Wife* offers a sparkling, comic reply. Instead of storming out, Constance stays - but on her own terms. It's less revolution than reinvention, and that's exactly the point.

The Constant Wife - TOUR
SL wall - artwork
ONE YEAR EARLIER



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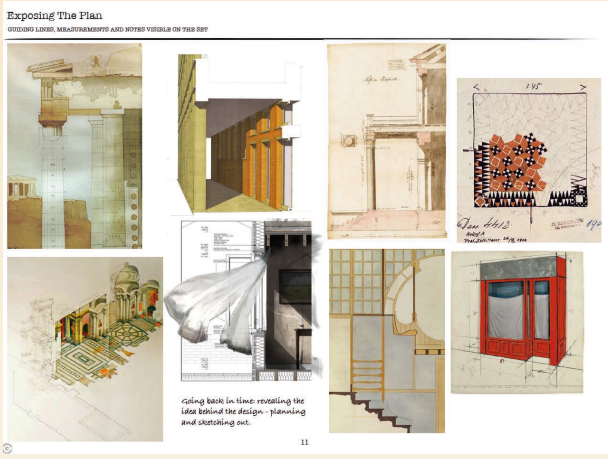
CHANGING THE GAME

Maugham - and Laura Wade in her new version - ask a provocative question: what if a woman decided to “play by the rules” while quietly rewriting them from within?

The Constant Wife is a comedy of feminist mischief. On the surface, it pokes fun at social conventions; underneath, it’s about a woman seizing the power to live, love, and earn as she chooses.

Women like Constance Middleton stood at a cross-roads in the 1920s. Financial independence didn’t just allow them to survive - it allowed them to choose. They could leave a marriage, stay in it on their own terms, or simply buy a ticket to somewhere new.

The questions raised in the 1920s - about freedom, love, work, and money - still resonate today. *The Constant Wife* shows us a world where women were redrawing the rules of life itself, turning marriage, citizenship, and independence into a new kind of social contract.



Research

Production photography Mihaela Bodlovi · Set and Co-Costume design Anna Fleishle

THE
CONSTANT WIFE

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DIRECTED BY TAMARA HARVEY

THE CONSTANT WIFE AT STRATFORD UPON AVON: A REMIXED REVIVAL

The RSC's 2025 revival of *The Constant Wife*, newly adapted by Laura Wade and directed by Tamara Harvey, was one of the most talked-about productions of the theatre season. Nominated for **Best Play Revival** at the UK Theatre Awards 2025, it drew wide acclaim - and raised interesting questions about marriage, independence, and the possibility of renewal.

Set in **1920s London**, in the drawing room of Constance (Rose Leslie), the play begins with a fragile equilibrium: a happy-looking marriage to John, a Harley Street surgeon, a devoted friend in Marie-Louise - and beneath the surface, betrayal. When Constance at last confronts the affair between her husband and her flibbertigibbet best friend, she is forced to ask what remains between two people married but no longer desiring one another. The revival suggests that the path toward the answer lies through both **financial liberation** and sexual autonomy. The Observer+2The Guardian+2

Laura Wade's adaptation keeps most of Maugham's sparkling dialogue but rearranges it: scenes are moved forward, flashbacks inserted, characters slimmed or reshaped - Bentley the butler becomes more of a confidant, Constance's sister Martha gains weight from what used to be a minor part. There are meta-theatrical touches too - characters attempt to see a production called *The Constant Wife*, worrying they'll miss Act One. Suspense is traded for a narrative style more suited to televisual rhythms, even as the comedy tilts toward Whitehall farce. The Observer

Yet, the adaptation also softens. There's also a change in the ending, drawing closer to the 1929 film adaptation Charming Sinners. The Observer

Performances across the board were praised. Rose Leslie embodies Constance with poise and quiet strength; Luke Norris charmingly flawed as John; Kate Burton, as Constance's mother, imperious and commanding; Amy Morgan's Martha sharp and morally restless. Wade's sharpening of character interactions and fleshing out of empathy for Constance - for example, via her confidences with Bentley - heightened the emotional stakes without losing the wit. The Guardian+2The Observer+2

On the visual and musical side, the production was noted as being sumptuous. Anna Fleischle's set and, together with Cat Fuller, costumes, evoked elegance and period detail - curved screens, sumptuous textiles, geometric designs - while Ryan Day's lighting underscores shifts of time and mood. Jamie Cullum's original jazz score swings between bristling and velvety and is used to punctuate scene changes with both mood and irony. The Guardian+2The Observer+2

Critics noted that while Maugham's assault on social double standards was somewhat softened, the play still retained razor-sharp wit. The audience laughter was frequent; moral doubleness was exposed; the comedy is smart rather than slapstick. Many reviews suggested the work is not just nostalgic, but urgent, asking today what power and selfhood look like within marriage, what it means to be wronged, and what form forgiveness or retribution might take. The Observer+2The Guardian+2

UK THEATRE AWARDS 2025: RECOGNITION WELL EARNED

With its nomination for **Best Play Revival**, the Stratford-upon-Avon *Constant Wife* is being recognised not only as a revival of a neglected classic but as a production that makes the old feel freshly minted. It weaves together humour, feminist impulses, lush design, and strong performances in a way that invites both delight and reflection. Even as it retains much of Maugham's original, Wade's hand is clearly felt - and largely, warmly received - for bringing moral complexity and narrative inventiveness into the drawing room.

Production photography Mihaela Bodlovi · Set and Co-Costume design Anna Fleishle

THE
CONSTANT WIFE

BY LAURA WADE BASED ON THE COMEDY BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
DIRECTED BY TAMARA HARVEY

BEHIND THE SCENES: THE CONSTANT WIFE PHOTOSHOOT

The Constant Wife is embarking on a UK tour from January to May 2026, with *Strictly Come Dancing* winner Kara Tointon taking on the title role.

It's 3:00 pm on a Wednesday in July, and I'm in the studio of Ladbroke Hall, West London, for the promotional photoshoot. Overseeing every detail is Olivier- and Tony Award-winning producer David Pugh, ensuring nothing - and no one - misses a beat.

Stoke-born Pugh commissioned the play and is the highly successful West End impresario behind the tour. He has theatre in his blood and an exceptional eye for detail. Across his 40-year career, he has delivered hits including Yasmina Reza's *Art*, *The Play What I Wrote*, and *Pride and Prejudice (sort of)*.

He says: *"I'm delighted to have commissioned Laura Wade to adapt this comedy and to be working with the Royal Shakespeare Company on this new production of The Constant Wife. For me, in the times that we're in, there is nothing better than to bring comedy to audiences in theatres all around the UK and to hear people laughing."*

Kara Tointon · Photogograph by Willie Christie

THE CONSTANT WIFE

BY LAURA WADE BASED ON THE COMEDY BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
DIRECTED BY TAMARA HARVEY

Tointon, best known for roles in *The Teacher* and *Mr Selfridge*, is an Essex girl who has also recently landed a part in the upcoming *Hunger Games* movie. She's the real deal, oozes star quality and is set to be a perfect Constance Middleton.

It's a coveted role, and little wonder that some of the stage's greatest talents have vied to play it. Unlike many of Maugham's works, the play has enjoyed a notable Broadway presence, serving as a showcase for Ethel Barrymore (1926), Katharine Cornell (1951), and Ingrid Bergman (1975). The most recent revival, in 2005, starred Kate Burton, daughter of Richard Burton and Sybil Christopher.

This special photoshoot for *The Constant Wife* UK tour brought together a large team of hair and makeup artists, supported by skilled assistants. The entire shoot was captured by legendary photographer Willie Christie, with Tointon styled in a stunning golden gown provided by award-winning costume designer Jane Robinson.

Wade's lively reworking of Maugham's 1926 tale of adultery originally opened in Stratford-upon-Avon to rave reviews, selling out every performance - the audience loved it.

Now, the 17-venue tour follows the acclaimed Stratford-upon-Avon run, that starred Rose Leslie and Kate Burton. Adapted by Laura Wade from W. Somerset Maugham's classic play, this fresh staging offers a contemporary remix of the story. Furthermore, it will be making its debut at sea on the Queen Mary 2 Transatlantic Crossing.

Wade has made some practical changes: for instance, she merged two characters - Martha (Constance's sister) and Barbara, an interior designer who invites Constance to work with her - making Martha's character richer and more dynamic. She also expanded Bentley the butler's role, originally little more than an usher, into a part worth playing.

RSC artistic directors Tamara Harvey and Daniel Evans said: *"Our ambition is to bring joy to as many audiences as possible, deepening our understanding of ourselves and the world around us, and so we are thrilled to be bringing The Constant Wife to stages across the UK, following its success at the Swan in Stratford."*

With the addition of original compositions by jazz artist Jamie Cullum and direction by Tamara Harvey, the production opens in Blackpool in January 2026 before moving on to Chichester and beyond.

Kara Tointon · Photogograph by Willie Christie

DIRECTOR, TAMARA HARVEY

"Sharing stories in a shared space helps people connect, reflect, and step into someone else's shoes."

Tamara Harvey, Co-Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, is one of the most thoughtful and influential voices in British theatre today. Known for her curiosity, intelligence, and collaborative spirit, she leads creative teams that balance discipline with joy, producing work that is as exciting to make as it is to watch. As the RSC's new production of The Constant Wife, adapted by Laura Wade and starring Kara Tointon, begins its UK tour, Tamara reflects on her journey as a director and artistic leader.

Her love of theatre began long before she imagined a professional career. Growing up in Brighton, she took part in her state school's annual play, directed by an unusual but brilliant maths teacher. "He taught us that the fun and joy of making theatre came through hard work and dedication," she recalls. "And that every person involved in a production serves the story - the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts."

Costume design

After university, Harvey spent four formative years at Shakespeare's Globe, assisting Tim Carroll under Mark Rylance's artistic leadership. "Those years shaped who I am as a director," she says. "I learned that theatre is alive and unpredictable. You can plan everything perfectly, but something unexpected will always happen." Her first London production, the UK premiere of Tennessee Williams's Something Cloudy, Something Clear, tested that lesson. When the production lost its leading actor during tech week, she had to find a replacement at the last minute. "It was chaos," she recalls, "but it taught me to adapt - that's the reality of live theatre."

Textile reference

Now a high-profile artistic leader, Harvey often shares advice with young people. "It's not a race. Theatre is a craft that grows with you. Don't compare yourself to others – focus on your own journey." She encourages aspiring directors to embrace life outside the theatre. "Life experience is as important as artistic experience. Go to that wedding, visit that gallery, spend time with friends. Those moments make you a better director - and a better human." She also values the simple power of saying I don't know. "Collaboration thrives when you admit uncertainty and invite others to help find the answer."

Collaboration is key, particularly her work with playwright Laura Wade and designer Anna Fleischle. "It's brilliant having a writer in the room," she e xplains. "You can respond in real time - adjusting a scene, exploring an emotional moment, finding what works on stage." For The Constant Wife, this collaborative approach helped them create a production that is both period and theatrical, with

playful self-awareness reflecting Constance's desire to take control of her own life.

For Harvey, every production begins with the text. She says that she reads it carefully, often returning to the original work, and engages in constant conversation with the creative teams. "I make discoveries and decisions through dialogue," she explains. "Designers, composers, lighting and sound teams, movement directors, actors – all of them shape the world of the play. Theatre is a conversation, and that conversation extends to the audience."

Textile reference

Touring and accessibility are vital to her vision. "We're a national theatre company, not just a Stratford company. Touring brings work to people who might never travel to Stratford-upon-Avon or London. I grew up far from both, and if it weren't for touring productions, I might never have fallen in love with theatre." Affordability is also crucial. Producer David Pugh is passionate about accessible pricing – tickets for the UK tour start from £10.00: "Sharing stories in a shared space helps people connect, reflect, and step into someone else's shoes."

Being an artistic director in 2025 is demanding, but Harvey finds her creative nourishment in rehearsal. "Every time I'm in a rehearsal room; I remember why I love theatre. Watching actors find truth in a scene – that's where the magic lives." She also draws inspiration from seeing other artists' work, keeping her imagination alive and her approach fresh.

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) reaches hundreds of thousands of young people through its various school programmes each year. Its Associate Schools Programme engages 135,000 children, while the RSC Learning programmes reach over half a million young people annually. Harvey is a passionate advocate for arts education, particularly in state schools. While many artists speak out, she believes more voices are needed from other fields. "Creativity and empathy for arts education benefit everyone – engineers, scientists, tech innovators. The arts teach imagination, problem-solving, and understanding complexity in ways no other subject can."

Looking ahead, she is excited about the RSC's evolving role. "What excites me most is the number of artists who want to make work with us, and the audiences eager to see it. If we can bring those two groups together in conversation, we're doing our job." Beyond *The Constant Wife,* Tamara is developing new work for the RSC, including *The Cherry Orchard*, set to open in Stratford next summer starring Helen Hunt and Kenneth Branagh.

In any case, Harvey's journey is a reminder that theatre is more than performance. It is a living, breathing conversation, shared humanity, and personal discovery. Through her reflective leadership she shows that theatre is a space for joy, reflection, and connection – and one that should be open to everyone.

Textile reference

WRITER LAURA WADE Q&A
THE PLAY'S THE THING

Laura Wade is the writer of the new adaptation of *The Constant Wife* for the RSC, based on W. Somerset Maugham's 1926 play. Wade, whose previous works include *Home, I'm Darling* and *The Watsons*, discusses the process of reworking a forgotten classic, why Constance still resonates today, and the character she thinks is "one to watch."

1. How did this project come about, and what drew you to it?

The producer **David Pugh**, who commissioned my adaptation of The Watsons, approached me again. He has great instincts for rediscovering works worth reviving, and he wanted a 21st-century female playwright to bring a fresh perspective to *The Constant Wife*.

Once I read it, I was hooked. Constance is a f ascinating character - intelligent, surprising, and morally complex. Watching how she reasons through her situation feels both witty and radical, even now. I couldn't resist.

2. You're reuniting with director Tamara Harvey after *Home, I'm Darling*. What makes this collaboration work?

Tamara and I are always looking for excuses to work together. This time, it was David who quietly sent her the play. She immediately saw it in the **Swan Theatre**, with its intimacy amplifying Constance's sharpness and humour.

We have a creative shorthand and a lot of trust. Working with Tamara and designer **Anna Fleischle** again feels like being part of a family - one that's brave enough to challenge each other while chasing the same artistic thrill.

3. What was your first impression of Maugham's play, and what freedom did adaptation give you?

I'd never read it before, and to my shame, I wasn't very familiar with Maugham's plays. But I loved it instantly. The beauty of adapting a lesser-known work is that there's room to surprise audiences without the baggage of expectation.

I see adaptation as an act of discovery - saying, *"Look at this amazing thing we've found."* My job was to polish and reframe it slightly for modern eyes, not to overwrite Maugham but to bring out the brilliance that was already there.

4. What key changes did you make to shape the story for today's audience?

Two main things: I moved the revelation of the infidelity earlier, which lets us explore Constance's reaction more deeply. I also combined and expanded characters - Martha and Barbara became one, which enriched Martha's story, and Bentley the butler got promoted from background figure to a pivotal, witty presence.

We didn't want any "tissue-paper characters." Everyone now feels like a person with a full life. That reflects what audiences expect from contemporary theatre - depth, agency, and nuance.

5. The play explores women's financial independence. Does that still feel relevant in 2025?

Completely. Maugham wrote it in the 1920s, when women were still fighting for control over their own money, but those themes remain urgent. Even today, women can find themselves financially trapped by relationships, childcare, or unequal pay.

Constance's decision to earn her own living is a radical act of self-definition. Like in Jane Austen's work, love and finance are inseparable. The play is both funny and fierce in asking: *What does independence really cost?*

6. Finally, which character should audiences keep an eye on - besides Constance?

Bentley, the butler. In expanding his role, I realised how much he mirrors my own as a writer - he quietly changes the course of events just by opening a door.

And of course, I hope audiences leave the theatre arguing about what *they* would do in Constance's shoes. The play doesn't hand out answers; it provokes debate. If people are still talking about it over dinner afterwards, then we've done our job.

Textile reference

Costume assembly

Production photography Mihaela Bodlovi · Set and Co-Costume design Anna Fleishle

ANNA FLEISCHLE: DESIGNING WORLDS

"It's been quite an amazing year," says multi-award-winning costume and set designer Anna Fleischle, reflecting on a period of intense creativity and acclaim. "Very, very busy - with a lot of really great work. And T*he Constant Wife* is one of them, in terms of working with Tamara Harvey and Laura Wade again. We did *Home, I'm Darling* a few years ago, and it was one of my best experiences ever - a kind of family, very talented, very intelligent women."

For Fleischle, collaboration has always been at the heart of theatre-making. Her designs - meticulous yet emotionally resonant - are as much about the people she works with as the worlds she builds. Yet her journey into the industry was far from easy. "It is a really hard profession to break into," she admits. "But there is also a massive dose of luck. On one hand, it's difficult when you're not there yet; on the other, it becomes easier once you are. Everything I have is totally self-built, but there's something about the work you put in to make those connections."

Fleischle's own path was forged through persistence and a belief in artistic integrity. Her advice to aspiring designers is direct and generous. "Persistently be there and work hard," she says. "You have to be prepared to do it, because you will have to. And second - don't look too much to the left and right. You can always compare yourself to people who got opportunities quicker, but that will never teach you anything valuable. The best thing you can do is consistently produce good work that you really believe in."

That combination of resilience and clarity has defined Fleischle's career. Over the past decade, she has become one of the UK's most sought-after theatre designers, her portfolio spanning West End productions, opera, and ballet. She embraces technology as a tool to expand creative possibilities rather than constrain them. "The fact that I can do 3D drawing and pre-visualisation, watch a scene change before anything has been built, and print for model-making or props - it's made my life a lot easier," she explains. "Model making is incredibly time-consuming. 3D printing can be much quicker, and you can be more detailed, so you can test things better."

In *The Constant Wife*, Fleischle found an opportunity to explore a uniquely female perspective - one she felt was both quietly radical and profoundly human. "I do think there's something quite brilliant and female about being quietly observant," she reflects. "You assess a situation, think, 'Okay, what do I want?' and then build a whole idea of where you want to go - and execute it without needing to announce it." Her design mirrors this inner process, allowing audiences to see Constance's world evolve "from the origin of an idea to the perfection of its realisation."

That sensitivity to psychology and structure has made Fleischle's work so distinctive. Her designs don't simply frame a story; they articulate it. Each detail, from a curve of furniture to a palette of light, reveals how characters inhabit their space - and how they might, in turn, be shaped by it.

Beyond aesthetics, Fleischle is passionate about the social role of theatre. In light of a recent high-profile comment describing theatre as exclusionary, she offers her own perspective – not as a rebuttal, but as a principle she holds deeply. "The amazing thing, or the power of theatre, is that it challenges your thinking," she says. "Nobody walks out the same way they walked in. That's how we evolve as a society. Everybody should be able to see shows. Theatre needs to be for everyone." She adds that coming from a country without a class system shapes her view: accessibility isn't about labels, but about ensuring the art form genuinely welcomes all.

Costume design

THE CONSTANT WIFE

BY LAURA WADE BASED ON THE COMEDY BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
DIRECTED BY TAMARA HARVEY

Production photography Mihaela Bodlovi · Set and Co-Costume design Anna Fleishle

THE CONSTANT WIFE

BY LAURA WADE BASED ON THE COMEDY BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
DIRECTED BY TAMARA HARVEY

She also points out the often-overlooked position of designers within the creative hierarchy. “The first person to work on a play is a designer,” she notes. “Up until rehearsals, you’re leading the conversations, presenting ideas. But during rehearsals, you slowly get written out of the narrative because now you’re in workshops and fittings.” That, she says, contributes to a widespread misunderstanding - “Designers are therefore often assumed from the outside to be purely executing a director’s ideas, rather than being the originators of the visual identity of a show.”

For *The Constant Wife*, Fleischle and co-costume designer Cat Fuller were meticulous about balancing period authenticity with modern resonance. “We picked shapes that could exist historically but still feel relatable,” she says, ensuring audiences connect to the characters as “like me, she’s like my mate, she’s like my mum.” That balance between timelessness and immediacy, she argues, is essential: “When you recognise yourself on stage, you react more strongly because it concerns you - and that can have a lasting effect.”

Her current projects reflect a designer at the top of her game, unafraid to traverse disciplines. She’s working on a new full-scale ballet with Birmingham Royal Ballet and Carlos Acosta, The Maiden of Venice; a production at the National Theatre with Clint Dyer; and, for the first time, designing Lily Allen’s new tour, where she’s also involved in creative direction - “shaping the team, the concept, the flow of the evening.”

Amid the success, Fleischle continues to campaign for better recognition of designers’ contributions. “Our work is visual. It should not be shown without the designer’s name on it,” she says firmly. “Yet theatres and press historically don’t include it, even though copyright law says they should. You wouldn’t print a play without the writer’s name or play music without naming the composer.” A recent breakthrough with the Royal Shakespeare Company has been particularly meaningful. “They agreed that from now on, designers will always be credited with the image, and they’ll ask papers to do it. That’s a huge step forward.” She pauses. “It still isn’t easy - you must ask for it, and then people treat you as if you’re being big-headed or difficult. But it really matters: it is our original work, and leaving it unnamed is not only disrespectful - it leaves the protection of our work vulnerable to unauthorised use and copying.”

As our conversation draws to a close, Fleischle returns to *The Constant Wife*, the project that so vividly encapsulates her ethos. “It’s a brilliant night at the theatre,” she says. “It’s funny, visually rich, and deeply enjoyable, with Laura’s writing sparking laughter and reflection in equal measure. Beneath the humour, it asks urgent questions about how we live together, reminding us that our differences aren’t burdens but enrichments that make us more human.”

THE
CONSTANT WIFE

BY LAURA WADE BASED ON THE COMEDY BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
DIRECTED BY TAMARA HARVEY

FURTHER READING - BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Texts

***The Constant Wife* by Laura Wade - based on the play by W. Somerset Maugham (RSC)** Bloomsbury publishing 2025,

- **Maugham, W. Somerset. *The Constant Wife*.** *Methuen Drama Student Edition.*
  The most accessible edition for students, with notes on themes, character, and staging.
- **Maugham, W. Somerset. Collected Plays.** *Vintage Classics.*
  Offers a broader view of Maugham's dramatic voice and social concerns.

Author Biographies & Major Critical Works

(Stronger, internationally recognised scholarship)

- **Hastings, Selina. The Secret Lives of Somerset Maugham.** *John Murray, 2009.*
  A definitive modern biography drawing on newly released archives.
- **Morgan, Ted. Maugham: *A Biography.*** *Simon & Schuster, 1980.*
  A respected, meticulously researched life study still widely cited.
- **Meyers, Jeffrey. Somerset Maugham: *A Life*.** *Knopf, 2004.*
  A concise, internationally referenced biography that connects Maugham's personal life with his dramatic output.
- **Kaplan, Amy. The Social Construction of Maugham.** *Duke University Press, 1991.*
  A key American critical text exploring how Maugham shaped and reflected modern identity.

International Critical Perspectives

- **Kobler, Franz. Somerset Maugham – *A Study in Character and Style*.** *W. Heinemann, 1973.*
  A European analytical study still used for its sharp examination of Maugham's dramatic form.

Historical & Cultural Context (Early 20th Century Britain)

- **Dyhouse, Carol. *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women.*** *Zed Books, 2013.*
  Strong contextual grounding for gender roles and independence - central to *The Constant Wife*.
- **Robb, George. *British Culture and Society in the 20th Century*.** *Palgrave, 2012.*
  Compact and accessible: ideal for giving students wider social context.

Comparative Drama & Literary Context

- **Coward, Noël. *Private Lives.*** *Methuen Drama.*
  A witty counterpart for studying marriage and performance of identity.
- **George Bernard Shaw. *Mrs Warren's Profession.*** *Penguin Classics.*
  A clear comparison for examining women's autonomy and societal constraints.
- **Githa Sowerby. *Rutherford and Son.*** *Nick Hern Books.*
  A powerful contemporaneous work on class and domestic power structures.

Digital & Reference Resources

- **The British Library - Discovering Literature (20th Century)**
  Articles, manuscripts, and contextual materials on identity, gender, and modern drama.
- **RSC Education Resources**
  Rehearsal-room approaches for teachers and students engaging with classic text.
- **The International Somerset Maugham Society**
  Multilingual articles, essays, and international perspectives.

UK TOUR 2026

Friday 16 - Saturday 17 January	BLACKPOOL	**The Grand Theatre**
Tuesday 20 - Saturday 24 January	CHICHESTER	**Festival Theatre**
Monday 26 - Saturday 31 January	YORK	**Theatre Royal**
Monday 2 - Saturday 7 February	OXFORD	**Playhouse**
Monday 9 - Saturday 14 February	RICHMOND	**Theatre**
Monday 23 - Saturday 28 February	BRIGHTON	**Theatre Royal**
Monday 2 - Saturday 7 March	CHELMSFORD	**Theatre**
Tuesday 10 - Saturday 14 March	LIVERPOOL	**Playhouse**
Tuesday 17 - Saturday 21 March	SALFORD	**The Lowry**
Monday 23 - Saturday 28 March	CAMBRIDGE	**The Arts Theatre**
Tuesday 31 March - Saturday 4 April	EDINBURGH	**Festival Theatre**
Tuesday 7 - Saturday 11 April	SHREWSBURY	**Theatre Severn**
Tuesday 14 - Saturday 18 April	LEEDS	**Grand Theatre**
Monday 20 - Saturday 25 April	CHELTENHAM	**Everyman Theatre**
Monday 27 April - Saturday 2 May	POOLE	**Lighthouse**
Tuesday 5 - Saturday 9 May	MALVERN	**Festival Theatre**
Monday 11 - Saturday 16 May	BATH	**Theatre Royal**
Friday 29 May - Friday 5 June	QUEEN MARY 2	**New York to Southampton**

constantwife.com

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