

A peace of his mind

Film director David Lynch tells Sharon Krum how meditation keeps him mentally fit and focused

The last time the film director David Lynch attended the Academy Awards, Clint Eastwood approached him, smiled, then leaned in to make a curious confession.

"I just meditated for 30 minutes before I arrived here," he told Lynch. "Great," came the reply. Yet Eastwood didn't seek out arguably Hollywood's most avant-garde director to impress him, he simply wanted to talk to a kindred spirit. Lynch, he knew, had meditated before the ceremony, too.

"I've never missed a day," says Lynch of his 32 years doing transcendental meditation, commonly known as TM. "Twice a day, every day, on planes, film sets, everywhere. Easy, easy, easy. You repeat the mantra and off you go."

With three decades of meditation under his belt, Lynch, 59, is probably the most ardent

practitioner of TM in the global film community — this is no Hollywood fad for him — although, until recently, you might not have known it. With a shock of hair on his head that seems to defy gravity and a predilection for placing the dark side of human nature under the microscope, it's easy to understand why some have referred to Lynch as celluloid's mad scientist.

But meet him in person and suddenly the idea of his meditating presents no difficulty to comprehend. Hardly the tortured soul, he seems remarkably easygoing and unpretentious. With his buttoned-up shirt and pleated trousers, he could be your friendly neighbour.

"It's a personal thing to start meditation and, if people asked, I was always happy to explain it. But I never believed that you had to go into the streets to talk about it."

However, this month and next, Lynch is breaking his own rule and going on to the hustings to expound on TM and to raise \$7 billion (£4 billion) to provide TM instruction to any school child in America within two years who wants it and eventually, he hopes, in the UK within three to five years.

"Stress is affecting our children earlier today," he says, describing why he recently formed the David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace.

"Children are filled with anxiety and all kinds of learning disabilities, and difficult family relationships arise out of that. Why not give them a technique that alleviates that suffering? I've seen what TM can do for children. They start flowering, their intelligence grows."

It's hard not to meet Lynch without making assumptions. Watching films such as *The Elephant Man*, *Twin Peaks*, *Blue Velvet* and *Mulholland Drive*, which explore the dark, dream-like underbelly of small towns and

big cities, it's tempting to think that the director and his movies are interchangeable. Certainly a first impression of his office, which is in a building behind his home, just off Mulholland Drive in Los Angeles, might confirm that. Post-modern and minimalist, the walls are painted the colour of concrete, a hue that's hardly blissful.

So when you meet a man who is so palpably enthusiastic and warm, you need a minute to reconcile this Lynch with the guy whose first film, the cult classic *Eraserhead* (1977), was about a mutant baby.

"Human nature, the struggle, is there to be examined," he says, when the discrepancy is pointed out. "Stories are all made up of light and dark characters; that's drama. But you don't need to suffer to show suffering. The truth is that you can't create if you are filled with stress or anger. It shuts down your creativity." TM, he believes, keeps his creative channels open. One wag has joked that we can only imagine how Lynch's films would look if he didn't meditate.

"I see TM this way. If you have a golf-ball-sized consciousness, you will look at everything that way. TM expands your consciousness, so your experiences grow exponentially. As a film-maker, I tell stories and, with expanded consciousness, you catch bigger, deeper ideas. I have found that, with TM, intuition grows, too, and when you're working in film or even in business, intuition is a huge tool that makes it easier to deal with people. The other thing for me is that TM has increased my enjoyment of 'doing'."

Introduced into the West in 1957 by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who famously became the Beatles' guru, TM is a meditation technique

that involves silently repeating a Sanskrit mantra for 20 minutes twice a day. It is supposed to settle the mind into a state of relaxation known as "restful alertness", while helping the practitioner "to transcend" to a higher state of consciousness. Though the TM movement, which claims to have taught six million people worldwide, has over the years had to weather allegations of being a cult, today meditation, in all its many forms, has become as acceptable as yoga and herbal medicine. There is one particularly non-spiritual reason for this: medical science. While claims about its benefits were for a long time purely anecdotal, clinical research is providing evidence that meditation has real health benefits for those who practise.

Ironically for someone who meditates ardently, Lynch, who is also a painter, writer and composer, was once cynical about the practice. "I thought that people who meditated were nut-eaters who were wasting their time," he grins broadly. "I just wanted to make pictures."

But in 1973 his sister told him she had started TM and that shifted something in him. "Even though I thought I was happy, I did have a lot of nervous energy and I had this anger, which I guess had been with me all my life, and, suddenly, I heard something in her voice and thought: I want that." Lynch found a TM teacher in Los Angeles and had four classes of instruction. "The effects were immediate."

Lynch, a father of three, is twice divorced. "I took out my anger on my first wife but, after two weeks of practising meditation, she said: 'Where did the anger go?'" Despite this, Lynch says the marriage was too far gone to be saved. "I know now that when you transcend, awareness increases and negativity goes away."

There's no question that Lynch is a true believer, but he doesn't come across as someone so intoxicated with it that he can't see straight. Actually it's quite the opposite, Lynch is very

All in the mind

Mantra mellow According to TM teachers, using a mantra to meditate enables your brain to fall deep into a state of rest and to be more at one with the Universe.

High spirits Researchers at California University claim to have found the mechanism behind the sense of joy that TM practitioners report. They wrote in *Medical Hypotheses* in 1995 that TM alters the release of pituitary hormones, and this produces similar effects to endorphins in athletes who experience a "runner's high".

Inner calm Russia's State Research Institute of Physiology reported this year that TM practitioners become calmer. It says in the *International Journal of Neuroscience* that meditators are less likely to get upset by disturbing films. The institute's earlier study of meditators' brain patterns shows that they switch off brain areas dedicated to external stimuli to concentrate on the inner mind.

Holy impulse A study in 1984 examined a TM teacher's brain while meditating and found electrical changes in the temporal lobe that have been previously associated with people having religious experiences.

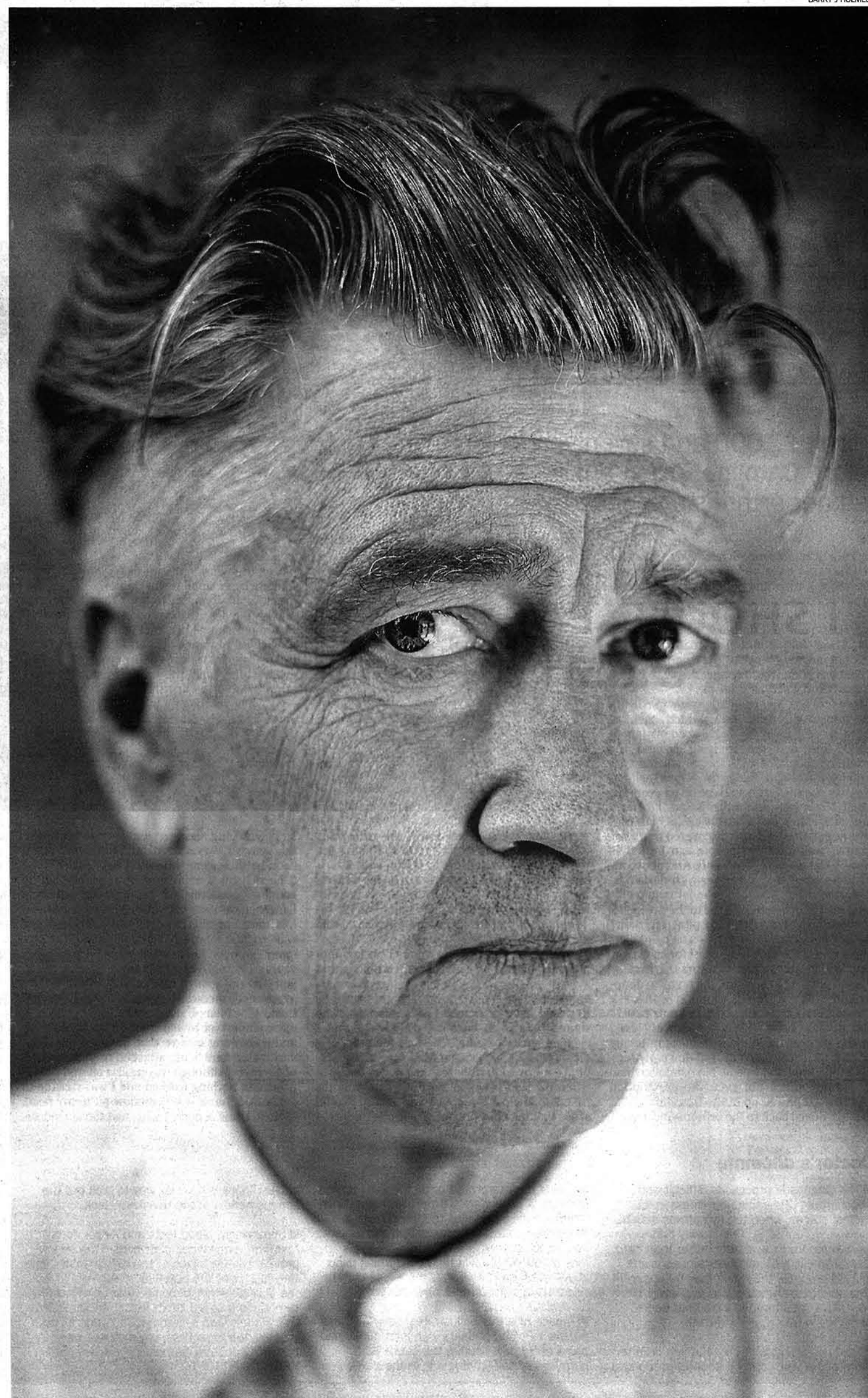
JOHN NAISH

LYNCH SAYS TM HAS HIM 'PUMPING WITH HAPPINESS'



Vamp star: Isabella Rossellini in *Blue Velvet*

David Lynch: a closer look at the dark side of human nature



I SHOULD PAY LESS FOR MY HEALTH INSURANCE

Get up to 100% of your premium back towards renewal

PruHealth is the revolutionary private medical insurance that provides outstanding quality of cover and rewards you for actively managing your health. By staying healthy you could get up to 100% of your premium back towards the cost of next year's cover. Just don't claim and you'll automatically get 25% back. You could also qualify for an instant 30% discount when you join by answering a few simple questions. It's all part of The Plan from the Pru.

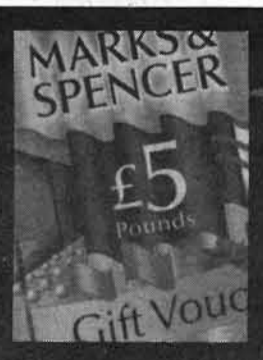
Call now to see how much you can save

CALL FOR A QUOTE TODAY AND RECEIVE A FREE £5 M&S VOUCHER

0800 092 6666

www.pruhealth.co.uk

Give ref. TIM029.
Lines open 8am to 9pm Mon to Fri, 8am to 1pm Sat.
Offer restricted to one voucher per household.



PRU HEALTH

Authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority