

An enema of the people

THEATRE

The Hypochondriac

Almeida

Nicholas de Jongh

THANKS for the Enema and Carry on up The Hypochondriac, you may feel, when Monsieur Fluerant arrives with his colonic irrigation machine. This is the born-again, in-er-face and up-your-arse-for-farce version of Molière's classic. Once Henry Goodman's would-be invalid, Argan, is screened from view, a tug-of-war or a thrust in-and-out ensues between Fluerant and Argan's brother (Stephen Boxer) in which the Hypochondriac's colon must be the bruised loser. Fortunately, though, we never learn.

Purists who like to take their Molière straightish, though not strait-laced, will hold their noses and purse their lips when exposing themselves to director Lindsay Posner's pantomimic, Carry-On rendering of this typically gross scene in Richard Bean's adaptation. Bean achieves coarse filleting and chopping of Molière's original, though the savage mockery of doctors, hypocrites and an anti-hero addicted to invalidism remains intact. Some of Bean's excisions are no great loss, though his invented epilogue, a chorus singing a mixture of cod Latin and litanies of medical gibberish, sinks to a nadir of irrelevant vacuousness, plumbing depths better left to colonic irrigators.

Coprophiliacs and youngsters who relish the juvenile bad taste and comic vulgarities of Little Britain will feel themselves delightfully at home with the Bean-Posner approach. Instead of



Classic played as farce: Thomas (John Marquez), Angelique (Carey Mulligan) and Argan (Henry Goodman) maul Molière

slanting The Hypochondriac as social comedy, this production comes at you all farcical and furious. It needs stand-up comedians to work. Molière laughed at flawed humanity. Posner's production settles mainly for grotesque farce tempered by flashes of social comedy.

In a room filled with specimen bottles sits Goodman's night-dressed, wild-haired Argan, flaunting a

Scrooge-like voice and manner. The actor remains unfunny, dehumanised and gross while fantasising himself ill and scheming to marry his daughter into the medical profession. He never succumbs to pathos when, thanks to the plotting of Lyndsey Marshal's comically devious maid, Ronni Ancona's Beline, Argan's gold-digger wife shows her true colours. Miss Ancona, keeping the randy

hypochondriac at disgusted arm's length, scores a comic bull's-eye as she oozes malign insincerity or gleefully imagines him struck dead. It is, though, John Marquez's weird dumbo, Thomas Diafoierrhoa, whose name and performances characterise a populist production that does Molière to silly, clowning excess.

● *Until 7 January.*
Information: 020 7359 4404.

Mackerras makes the most of a masked ball

THE warm ovation that greeted Sir Charles Mackerras established the mood of the evening. This was the 80th birthday of one of the finest and best loved conductors alive. We would enjoy ourselves, whatever the shortcomings of this first revival of the ROH's Un Ballo in Maschera in the Boston version. With Mackerras, all would be well, musically at least.

And so it proved. Mario Martone's leaden staging, designed by Sergio Tramonti, grows no more persuasive on second encounter. Stiff, mid-19th century realism jostles uneasily with

OPERA

Un Ballo in Maschera

Covent Garden

Fiona Maddocks

moments of abstraction. As before, however, the masked ball finale looks spectacular: a Tissot-esque scene of twirling bustles in which tilting mirrors cleverly suggest the cataclysmic collapse of the world order.

The cast was uneven. Dmitri Hvorostovsky as Renato held the stage:

lyrical, stern, handsome, humourless. Richard Margison's Riccardo never found focus, too often sliding around the notes and failing to convey any real sense of the heroic. Stephanie Blythe showed beefy strength as Ulrica and Patrizia Biccire made a bright-toned Oscar.

Of greatest interest was the Swedish soprano Nina Stemme as Amelia, making her house debut and singing her first Verdi role. Her voice tends to be pale at the top but rich and communicative in mid and lower range. She hasn't yet explored the role's full char-

acterisation, giving a more introverted performance than her predecessor, Karita Mattila. But this was a promising start in new terrain.

The ball over, Mackerras was cheered on stage to receive a cake with 80 candles. After some spirited blowing, he observed that he had conducted at Covent Garden for half a century. Luckily for us he chose to spend his birthday there. He's giving eight more performances. Go and hear this rare and generous musician.

● *In rep until 16 December.*
Information: 020 7632 8300.

A clumsy bid for greatness

EXHIBITION

David Hockney Midsummer: East Yorkshire 2004

Somerset House

Nick Hackworth

WITHOUT so much as a blush, the press release for this small display of works by Hockney describes it as a "complement" to the 18th-century watercolours in the Hermitage Rooms upstairs. Insult might be closer to the mark.

Packed together in a grid on one wall, the 36 watercolours explore the land- and cityscapes of Hockney's native Yorkshire — fields he laboured in, woods he gambolled through and the rooftops of Bridlington, where his mother lived. These are scenes of melancholy and nostalgia. But such is Hockney's handling that although the sentiment might be there, when its articulation is this bad, who cares?

Hockney's abortive experiments with watercolour began in mid-2002 and lasted until early this year. A quote on a nearby wall about Chinese painting indicates that he hoped to capture something of that genre's fluidity and vision. Contrary to such stated aims, the worst pieces are lumpy and heavy.

Badly drawn forms, such as haystacks, sit on fields of unmodulated colour. Meanwhile, the delicacies of the medium, the chance to explore tonal variations by blending pigments wet-on-wet and the pleasure of eking out meaningful shapes from gestural marks, lie unexplored.

For comparison, look at the 18th-century works. The precision of Girtin or Cozens and the wonderful versatility of Turner, who conjured atmosphere from the loosest of brushstrokes, amount to an embarrassment of riches. All this exhibition proves, as if we needed reminding, is that the alchemical touch of celebrity, transmuting straw into gold, remains undiminished.



Hockney: Four Roads and Cornfields

CDS OF THE WEEK

POP

Enya

Amarantine

(Warner Bros)

★★★★☆

ALWAYS the maverick, Enya still refuses to play live or enter into any of the promotional games that artists are meant to indulge in. Instead, she sells records (65 million at the last count), singing in English, Japanese and an unnamed language conceived by lyricist Roma Ryan, wife of Enya's manager, and producer Nicky Ryan.

Amarantine is uncompromising, unlike anyone else (apart from her former band, Clannad), and is a work of beauty as capable of breaking hearts as mending them. The title track, with its introductory hint of Orinoco Flow, glides ahead on a bed of gentle melody, but manages to be as hook-laden as a Franz Ferdinand single, while It's in the Rain is mournful and uplifting, and Someone Said Goodbye is a slice of hushed despair. Desperately good.

John Aizlewood



Tommy Lee

Tommyland:

The Ride

(Steamhammer/SPV)

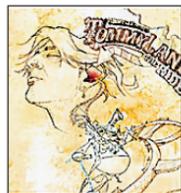
★★★★☆

WHAT kind of a place do you imagine

Tommyland might be? I confess to conjuring up lurid images of grotesque behaviour, curiously engorged body parts and minimal mental activity. So this release by the Mötley Crüe drummer came as a surprise. It seems that Lee now wants to be seen as a serious West Coast dude like, say, Tom Petty or Don Henley.

Good Times, a breezy pop song, sets the tone and the mood is continued with Hello Again, which sounds a bit like Oasis trying to play All the Young Dudes. I Need You is modern and mysterious, Makin' Me Crazy could be a chart contender and Watch You Lose is the best shot yet at Nirvana-lite. The clue to his volte-face is found on Tired, a song of disillusionment with excess. So drummers do have feelings.

Pete Clark



Justin Vali

Madagascar Valiha

(Cinq Planètes,

CP 06496)

★★★★☆

ACROSS the world, fantastic instruments are made from bamboo. But none is more remarkable than the valiha from Madagascar. In its most traditional form, it's a bamboo tube with "strings" cut from the bamboo itself supported on small movable bridges. Nowadays, more durable metal strings, or bicycle brake cables, are preferred by musicians.

Justin Vali has recorded many albums (with Kate Bush, among others), but this double CD is entirely solo. The sound is delicate and harp-like and you need to focus into its special sound world. It's a guide not only to the many types of valiha, but to the animal and plant life of Madagascar after which the pieces are named.

Vali plays at the Purcell Room tomorrow night.

Simon Broughton



CLASSICAL

Evgeny Kissin

(piano)

Scriabin/Medtner/

Stravinsky

(RCA Red Seal,

82876 65390 2)

★★★★☆

THE Russian virtuoso Evgeny Kissin has come in for a lot of flak in recent years. Following his debut as a 12-year-old in 1984, he has often been condemned for lack of emotional maturity. But this new CD reveals him to be far more than a thundering keyboard technician.

The three movements from Stravinsky's Petrushka have the virtuosity and brittle precision that the music demands. But Medtner's Sonata — Reminiscenza, Op 38 No 1 — shows how introspective and lyrical his playing can be. Better is the Sonata No 3 by Scriabin, where Kissin captures the Promethean ambition of the outer movements and the tenderness of the Andante. Five of Scriabin's Preludes, Op 15, are also dispatched with sensitivity.

Barry Millington



JAZZ

Christian Garrick

Firewire

(Flying Blue Whale,

FLY-003)

★★★★☆

IF you know Christian Garrick as an elegant Hot Club de France violinist in the Thirties style of Stephane Grappelli, prepare to be amazed. His new double album, with keyboarder David Gordon leading an exceptional rhythm section, not only sounds totally 21st century but also swings like a hotel roof in a hurricane.

Alternating acoustic violin with loops, overdrive, wah-wah and other synth effects, Christian writes attractive material and burns through his solos with an impetus and invention few suspected he had. Think of electric Chick Corea or Polish violinist Michal Urbaniak in their free-flowing prime. Christian has been consolidating until now, but with this fine recording, his time has arrived.

Jack Massarik

