

The Arts

Where is the lust?

THEATRE

As You Like It

Swan, Stratford-upon-Avon

Nicholas de Jongh

I GLEANED little serious amusement, pleasure or enlightenment from director Gregory Thompson's weird assault upon this romantic pastoral comedy. The perverse production, which disappointingly launches Michael Boyd's artistic directorship of the Royal Shakespeare Company, has the singular distinction of being the ugliest looking As You Like It I have ever seen. Ugliness is not, of course, necessarily a bar to illumination: Robert LePage thrillingly staged A Midsummer Night's Dream in a hideous mud-bath world, the lovers trapped in its quicksands.

Thompson's production, however, lacks quirks of invention, except in the first, riveting moments when Martin Hutson's interestingly vulnerable Orlando glumly sees chunks of wood. Suddenly he collapses in helpless sobs and clings to old Adam like a helpless, hopeless child. His life-predicament becomes clear. Otherwise designer Colin Peters baldly conceives the Duke's sinister court — men in frock coats and fancy bow ties, women in big bustle dresses — as a steeply tilted platform, surrounded by snow-flakes. For the Forest of Arden scenes, segments of this platform are detached, placed against walls and turned round, revealing either green fungal growths or brussel-sprouts everywhere attached to them.

These gross, repellent appurtenances provide no atmospheric support for Shakespeare's vision of Arden, either as an Arcadia or a grim, fearful forest through which Nina Sosanya's Rosalind, Orlando and Naomi Frederick's sweet, fragile Celia must struggle towards self-discovery. This is a blank, characterless Arden, with just a few bird sounds and actors comically playing trees and sheep. David Fielder's Jaques prowls around in a skull-cap but



Cute teenage youth: Nina Sosanya (Rosalind) looks the part but there are too few signs of love and longing

never discovers his character's sad, despairing essence. There are scant climactic changes to mark emotional changes.

Miss Sosanya, when dressed up as Ganymede in long jacket, high boots and shirt looks, sounds and behaves perfectly like a cute teenage youth. Mimicry, though, is not enough. Her phlegmatic

Rosalind, whose slack, unaristocratic diction includes "towld" for "told" and "lidy" for "lady", is never smitten or bitten by eros and longing. She's not fathoms deep in love, more like five nautical inches under. She fails to relish the flirtation and game-playing with Hutson, a compellingly gauche, intense

Orlando, who never dares let himself go and fall for Ganymede. The grave, randiness of Natasha Gordon's shepherdess in waiting briefly flashes in a production where love, longing and lust are muted elements.

● Until 8 November. Box office: 0870 609 1110.

Tristram Kenton

MUST SEE
this weekend

COMEDY

New Act of the Year, Hackney Empire
(020 8985 2424)

If you want to spot the comedy stars of the future this is the place to look. Past candidates range from Ardal O'Hanlon to Harry Enfield and Alan Davies. With less than 10 minutes to prove themselves, this annual gig is all about the survival of the wittiest.

Tomorrow, 8pm

POP

Jurassic 5, Brixton Academy
(0870 060 0100)

Six-strong LA rap crew, one of the honourable old-school minority who don't go around bragging about their firearms collection, come to London to showcase their latest album.

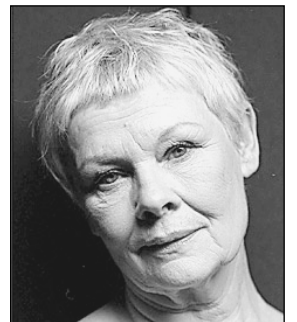
Tomorrow and Sunday, 7pm

THEATRE

London Concert for Peace,
Theatre Royal Drury Lane
(020 7494 5000)

Dame Judi Dench (right), Sir Ian McKellen, Sir Alan Ayckbourn, Harold Pinter, Samantha Bond, Mark Rylance, Jemma Redgrave and Adrian Lester, along with a host of other luminaries from stage and screen will be "celebrating the joy of life" in aid of Red Cross, Oxfam, Care and Amnesty International.

Sunday, 7.30pm



DANCE

Snag Project: Bye Suspicious,
Clare Studio, Royal Opera House
(020 7304 4000)

The choreographic duo Joanne Fong and Sarah Warsop bring an interesting mixed bill of contemporary work to Covent Garden.

Tomorrow, 8pm

FILM

L'homme du Train
(Certificate 12A)

This tender comedy, manipulated with finesse by the director Patrice Leconte, follows the curious friendship that develops between a tough guy (Johnny Hallyday) and a retired schoolteacher (Jean Rochefort).

On general release

EXHIBITION

Constable to Delacroix, Tate
Britain (020 7887 8008)

In its survey of the relationship between French and British painting in the period 1820-1840, which stresses the supposed influence of Constable, Turner, Wilkie and Lawrence on their French contemporaries such as Géricault (above), this exhibition offers new insights into late Romanticism.



Until 11 May. Daily 10am-5.50pm



Monkeying around: Martin parodies the YBAs

Aping Damien, satirically

DESPITE the prevailing economic gloom, the contemporary art scene has lately been blessed with the birth of several new galleries. Of these, Counter Gallery has, by virtue of the reputation of its founder, Carl Freeman, received the most attention. A writer and curator, Freeman was instrumental in promoting the BritArt generation, Hirst, Hume, Emin et al, through his curation of several seminal warehouse shows in the early Nineties and subsequently a number of more institutional exhibitions at major national galleries.

More recently, Freeman has ventured into the commercial arena with Counter Editions, a web-based company selling prints and multiples by the usual suspects — Emin, Hume,

EXHIBITION

Simon Martin

Counter Gallery, EC2

Nick Hackworth

the Chapman Brothers, etc — and has now opened this small gallery space which nestles in the mean streets of Shoreditch.

The first show at Counter, however, is quiet, odd and not altogether convincing. Simon Martin, of the YBA generation but not, as yet, well known, is a versatile artist who presents three pieces: a painting, a sculpture and a painted relief, all linked by an amusing animal theme.

The sculpture is the most successful piece. Mounted on a plinth, the large, white, strangely round and cartoonish

rendering of a chimpanzee's head is a parody of the idea that a floating white sphere would be the perfect sculpture. It is an idea that Damien Hirst has ruminated on and, with typical subtlety, he wanted his ideal sphere to float above upturned kitchen knives, but with its comic puncturing of such pretension Martin's version is the sharper.

Less effective, though, is the bizarre, wall-mounted relief of a brightly coloured starling, which genuinely would seem more at home in a toy shop, and the painting, a hyper-realist depiction of a bright red Amazonian tree-frog, which though well-executed, seems oddly pointless.

● Until 26 April. Information: 020 7684 8888.