

Heart of the horror

THEATRE

Iphigenia At Aulis
National's Lyttelton
Nicholas de Jongh

PERHAPS the barbarism and spectacular bloodshed of the fighting in Iraq has inspired the recent outburst of classic Greek drama revivals. For as Katie Mitchell's horrifying production of Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis* reminds us, when it comes to describing the savagery and infectious depravity of war the ancient Greek dramatists were matchless.

The particular fascination of *Iphigenia* has to do with its treatment of human sacrifice as a stratagem of a war in which a cowardly commander seeks to save his own skin by shedding that of his daughter's, *Iphigenia*.

Miss Mitchell yanks the play from its fifth century BC moorings and anchors it in the 1930s or 1940s. She manages to make the behaviour of Ben Daniels's surprisingly insipid Greek army chief, Agamemnon, even more shocking.

It as if such primitive, sacrificial wickedness were a contemporary phenomenon. Euripides's non-specific location becomes in Hildegard Bechtler's striking design, an army headquarters requisitioned from a stately home, with high, grey-washed walls, lofty windows and stacks of upright chairs.



Betrayed by sacrificial wickedness: Hattie Morahan, Kate Duchene and Ben Daniels in Katie Mitchell's darkly moving *Iphigenia At Aulis*

The chorus, true to the period mood though sounding affected in Don Taylor's bathetic translation, become a flock of black-garbed, genteel ladies who hover in awkward nervousness around *Iphigenia* and her mother Clytemnestra, then scatter like frightened birds. Half true to their classic origins, they sing and dance to what composer, Paul Clark, makes sound mid-20th century jazz.

The atmosphere grows bracingly strange.

The scene of *Iphigenia*'s arrival with her mother, enormous piles of suitcases and flowers accompanying their appearance, tips the action mistakenly towards social comedy. Soon, though, the action takes a turn towards the heart of darkness where people change their minds and morals as if they were discarded clothes. Justin

Salinger's Achilles, behaving more like a camp-follower than soldier and smugly resting on his own laurels, offers no help. Hattie Morahan's frail, fine, wide-eyed *Iphigenia*, shuddering with fear, realises she will be sacrificed to secure a fair wind for the fleet.

A wailing baby sounds sentimentality's note but Mitchell raises the temperature to fever-point.

Kate Duchene's riveting Clytemnestra battles with Agamemnon, all sails flying.

Her shrill, trembling voice teeters on hysteria's verge, cracks and shrieks while her stoic daughter is rushed away like ritual lamb to the slaughter. A great wind blasts the beleaguered building where women hold out against male power. Astonishing.

● *Information:* 020 7452 3000.

Brit art's latest patron fails to cause a stir



Takashi Murakami's Kitagawa-kun figure

THE only thing missing from the British art boom, which has fostered a bacterial-like growth in the number of artists and galleries, is British money. European and American collectors back most of the shows. Charles Saatchi is the best known exception; another, whose profile will be raised when he opens a gallery in Manchester next year to house his collection, is Frank Cohen.

As part of Art Fortnight London, an eclectic series of events and exhibitions organised by a collective of galleries and auction houses, about 35 works

EXHIBITION

Frank Cohen Collection: A Selection

3 Grafton Street, W1
Nick Hackworth

selected from the 1,000 that Cohen owns are being shown in a magnificently gaudy Mayfair house.

The artists on show make up a roll call of über-trendy international names. There are a painting and sculpture by the inexplicably successful Takashi Murakami, two

canvases by Richard Prince, an American best-known for his unfunny jokes stencilled on huge, monochromatic surfaces, some tastelessly amusing works by the Chapman brothers, including a portrait of Hitler as a clown, pieces by Marlene Dumas and Luc Tuymans — who have been largely responsible for setting the tone of contemporary painting — and two comically distorted sculptures by New Yorker Rachel Feinstein, whose DIY aesthetic sits in pleasant contrast to its opulent surroundings.

This selection suggests that Cohen's gallery will be a significant contribution to our art scene. But it also has the effect of highlighting Saatchi's bravery when the inevitable comparison is made. Though Saatchi's purchasing choices are occasionally dubious, he is willing to buy the work of unknown artists, informed only by his own taste, and has, as a consequence, formed the taste of others, something that Cohen's collection, on this showing, is unlikely to do.

● *Until 22 July.*
Information: 020 7839 8139.

Drawn to the real secret of his success

"BACK to being who I was before," is the first line on the new *Badly Drawn Boy* album *One Plus One Is One*. This week, that meant Damon Gough and his band playing free concerts in tiny pubs all over the country, in an intimate, inspiring mini-tour that reached Hoxton last night.

"This has been a life-affirming week," he said. "You've made me feel good

about the whole thing again."

He has been burnt by the music industry, which gave him the Mercury Prize for his debut album in 2000, then turned on him after 2002's disappointing *Have You Fed The Fish?* A sour rant here about music journalists, the sole printable word of which was "dimwits", showed that his wounds have not yet

POP

Badly Drawn Boy

The Spread Eagle, E2

David Smyth

fully healed. Apart from that moment he was in fine form in close-up, playing with more focus and passion than on any of the other occasions I have seen him.

Some past shows have been overlong, stop-start muddles that have come closer to being stand-up comedy than live music.

In these cramped conditions he gave the songs room to breathe, beginning solo with acoustic versions of familiar tracks such as *A Minor Incident* and *The Shining*.

He then eased the band

into proceedings with new songs, including the fluted, gorgeous *Easy Love* and the winsome *Year Of The Rat*, which he said he hopes will be a minor hit every 12 years.

His quirks were still present (he passed around a photo of his two children at one point) but this time the music came first. Everybody, including Gough, went away happy.

IN LONDON TONIGHT

BY RICHARD GODWIN

Plan your evening's entertainment with our guide to the best films, shows, gigs and one-off events that are still taking bookings (at the time of going to press).

PICK OF THE NIGHT

Jeff Beck

7.30pm, Royal Albert Hall, Kensington Gore, SW7. £25-£40. Tube: South Kensington.

Beck emerged from the Yardbirds in the mid-Sixties as one of the great British axe-wielders. Fans will be torn — the remainder of the Yardbirds are playing at the Royal Festival Hall tonight.

020 7589 8212

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY

The Concretes

7.30pm, King's College Students' Union, Macadam Building, Surrey Street, WC2. £8.50. Tube: Temple. The hotly tipped Swedish art-rockers come to London on a wave of acclaim for their Velvets-inspired pop.

020 7836 7132

THE BIG FILM

The Day After Tomorrow

Across London. Dennis Quaid and Jake Gyllenhaal doing their best not to be engulfed by some awesome special effects in this climate change disaster flick.

OPEN YOUR MIND

Democracy

7.30pm, Wyndhams Theatre, Charing Cross, WC2. £10-£39.50. Tube: Leicester Square.

Roger Allam's (pictured) portrayal of West German chancellor Willy Brandt is a riveting study of shrewd vacillation and melancholia in this bracingly intelligent thriller.

020 7369 1736



Tristram Kenton

CHEAP DEAL

Russian Landscapes In The Age Of Tolstoy

6pm-9pm, National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, WC2. £3.50, £1.50-£3 concs. Tube: Leicester Square.

Tickets are half price on Wednesday evenings for this new exhibition exploring the spaces that inspired Russia's magnificent literary heritage.

020 7747 2885

BEST COMEDY

The Comedy Store Players

8pm, Comedy Store, 1a Oxendon Street, SW1. £13, £8 concs. Tube: Piccadilly Circus.

Giggles are guaranteed as the crack improv team, featuring Lee Simpson and Jim Sweeney, takes over.

0870 060 2340

BEST TALK

Tony Benn

7pm, B5 Auditorium, King's College, Stamford Street, SE1. £6, £4 concs. Tube: Waterloo.

The great raconteur and maverick socialist talks about his new paperback, *Free Radical*.

020 7292 5100

To get your event listed, please email details to richard.godwin@standard.co.uk