



Riveting: Sello Sebotsane portrays Idi Amin as a man serenely going out of his rather small mind

## Cartoon soldier cut to size

ALL arrayed in white leather uniform and gold boots, toy medals glittering on his lapel, forever dancing and prancing, voice a fog-horn bellow of threats, Sello Sebotsane's riveting Field Marshal Idi Amin has the air of a man serenely going out of his rather small mind. Aptly so. Big Dada, performed by the South African company, Third World Bunfight, ingeniously plays out the political life of the Ugandan dictator of the Seventies as the theatrical equivalent of a cartoon strip, and as a comment on a cowed country in the grip of a megalomaniac mass-murderer. Black farce, you could say, takes a fresh turn for the amusing better.

Author Brett Bailey, who also briskly directs and designs this dark show, chronicles Amin's barbarous eight-year rule in a disconnected series of vivid tableaux that are fortified by catchy African song and

BIG DADA ★

The Pit, Barbican

Nicholas de Jongh

dance. The idea is to cut the absurd Amin down to size, while never losing sight of his murderous potency. With a beer crate to give him height, watched by a posse of blank-eyed functionaries in dinner jackets or fatigues, Sebotsane's Amin seizes power as if it were some new toy.

The tyrant's power-mongering is chillingly viewed in toyshop, childlike terms: an excited Amin clutches the toy tanks and missiles he will receive when he jettisons the Zionist cause he's accidentally adopted. He returns home happily with a full shop-

ping-bag. Blood-stained marionettes jovially sing in accompaniment to a music-box tune "They chopped us into pieces." Two toy crocodiles hunt for human flesh.

Bailey beautifully captures the authentic Amin lingo, which veers between Alice in Wonderland and the uneasy, illiterate. "The lot of you, you're all abolished," he rages. "I have got very good brains."

The meandering second half fails to explain Amin's decline or his tyrannical regime's durability, yet the final images of the dictator — swigging whisky as he feasts upon the bloody innards of the corpse he clasps, and his jubilant singing of Sinatra's I Did it my Way — memorably convey Amin's monstrousness and banal pride.

● Until 29 September. Box office: 020 7638 8891.

## Brutal truth

BORIS MIKHAILOV/

Case History X

Saatchi Gallery, Boundary Rd, NW8

Nick Hackworth

IMAGES do not always speak for themselves. Take the photographs currently hanging on the walls of the Saatchi Gallery. In them you will see described, in graphic detail, the degraded lives of the homeless of Kharkov, a run-of-the-mill town in the Ukraine, the prime casualties of the botched transition from communism to capitalism that has scarred the former USSR.

A woman with a hideously distended, jutting belly poses naked for the camera. Street kids are pictured smoking, pissing and sniffing glue. A balding man in his forties with a tattoo of Stalin on his right breast proudly shows off his large, warty penis. A young prostitute bares her arse, disfigured by STDs.

What is one supposed to make of images like these? Seen within the incongruous context of the exhibition's private view, peopled as it was with serving staff dressed up in Damien Hirst spot-painting T-shirts filling and re-filling champagne glasses, the images inevitably appeared voyeuristic, exploitative and bordered on the repulsive. Especially so, given that many of portraits are nude, the models were paid and, to make matters worse, many have died since the pictures were taken, only a few years ago.

These are all accusations that have been levelled at Mikhailov before, most recently when he won the Titbank



Graphic: Mikhailov's Homeless Man

Photography Prize earlier this year. He remains, however, unrepentant, and it is his description of what he does and why, laid out in the introduction to the book that accompanies the exhibition, that is possibly the only saving grace of this exhibition.

According to Mikhailov, he had a "professional and civic duty" to record the lives of these fellow Ukrainians that would otherwise fade unnoticed from the world, to give them a place in history as well as to bestow visibility on their plight. His undeniably powerful images succeed in achieving these two aims, but a final judgment of this kind of work seems to me to depend upon what the artist thinks, or at least claims he is doing, and whether or not you believe them, which is why images cannot always speak for themselves. In a different context, this exhibition might have been acceptable — in this gallery, with its history of chasing shock-value, it is not.

● Until 9 December. Telephone: 020 7624 8299.

## Word perfect funky gems

DENYS BAPTISTE ★★

Jazz Café, NW1

Jack Massarik

DENYS Baptiste is a terrific saxophonist, but he has many rivals. What makes this self-effacing but deep-thinking 31-year-old special is his writing. Most British jazz musicians cannot compose a shapely or halfway memorable line to save their lives, but Baptiste's first two albums are full of gems. Had he been born in Philadelphia or Detroit instead of being British to the Caribbean core, US stars would be playing his numbers at their concerts.

Last night, he launched his latest CD, *Alternate Currents*, with trombonist Winston Rollins and trumpeter Kevin Robinson (on flugelhorn) joining his tenor-sax in the front line. Their sextet harmonies had a latter-day Jazz Messengers feel, but their solo skills did not match his and it was not until the quartet segment of the show that magic started to happen.

Backed by pianist Andrew McCormack, bassist Larry Bartley and drummer Tom Skinner — arguably London's most tight-knit and taut rhythm section — Denys began to stretch out and demonstrate his breadth of ideas. Mind the Gap, with its rolling New Orleans beat, inspired a funky soprano solo, Toga To Go touched off some tough tenor and the beautiful *City of Clouds* became a lyrical duet for soprano and piano.

Guest star Martin Taylor noodled around on the modal original, *Kraken*, but regained firmer ground with Marvin Gaye's *Inner City Blues*, adding his Bensonish guitar to Juliet Roberts's soulful vocal. And her fine ballad, *Stop and Look Around*, was the highlight of a substantial evening's music. Obtain the record.



Terrific: Denys Baptiste

Ratings: ○ adequate, ★ good, ★★ very good, ★★★ outstanding, X poor

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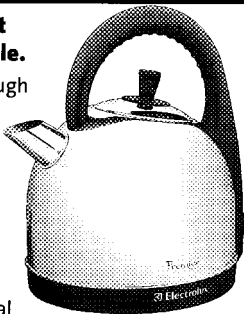
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