

Bard's blunt darts

JUBILEE ○

The Swan, Stratford

Nicholas de Jongh

IT WOULD be hard to imagine many subjects of less interest or relevance to contemporary theatre audiences than the 1769 Stratford celebrations marking the 200th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. But the Royal Shakespeare Company presumably thought this festive occasion, which was notable for Stratford's opportunistic profiteering, philistine ignorance and ceaseless rain, ranked as a timeless manifestation of English small-mindedness. Jubilee, a satire about the 1769 junketing, dreamed up by veteran playwright Peter Barnes, turns out to be a toothless, old growl of a play that has little bark and no serious bite. The humour is too often broad and thin.

In his first, famous drama, *The Ruling Class*, Barnes proved himself to be a savage mocker of traditionalist England. His exuberant bad taste, his abrupt oscillation between the tragic and the absurd-grotesque, beautifully distinguished him. But these qualities are absent here. The knockabout tone prevails from the heavy-handed beginning of Gregory Doran's sumptuously dressed but satirically threadbare production: actors dressed up as Peter Hall, Trevor Nunn and Terry Hands — the last three directors of the RSC — appear in Garrick's dream, assuring him that the Shakespeare celebrations will initiate a worldwide industry.

In 25 verbose, sprawling scenes, which track between Stratford, London and the odd thespian location,



Sacrificing the right charisma and magnetism: Nicholas Woodeson as Garrick

Barnes tries to convey how David Garrick, the revered Shakespearean actor, was persuaded to cast aside his doubts and stage the festival. On Robert Jones's bare stage, decorated with two wooden stairways that are rearranged to become Garrick's dressing room and a grand rotunda, mercenary Stratford councillors, greedy small boys, fashionable composers and literary gentlemen, not to mention the odd actress, are caught up in the celebration business. But

Barnes's satirical darts are bluntish. He makes little of the business in which smart London hauls itself up to uncouth Stratford — "a cemetery with lights".

When it comes to the actual celebrations, the comic fiasco of rain and cancelled pageants looms small. Nicholas Woodeson's Garrick sacrifices the right charisma, magnetism and gusto for the wrong cool irony and detachment. The climactic jubilee songs and dances, the cos-

tumed gallivanting and trite paeans to Shakespeare do not so much suggest the launching of a national myth as a theatrical miss. But Barry Stanton, as both a randy Dr Johnson and a lofty aristocrat, Paul Bentall's Shakespeare-loathing-critic and Michael Mears's haughty composer all impressively convert Barnes's caricatures into characters.

● In repertory until 13 October. Box office: 01789 403403.

Sons and Hoovers

IN CELEBRATION ★★

Minerva, Chichester

Rachel Halliburton

DAVID STOREY's name was on every serious theatregoer's lips from the late Sixties to the early Seventies, but the subsequent neglect of his naturalistic portrayals of working-class life means that staging one of his plays seems like an exercise in social archaeology.

Director Sean Holmes revived Storey's *The Contractor* at the Oxford Playhouse earlier this year, and now, with this affecting, beautifully cast production, he proves the playwright still has much to offer to today's audiences.

In Chichester's *Minerva Theatre*, Anthony Lambie's strangely museum-exhibit-like set recreates the shabby splendour of a Sixties Yorkshire miner's cottage clamped in the vice of a houseproud mentality. The tall, besuited young man standing awkwardly among the plumped cushions in the sitting room seems not to belong there, but when an older man shuffles in and starts

to welcome him we realise that they are father and son.

That sense of dislocation looms large in a play that explores the experiences of three men kicked across the class divide by parents who don't want them to suffer the hardships of a mining-village existence.

The sons, Colin, Steven and Andrew, have returned home in glory for their parents' 40th wedding anniversary, but soon the psychological pedestals they have been placed on begin to wobble, eventually crumbling beneath the weight of their self-disgust.

After the energetic social climbing encouraged since the Thatcher years, the sons' discomfort with their gleaming middle-class identities seems dated and, on occasion, needlessly self-pitying. However, Holmes has found actors who can bring back that era with force, whether it's Sean Gleeson's maverick solicitor-turned-artist; Andrew, Fred Pearson's jokily frail depiction of the father; or Susan



Susan Jameson and Fred Pearson

Jameson's incredible portrayal of the mother, reduced to a doll through her plastic perfectionism.

This deceptively simple portrait of a family's disintegration lingers in the mind long after you leave the theatre. A production to be treasured.

● Until 4 August. Box office: 01243 781312.

Haircuts, rhythm and crunch

HAVEN ★

Dingwalls

Max Bell

THE current issue of *Viz* has rattled a few cages thanks to its superb "Shittish Isles" map. While chuckling at that brilliant illustration, don't forget its lampoon of "club culture" in the new faux hot spot Casco Caseoso. It's hard to stress how sick people are of Ibiza, Aiya Napa and the moronic elevation of same via cheap TV. What's that to do with Haven? There is another groundswell of opinion against hip-hop pseudos and chancers on agreeable allowances. The whole rebirth of interest in New York bands is a reaction to this. Haven aren't saviours of anything but they play with commitment and fire and look like they'd die for their music.

Coming out of Cornwall and relocating to Manchester, Haven are a four-piece who play with guts. Singer Gary Briggs strains at every sinew, guitarist Nat Wason is welded to his Les Paul. The rhythm section make no apologies for crunch.

Being melodically airtight isn't enough by itself.

Fortunately, Haven move on bursts of harmony and aggression and boast decent haircuts — from Slade mod to Buffalo Springfield curly. Forgetting fashion and cutting along to tunes, *Let It Live*, *Beautiful Thing* and *'Til The End* are classic rock songs in the making, fuelled on an attitude that isn't mindless.

While it's tempting to push Haven forward as the next big thing, it would be wiser to leave them alone to brew with an audience. At the moment they're just starting to ferment. At full strength they could be awesome.

Drama gets the shaft

JUAN MUNOZ/

Double Bind ★

Tate Modern

Nick Hackworth

TO HELP it deal with its ludicrously large Turbine Hall, Tate Modern persuaded Unilever to hand over £1.25 million, enabling it to commission one artist a year until 2004 to fill the space with some very big artwork.

This year, it's the turn of Juan Muñoz, one of Spain's most celebrated artists, a sculptor who places human figures in complex architectural settings.

Muñoz has made a big architectural intervention. Halfway down the Turbine Hall, if you stand on the balcony, you normally look down on to empty space on either side; now, if facing the back of the hall, you see a temporary floor stretching out. It appears to be punctured by a series of square shafts, but only a few are real openings, the rest are *trompe l'oeil*.

Seen from underneath, the installation is radically different. The only light filters in from the shafts in the ceiling, but in the first few shafts you see nothing. In those deeper down, you begin to see life-sized grey-blue metallic figures inhabiting the half-space between the ceiling and the floor and apparently engaged in mysterious dramas.

In one shaft, a figure disconcertingly like Biggles, with gelled hair and military-style clothing, looks down with a superior expression. In other shafts, figures run around with blankets, peering into doorways hidden from view, inexplicably sitting on each others' knees and clustered around soft-light sources that illuminate their faces.

Double Bind is named after a theory about interpersonal communication that illustrates, according to Muñoz, "how much misunderstanding is included within language and communication". Our failure to understand the dramas unfolding above and our appreciation of the difference between the surface and subterranean worlds illustrate the point well enough.

It is unfortunate, but perversely appropriate, that the Tate Modern has, in its promotional material for the piece, managed to misattribute the Double Bind theory to William Bateson, the founder of genetics, when it was formulated by his social-scientist son, Gregory Bateson.

Misunderstanding is more rife than even Mr Muñoz expects.

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

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