



of fantastic creatures drawn from Codex Serafinus, the imaginary encyclopaedia created by Luigi Serafini, the artist and naturalist

# Dressed to thrill

Serafini. His is a strange book, best described as a fantasy realm somewhere between Disney's Lion King, Heath Robinson's homespun contraptions, and Escher's illusions.

Page after page features colourful pageants of strange plant and animal beings. There are climbing ferns, talking trees, and imaginary flowers.

Singing frogs jostle alongside insect men, and circus women play with mathematical equations, flying machines, and then segue into beetle-bugs.

It's a world of familiar creatures morphed into something else, and

then morphed again into anthropomorphic creature-plants.

Decouflé has faithfully and sweetly transferred Serafini's imaginings on to the stage. Twenty-five of Lyon Opera Ballet's able dancers don some 150 costumes, and move in broadly balletic style, although not an especially interesting one.

You vaguely wonder what ballet dancers are doing dressed up as talking trees, and why this family-friendly show isn't on a float at the Notting Hill Carnival rather than London's leading dance theatre.

But the production is so good, you don't really mind, and you're soon

scooped up by the next fantastical scene. One of the best is when two dancers mime the motion of food as it passes through the body (this is much better than its sounds).

There's also a good humoured chicken-woman in patent red shoes who shakes her tail feathers around talking trees. And the opening scene is gorgeous, with a herd of zebra-men moving across a savannah-like plane. The costumes really are fabulous.

Which gets you thinking. Tricodex is not so much a dance show as a triumph of costume design. It be stitchcraft!

# Deconstruction of the natural world

ALTHOUGH tourism is now the largest industry in the world, the psychological effects of mass-market travel remain relatively unexplored. In its oblique fashion, Universal Experience, a group show of 50 international artists including Maurizio Cattelan, Peter Fischli and David Weiss, Jeff Koons, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Warhol, attempts to examine this curious world of desire, expectation and experience.

Like all such thematic shows, Universal Experience is flawed. Art curators are allergic to didactic, sociological displays and so tend to be dangerously loose in their interpretations of the theme. Many works here are only tangentially related to travel.

Despite exuding a Gap advert-style naffness, Doug Aitken's high-tech, multi-screen video installation about parallel lives in an apartment block is visually

## EXHIBITION

**Universal Experience: Art, Life and the Tourist's Eye**  
Hayward Gallery  
Nick Hackworth

stunning. An experience of a different sort is offered by über-trendy Swiss artist Thomas Hirschorn's lo-fi, walk-in installation, which mourns the looting of Iraq's museums. Most contemporary political art is pompous and deluded, but Hirschorn goes one better by being incredibly tasteless as well, juxtaposing hardcore porn with news footage of dead victims of war.

Happily, the show is good enough to absorb such lapses of quality. The most effective works about the tourist experience highlight the

layers of unreality and expectation in which the whole business of travel is wrapped.

Oliver Barbieri shows a video of Rome, shot from the sky through a lens that makes everything look like a model.

Fischli and Weiss display a 90ft light table showing travel images, mundane and beautiful, taken over the past 15 years: a simple reminder of the speed with which we've ransacked all the natural world has to offer.

Which leads to the one of show's points: that art galleries may be the only places left where we can travel to experience different sensations, thoughts and feelings.

Notwithstanding its lack of originality many, however, may wish to stick with the tried-and-tested combination of a sandy beach and a large cocktail.

● *Until 11 December.*  
Information: 020 7921 0813.

## WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

### JAZZ

**Tim Berne**

**Vortex, N16**

Jack Massarik

AS free-improv alto-sax goes, Tim Berne is one of the more accessible operators. Loud yet never overbearing, the burly, designer-stubbled New Yorker worked up a sizeable head of steam last night without resorting to the self-indulgent honks and howls that distinguish most of his fellow toilers in the Ornette-via-Braxton vineyard.

Scorning a microphone, Berne led his Hardcell Trio, with drummer Tom Rainey and pianist Craig Taborn, through quirky originals that mixed unstructured soloing with tightly written interludes. This cerebral interplay can be hard going, but Berne's note-based abstractions made

sparks fly. Taborn, too, was a major asset. His right-hand work suggested more than passing acquaintance with straight-ahead improvisation, and his way of homing in on bluesy tone-centres gave the music a warmer cast.

My First Phone, I Do It and Van Gundy's Retreat (dedicated to the New York Knicks' former basketball coach) featured complex counterpoint for piano and Berne's honourably battered and delacquered old Selmer sax, but dynamics weren't ignored.

At full throttle the trio generated a spiky, tumbling kind of swing, but at quieter moments Rainey played the tom-toms with his fingertips. Absorbing music by a trio coherent enough for the uninitiated yet far-enough-out for the fashionistas.

● *Ends tonight.*  
Information: 020 7690 6661.

WHERE better to spend a Friday night than in the company of a band who perfectly articulate the lure of the weekend to the wage slave? Like Hard-Fi, another breakthrough band of the past few months, wiry London quartet the Rakes write their jerky, aggressive songs using first-hand knowledge of dead-end jobs and alcohol-fuelled escapism.

Album number two will no doubt be filled with tedious tales from the tour bus, but on August's debut *Capture/Release*, this band seem completely to understand their fans. *Work, Work, Work* (Pub, Club, Sleep) was a mellower depiction of a life spent drifting, while *Violent and We Are All Animals* concerned the dangers of the town centre at chucking-out time. Even a flirtation with politics on the fiery *Strasbourg* contained the line, "I

### POP

**The Rakes**

**Koko, NW1**

David Smyth

could smell the vodka on your breath".

Singer Alan Donohoe was refreshingly uncool for a frontman, gabbling impenetrably between songs, hugging his bandmates while they were trying to play, and dancing with complete disregard for the whereabouts of his elbows.

The thumping beats of *Terror!* and *Open Book* got the crowd dancing too. As the band closed with new single *22 Grand Job*, joined by four shimmying secretaries chewing pens suggestively, it seemed like a long time til work on Monday morning.

### THEATRE

**Hush**

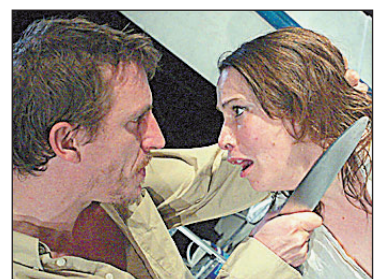
**Arcola, E8**

Fiona Mountford

LYDIA'S husband Griff is not making her ninth month of pregnancy easy. Racked with headaches and drinking heavily, he questions his wife incessantly, turning their pleasant kitchen into an interrogation room.

Over the course of an intense, repetitive, yet strangely truncated 55 minutes, young playwright Samantha Wright slowly reveals the desperate depths of Griff's paranoia. In Donnacadh O'Briain's impressively focused production, the unborn child is, to Griff's fevered imagination, a cuckoo that will destroy their comfortable nest.

Alex Palmer makes Griff suitably wild-eyed and suggests that there is very little he would not be capable of if his mood swung far enough. But if he does not coalesce into a three-dimensional character, Wright's script, which leaves the



**Intense performance: Alex Palmer (Griff) and Juliet Cowan (Lydia)**

couple entirely context-free, must be to blame.

Juliet Cowan's fine Lydia has the world-weary air of a woman who's aware that her swollen stomach does not constitute the only child in her life. She picks her words with care, treading through verbal minefields, hoping that just for tonight, they might avoid explosions. In truth, it is a performance that is greater than the writing merits.

● *Until 22 October.*  
Information: 020 7503 1646.

### COMEDY

**Russell Brand**

**Brighton Corn Exchange**

Bruce Dessau

ONE CAN say that Russell Brand is excessive without fear of libel suits. Addiction to smack and crack got him the sack from his early TV presenting jobs, but he pulled himself out of a Pete Doherty-ish tailspin and is now combining a screen comeback with a smart line in confessional stand-up.

His latest show, part of the Paramount Brighton Comedy Festival's starry schedule that includes Jimmy Carr, Ross Noble and Ardal O'Hanlon, is essentially an extended anecdote about his messy sex life plus a sardonic

deconstruction of tabloid news. Both elements entertain, despite the latter being a little scattershot. The gangly jester paints captivatingly lurid pictures. His growing internet porn fixation is breathlessly described as a tumble into "a smutty Lewis Carroll labyrinth following a white rabbit of filth". An orgy experience is an un-Bacchanalian letdown, with bland nibbles and a repair man arriving mid-romp.

Brand is undeniably egocentric, but that's a job requirement. At one point, he guiltily admits that his dysfunctional behaviour generates great material. True, but even if he was married with a mortgage, he is gifted enough to find the funny side. ● *Also at Soho Theatre 24-29 October.*  
Info: 0870 429 6883. Brighton Comedy Festival until 22 Oct. Info: 01273 709709.