

Reviews

THE FAMILY OF THE INFANTE DON LUIS ★★

National Gallery

Nick Hackworth

THE Family of the Infante Don Luis is one of Goya's largest but least known paintings, and it is hanging, in splendid isolation, in Room I of the National Gallery, on temporary loan from a museum in Parma.

Painted in 1784, it was Goya's first major royal portrait and depicts the Infante (prince) Don Luis, brother of Carlos III, King of Spain, with his young wife María Teresa de Valabriga, their children and their attendants.

Although the painting was reputedly a great success with Don Luis, it is an unusual family portrait, almost impertinent in its refusal to flatter its subjects. That however was typical of Goya. He saw himself as an inheritor of Velázquez's fluid brushwork and Rembrandt's ability to capture human character on canvas. Thus he painted what he saw and refused to idealise.

Sitting at the centre of the painting is María Teresa, and Goya has done everything in his power to fix our attention upon her. Pale-faced and melancholy, she stares right at us dressed in a bright, white robe while most of those around are garbed in muted browns. Emphasising her further are two diagonal "lines" that slope



Mystery and ambiguity: The Family of the Infante Don Luis by Goya

Family unflattery

towards her from either side, formed by the varying heights of surrounding figures and subtly strengthened by a green curtain in the background.

María Teresa had good reason to look melancholy. A minor aristocrat, she was forced by the King to marry Don Luis, 32 years her senior and a notorious womaniser, to

stop him creating scandals. Carlos also specifically excluded their offspring from royal succession.

To add insult to injury, Don Luis wasn't a looker. Giacomo Casanova described him as "terrifically ugly" and he sits beside her looking old and vacant, engaged in a game of cards.

The young man smiling at

us from beneath a white cap, second from right, however, is neither melancholy nor ugly and might be Francisco del Campo, personal secretary to María Teresa and possibly her lover as well.

It is a painting full of ambiguity and mystery.

● Until 3 March. Tel: 020 7747 2885.

Carbolic comedy

JINGOISM and xenophobia come at their most cuddly in this third staged Dick Barton adventure, where it is better to be dashing than dastardly and every Englishman's foe is a rascal. When a Latin lothario arrives in London and starts feeling up ladies' baubles, Barton is shocked to his Union Jack Y-fronts, but it is only after the villain woos our hero's cleaning lady away from her Brasso that the nation falls truly into danger.

Writer and director Phil Willmott first resurrected the Fifties radio hero from clean-cut oblivion in 1998, with a comic adventure where the fiendish Baron Scarheart tried to hit England where it hurt by poisoning its tea supply. In this final part of Willmott's trilogy, audiences are giving no indication that they are tiring of the spy whose upper lip is as stiff as his resolve, and the formula of public-school priggishness and distrust of everything female and foreign continues to provide the Croydon Warehouse Theatre with a sell-out success.

While sophisticates might want to label the show a postmodern parody, it succeeds because of the sheer exuberant awfulness of the jokes, the slickness of the music adaptations, and the ridiculously convoluted plot. George Asprey manages to radiate the square-jawed heroics of Dick Barton, as he tells his assistant Snowy to "Leave the clever stuff to us public school chaps," and warns of the dangers of "underestimating foreign fiendishness".

THE TANGO OF TERROR ★

Croydon Warehouse

Rachel Halliburton

Russell Craig's design places Kit Benjamin's BBC announcer prominently on the left of the stage, while Fifties-style props provide an appropriately two-dimensional context for the action. This show is at its strongest when the characters are most determinedly over the top, so Joanna Brookes's portrayal of Barton's carbolic-soap-washed, wannabe-romantic housekeeper Mrs Horrocks provides a strong comic focal point, while Duncan Wisbey's ridiculous cockney disguised as a Latin villain is well complemented by his engaging musical performances on the piano.

Musical director Stefan Bednarczyk has raided everything from Jerusalem to Mozart's Eine Kleine Nachtmusik to provide an accompaniment to the slickly satirical songs. This is obvious but well done comedy: Dick continues to penetrate the nation's hearts.

● Until 3 February. Box office: 020 8680 4060.

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

Dillie holds her own

DILLIE KEANE ★

Arts Theatre

Bruce Dessau

FASCINATING Aida is "not dead, just dormant" explains Dillie Keane. Not content to Dillie-dally until her trio's 2003 reunion, the imposing blonde third of the combo has been taking this current show, Back With You, everywhere from the provinces to Berlin. What the Germans make of her distinctly English brand of comic songsmithery is anyone's guess but the West End witerati ought to lap it up.

Keane, accompanied by pianist Russell Churney, certainly has no difficulties holding her own. She can do bittersweet and sour with equal ease,

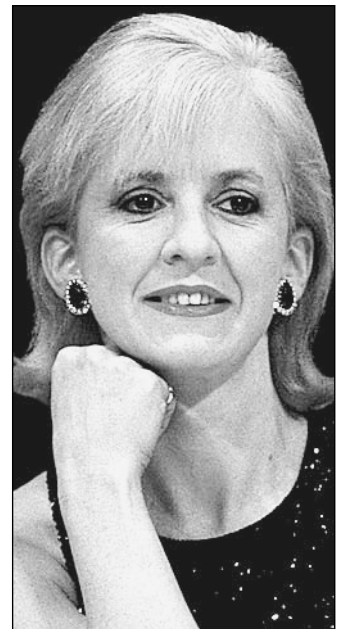
shifting mood with the tilt of a chin. In her gold frock, and later a sparkly black outfit split to the armpit, she is a commanding presence. The only time she comes unstuck is wedding her traditional template to modern technology. Her nod to the web, Internet Love, is a predictable examination of chatroom dating. Naturally everyone lies about their age.

Growing old disgracefully is the recurrent theme. This set, mainly co-written with Adele Anderson, is more personal than Aida's, homing in on "love, ageing and sex" because she's "had so much of all three". Middle age is hard to handle, but she is having fun trying. 'Allo, Bonjour Monsieur, addressing the issue of Parisian sexually transmitted diseases, is a Gallic sequel to Aida's Herpes Tango. On Song Of Sexual Re-Orientation, with its refrain "wouldn't it be nice to be a lesbian", she sashays like Noël Coward possessed by Mae West.

The show-stopping moment comes in Joyce, when the lights literally turn Keane an Incredible-Hulk green as she rages against infidelity. There's always been something both ballsy and polite about her, and they both come across here.

A long shot, perhaps, but if there is a market for the missing link between Flanders and Swann and Sophie Tucker, Keane has it sewn up.

● Until 26 January (not Sundays). Box office: 020 7836 3334.



Show stopping: Dillie Keane

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