

Reviews

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Music hot from Gipsy campfires

MUCH has happened to these Gipsy wizards since they swapped their Romanian campfires for the bright lights of the wicked West. Having rocked Ronnie Scott's and barnstormed the Barbican with their near-extinct skills, this doughty dozen have been on the crest of a world-music wave.

Party-loving Johnny Depp, who met them on the set of *The Man Who Cried* and observed that "these guys have this gift to make you feel alive" (clearly an unfamiliar sensation in Hollywood), has flown them over to LA a couple of times, but hey, that's nothing to men who can look cool while playing incredibly hot music.

Steely-eyed, sharp and shiny-shoed even in their penny-pinching period, they seem somewhat better fed these days, but if anything are playing with more fire

TARAF DE HAIDOUKS

★★★

Lyric, Hammersmith

Jack Massarik

and precision. As before, they attacked in waves of four or five last night, pounding us with passionate arrangements for violin, accordion, cymbalom, penny-whistle and bass. Tempos varied from stately ballads that defied western time-signatures to white-knuckle horas played in perfect unison at anything up to 300 beats a minute.

Ilie Iorga and Dimitru Baieu tugged our heart-strings with pentatonic minor-key songs delivered with a slow-mo vibrato. "Ion-itsa" wowed us on accordion, Cristinel Turturica stopped the show with his dazzling cymbalom feature and the



Roaming Romanians: Taraf de Haidouks have swept through London and Hollywood

patriarch of the troupe, Neculae Neacsu, did his trick with the horsehair thread as violin bow.

Five nights in the heart of folk-music-loving Hammersmith looks an inspired booking for them. Totally

acoustic, with only a black-out-curtain as backdrop and not a microphone in sight, they were cheered all the way last night. Individual namechecks were drowned in applause, but it didn't

matter. This is a group in

every sense, and probably the best of its kind in the world. The homegoing buzz in the foyer told its own story.

● *Until Saturday. Box-office: 020 8741 2311.*

Elect band

EMF ★★★

Astoria

Max Bell

IT seems spookily appropriate that EMF should choose to reform and regale us with their pre-Brit pop grooves and swearing on the eve of the General Election.

After all, this is the band whose musical catch phrase was "you're expletive deleted unbur-lee-vable" and whose initials have been appropriated by the European Monetary Fund. Their name stands for Epsom Mad Funkers, or something far ruder.

But if there is already such a concept as Nineties nostalgia, then EMF are ideally placed to tap into it, although the scenery has changed since the members of pop for the Forest Of Dean first jumped about like jack rabbits on ecstasy.

Garage is no longer just somewhere you park your car, dance music rules and Eminem is the new two-way family favourite. More pertinently, EMF can't revive old videos because of their liberal use of strobes, now illegal on TV. Shame.

What separates the @meff (as they're colloquially known) from the boys is a refusal to grow old other than disgracefully. Kicking off with *Children*, singer James Atkin and his cohorts worked their way up to the new single, *Incredible* (spotting a trend here) without ever indicating that they were bored or blasé with their lot.

Sure, Atkin looks a bit like John McEnroe these days but a bit of experience suits him and the rest of the band just rocks. It was as if Jesus Jones never existed. I kid you not.

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

Bedroom farce with a nightmare feel

THE Eastern Europeans are maestros of miserabilism. They can turn common or garden gloom into epic comedies of self-absorption. Or, in the case of Polish writer Tadeusz Rozewicz's 1960 absurdist drama, a hectic bedroom farce of self-absorption.

Rozewicz's delirious play is about a man who cannot get out of bed. He is an everyman aged somewhere between nought and 40. The traffic of people through his grotty boudoir turn it into a busy cattle market.

Amid the hubbub, he claims to be "having difficulty turning into a human being" and is in the grip of extreme psychological alienation. He looks at his hand as if it were someone else's and, amazed at his ability to

CARD INDEX ★★★

White Bear, SE11

Patrick Marmion

control it, plunges it under the sheets to massage his flagging libido.

A product of the post-War period, following Nazi occupation and Stalinist rule, Rozewicz's riotously iconoclastic play has no truck with classical convention.

Although he employs a self-righteous chorus who emerge from the hero's closet, Rozewicz soon has his hero kill them off — having first failed to kill himself. At a personal

level — with his bickering with parents and dismissing lovers — the play is the fantastical daydream of a shambolic idler. At a political level — where he is harassed by meddling bureaucrats and wounded partisans — it is a sinister nightmare reflecting Polish history.

Nor is Rozewicz above ridiculing Germans on the way — particularly his brother was murdered by the Gestapo in 1944.

Peter Czajkowski's direction and Adam Czerniawski's translation not only recapture the original spirit of the Theatre of the Absurd, they also re-cast Rozewicz's play in a contemporary British idiom. Steve Wilson's dingy design is off-set by Mark

Doubleday's urine-coloured lighting. An ensemble of 10 creates a chaotic procession of characters who would be tiresomely capricious, but for the innate comedy of the situation and the variety of the acting.

Paul Mooney's hero is a steady dramatic locus as an exhausted, indolent, anxious, guilty spectator on his own life. He is inclined to agree with the character who says, "people are a herd of animals slithering on shit".

The brilliance of Czajkowski's production is that it milks the pathos and comedy of this farmyard formulation for a post-BSE generation.

● *Until 17 June. Box office: 020 7793 9193.*

Feline freaks

WOULD you like your pussy stretched? If not, keep it away from the Chapman brothers.

To begin with, it was children. They trawled the seas of paedophilia and fished up anuses and penises with which to adorn their fibreglass child mannequins. Then they mined a rich seam of apocalyptic fantasy to create *Hell*, the huge tableaux of writhing Nazis engaged in a vast sadistic and cannibalistic orgy that proved to be the centrepiece of the Apocalypse exhibition at the Royal Academy.

Now it's cats. Across seven smallish oil paintings from the I'm Deliberately Naff school of painting the Chapmans have depicted a gallery of feline freaks. *Stretched Pussy* depicts what might once have been a cute little moggy, its face at the centre of the canvas while all its features have been stretched to the sides of the

CHAPWOMEN ○

Modern Art Inc, E2

Nick Hackworth

frame until they become mere streaks of colour racing towards the edges.

Arachnokitty is a handsome cat with a cluster of spider eyes on its forehead, while in *Pussy in the Middle*, two furry kittens lie contentedly asleep, apparently reconciled to the fact that their heads have been spliced together by some malign genie.

This straightforward exercise in the depiction of the Freudian uncanny — which holds that that which is truly disturbing is not that which is alien, but that which was once familiar rendered unfamiliar — loses much of its power because the works are shoddy, the canvases warped and the paint flatly



Four-eyed puss by the Chapman brothers

applied. But perhaps the Chapmans (or Chapwomen as they choose to call themselves on this occasion) are doing us a service. These furry little blighters consume more than £695 million of cat food a year and spend their lives farting

around to their heart's content. Perhaps it's time someone picked on them.

● *Modern Art Inc, 73 Redchurch Street, E2, Thursday to Sunday 11am-6pm (020 7739 2081). Until 1 July.*

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