



Oriental horror: traditional Japanese stylisation with red ribbons streaming from maimed bodies helps ritualise the action in Titus

WHAT ELSE IS NEW...

POP

Long Blondes
King's College, WC2
★★★★☆

David Smyth

AFTER a year spent patiently waiting on pop's slip lane, the Long Blondes understandably seem to be in a terrible hurry. The Sheffield quintet raced through last night's nine-song set at such a pace that they didn't even take time for an encore.

Victims of their own early hype, the band built an excited fan base long before they managed to secure a recording contract, unable to take things to the next level with a major tour because they all still had day jobs. Now, finally, this one-off show marked Monday's release of their first single for permanent home Rough Trade. The band's appeal is

obvious: three girls, two boys, thrift-shop chic, fashionable name-checking and a magnetic singer in Kate Jackson. She seemed to be enjoying herself too much for true vamp status, grinning, glad-handing and primping her hair.

However, looking right was clearly more important than knowing their instruments. Second guitarist Emma Chaplin might as well have been working the cloakroom.

Punky songs such as Separated by Motorways and Lust in the Movies were fast and fun but little more, and the occasional attempt to add depth with Jarvis Cocker-style spoken interludes sounded clunky.

The Long Blondes are undoubtedly a burst of colour on the indie scene, but they will have to slow things down a bit if they are to outlast their buzz.

CLASSICAL

Fiddlesticks
Chelsea Festival
★★★★☆

Nick Kimberley

MADELEINE Mitchell is not a violinist who endlessly recycles familiar showpieces. New music is what she does, and composers flock to write for her. Put her with laddish percussionists ensemblebash and you have Fiddlesticks: geddit?

Lou Harrison's Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra, radical in 1959 and still sounding fresh, made a sturdy centrepiece. The violin part is conventionally soloistic, while the orchestra (five players) tinkers with flowerpots, car parts and much else besides. As the "drums" shimmer, rumble and crash like a miniature gamelan, the violin sings and dances,

producing an eerie sense of ancient engulfing modern.

Mitchell promised to take us "Around the world in 80 minutes", and so she did. In Nigel Osborne's Taw-Raw (for violin alone), a familiar melody seemed just out of reach, as if heard on a radio in a jungle full of scratching beetles and screeching monkeys. Simon Limbrick's Mopti Street initially sounded like tuning-up, but coalesced into a lilting tribute to Mali, while Tarik O'Regan's Fragments from a Gradual Process had off-centre rhythms pulled into shape by Mitchell's gipsyish fiddle. Finally, Mitchell joined in a percussion procession, recreating a kind of drummed anaesthetic used in Senegalese circumcision rituals. Not what you expect in the tearoom of Peter Jones.

● **Chelsea Festival continues until 25 June (020 7351 1005).**

Fleshing out the pain game

THE transience of flesh is the predominant theme in this exceptional, museum-quality show that combines the two greatest butchers of British art in modern times, Francis Bacon and Damien Hirst.

For Hirst, the appellation "butcher" is a prosaic statement of fact. His space is dominated by a powerful early work, A Thousand Years, 1990, in which a large, partitioned vitrine, with a severed cow's head and a fly electrocutor, exhibits the short life-cycle of countless flies who hatch and die in the space. Alongside are a number of triptychs, of which the most significant is The Tranquility of Solitude (For George Dyer), referring to Bacon's East End, ex-criminal, drunk, depressive lover who killed himself in 1971. In each vitrine a skinned lamb stands in for Dyer, one manipulated so it is sitting on the toilet, with a syringe stuck in its leg. The real thing, In Memory of George Dyer, is next door, part of a stunning display of five of Bacon's large triptychs from the Seventies. The comparison is painful, for Bacon's butchery was subtle and more powerful for it, sublimated into paint to torture the forms of his unhappy subjects. He wielded a stiletto as against Hirst's sledgehammer.

The triptych was a device Bacon favoured

EXHIBITION

Francis Bacon: Triptychs/Damien Hirst: A Thousand Years & Triptychs
Gagosian Gallery, WC1
★★★★☆

Nick Hackworth

for its filmic quality, allowing viewers to compare images and register changes wrought by time. The black joke is that each picture tells the same dark story of trapped flesh.

In his most savage works, human bodies and faces collapse under the weight of the essential formlessness of the meat, as if the material substance of the body refused to believe in the temporary fiction that is the human form. That Dyer, a failed suicide before he became a successful one, hated that same fiction makes Bacon's work doubly poignant. Hirst has physically twisted his lambs to ape Dyer's three poses, but in a final condemnation actual flesh is revealed as being rather less expressive than paint in communicating pain and suffering.

● **Until 4 August. Information: 020 7841 9960.**



Savage: one of Damien Hirst's triptychs

Death stalks in from Sesame Street

IT takes a certain type of play to carry off the stage direction: "Enter Death from the wardrobe." After a couple of hours of dreary pseudo poetry, the instruction seems tantalising in its Gothic wackiness. But when Death arrives dressed in what looks like a left-over costume from Sesame Street, we realise that oblivion is going to be the kindest option for both Woman and Scarecrow.

"Die if you're going to. If not, get up!" says Him — short, naturally, for the adulterous "Him Who Made Little of You" — some way into Marina Carr's dirge for lost time. "Hear, hear!" we long to cry. By this point, Woman, bedridden with a terminal illness, has spent more than enough time lamenting past lovers and the

THEATRE

Woman and Scarecrow
Royal Court Upstairs
★★★★☆

Fiona Mountford

future that awaits her eight children. As her name implies, nothing about Woman's then or now is literal, just tiresomely, metaphorically Symbolic of Opportunity Missed.

Not only is there something nasty in the wardrobe, there's a negligée-clad inquisitor Scarecrow hovering by the headboard. What is

this bizarre creation, portrayed with wearying over-emphasis by Brid Brennan in Ramin Gray's peculiarly staged production? Woman's subconscious? A morphine-induced nightmare? A way for Carr to avoid writing a monologue?

Fiona Shaw, who looks and sounds remarkably well for someone about to meet her Maker, fares best when Carr allows Woman some gallows humour. A particularly amusing recitation of detailed funeral instructions reminds us that this most intense of actresses has a notable aptitude for comedy. It's not enough, though, to stop us wanting to turf Shaw out of bed and settle down for a good snooze ourselves.

● **Until 15 July (020 7565 5000).**

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