

WHAT ELSE IS NEW...

THEATRE

A Taste of Honey

Richmond

★★☆☆☆

Fiona Mountford

IF YOU didn't already know that this was one of the seminal British plays of the Fifties, and films of the Sixties, you certainly wouldn't guess it from this pedestrian revival. You might, in fact, wonder why such a fuss was made at the time of its 18-year-old author, Shelagh Delaney.

So here we are, allegedly, in a poor area of 1958 Salford, as flighty single mother Helen serially neglects her teenage daughter Jo in favour of the latest "fancy man". Yet Stuart Wood's enervated production has a shaky sense of period

and, more fundamentally, a shaky sense of where the doors of the flat are supposed to be. It's not long before cast members start walking through what, five minutes previously, had been walls.

Samantha Robinson is certainly no Rita Tushingham as Jo. Looking both too young and too modern, she fails to convince as a gymslip mother desperate for affection but uncertain that her unborn child is a pointer towards happiness.

In a tiresomely two-dimensional turn, Samantha Giles makes no inroads into the jumble of contradictions that is Helen.

If ever there was a case for staying in and renting the DVD, this is it.

● Until 10 June.

Information: 0870 060 6651.

POP

Jim Noir

King's College, WC2

★★☆☆☆

Andre Paine

NOVELTY songs, bowler hats and garden gnomes on stage helped Mancunian newcomer Jim Noir get a good reception from the student crowd at his tour finale. The bowlers were handed to us on arrival, in honour of the lanky singer's trademark headwear.

Noir is certainly talented, but he should be wary of relying on a few cute tunes and an Adidas TV advert. The campaign features David Beckham, Frank Lampard and Noir's whimsical song, Eanie Meany, about a boy whose football smashes the

neighbour's gnomes. It could be an unlikely summer hit.

The single was performed early in the set when the band were struggling with their sound (this was their first-ever tour) and it failed to capitalise on any World Cup fever.

There were some fine moments, though, such as the sparse *Climb a Tree* and *Computer Song*, with its lovely, ethereal vocals about an aberrant PC. But, overall, their homage to The Beach Boys was all too apparent, with several songs employing four-part harmonies when there were no other ideas.

Recent single *My Patch* got the audience flinging those bowlers around at the end. But its repetitive, jaunty tune made me want to stamp on mine.

THEATRE

Lady Windermere's Fan

Landor, SW9

★★☆☆☆

Kieron Quirke

NOVELTY is great, but relocating Oscar Wilde's amorality play to Marbella and the world of Footballers' Wives is a World Cup cash-in too far.

Barry Fantoni's bright and clunky production at the Landor squeezes some fun out of its gratuitous concept but rarely brings the play behind it to life. The problem is that parallels between late 19th-century society and that of today's sporting nouveau riche aren't that close.

The leads — Georgina Ayers-Hunt as Lady W, and Colleen

Daley as Mrs Erylne, the lover-ival who drives her to distraction — rise above the irony to give well-measured, if uninspired, performances. The supporting cast prefers comedy by whatever means. John Glynn, as Lord Darlington, gifted several of Wilde's more sublime epigrams, gets his best laughs eyeing the maid and saying "muchas gracias".

There is one lovely moment. The men play out the third-act exchange of wit in front of a televised football match and, strangely, it works. Suddenly, you feel there might be something in Fantoni's concept: where status-hungry women depend on frivolous men.

It's probably unintentional, but it's a glimmer of Wildean starlight through the conceptual fog.

● Until 17 June. Information: 020 7737 7276.



Fashion revolution: Che used in a 1999 advert for Jean Paul Gaultier sunglasses

From icon to advertisement

IT IS thought to be the most reproduced photograph in history: Che Guevara snapped by Alberto Korda with his Leica in 1960.

Taken from below, it captures Che, with a stylish light, leather jacket, beret, wild hair and designer stubble, staring straight ahead, and thus above and beyond the viewer — a line of sight appropriate to a man of destiny, though Korda described the look as "angry and pained".

Paris-Match and radical Italian publisher Feltrinelli had already used the image before Che's death in 1967, at the hands of CIA-directed Bolivian forces secured him immortality as an icon of radical romantic revolution.

Since then, stylised and warped versions of the image have adorned everything from protest posters to beers, cigarette packets and porn mags, via canvases and prints by artists from Warhol to Gavin Turk.

The process by which such icons emerge and become

EXHIBITION

Che Guevara: Revolutionary and Icon/Sixties Graphics

V&A Museum

★★☆☆☆

Nick Hackworth

drained of meaning through overuse is fascinating, informing John Updike's observation that "fame is the mask that eats into the face".

But the show here, a collection of multiple manifestations of the Che portrait, adds little depth to the subject and merely presents a colourful succession of images.

It would have been more effective to compare the reality of Che's beliefs with the vacuity of the icon. It would have been interesting to show the opposite of Korda's image, the photo by Freddy Alborta of Bolivian troops posing with Che's corpse. As Mao Zedong pointed out, revolutions

weren't about album covers, but "acts of violence by which one class overthrows another".

Those who'd disagree with Mao's reductive view of politics may find comfort in a small but forceful display of graphic works from the Sixties in which pretty pictures, in the main psychedelic album covers and music posters, abound.

Michael English's powerfully voluptuous, brash, comic-style lines formed lips and words to advertise the UFO club on Tottenham Court Road; German artist Edelmann's LSD-inspired cartoons helped shape the image of The Beatles; while the likes of Oz Magazine deployed a range of tactics to force cultural change.

As with Che, the radicalism of these styles and images rests firmly in the past, yet they live on in a weird Frankenstein afterlife, reanimated by the global industries of mass consumer culture.

● Sixties Graphics until 12 November; Che Guevara until 28 August. Information: 020 7942 2000, www.vam.ac.uk.

Hats off to Fedora in the park

OPERA

Fedora

Holland Park

★★★★☆

Fiona Maddocks

IN GIORDANO'S *Fedora*, you can't move for nihilists and countesses. Within 20 minutes there's a body on stage, a posse of secret police and a curse. As for the femme fatale of the title, she's the kind of girl who keeps poison in her crucifix, and when her lover declares his passion responds with the immortal come-on line "But what about your mother?", promptly offering to take on maternal duties herself.

Subtle this Italian melodrama is not. But it's stuffed with exactly the kind of melodic generosity and high drama to ignite Holland Park Opera's 10th season into explosive life. After the success last year of the same composer's *Andrea Chenier*, *Fedora*, starring the much-loved Australian soprano Yvonne Kenny, was a natural choice to consolidate this company's re-examination of verismo repertoire.

First performed in Milan in 1898, the opera tends to be written off as cheap and trivial. It requires no sleuthing to see why. The music moves forward with the easy fluidity of a river without an undertow.

Orchestral colours, helped by the dark presence of double cor anglais and double bass clarinet, are effective. But melodies are neutered by flaccid, text-book accompaniment, the sudden shock of a mini fugue notwithstanding. So if the excellent City of London Sinfonia at times sounded thin, it was because of the score, not their playing.

It's unsurprising that the opera so rarely appears on a main-house stage, though Domingo sang it at Covent Garden more than a decade ago. A festival setting is an ideal place to air it and conductor Brad Cohen and director John Lloyd Davies have pulled off a hugely enjoyable show, after a tentative first act. Bob Bailey's designs, lit by Mike Gunning, have Merchant-Ivory clarity and elegance.

The competent line-up of singers, with special mention for Natasha Marsh's spirited Olga, had luxury casting in the two main roles. The first was Kenny, who looked magnificent and held the stage, her voice at its glowing richest in middle and lower register.

The other was her fellow Australian, the astonishing Aldo Di Toro. He pulled out top notes magically, like silk handkerchiefs from a conjuror's sleeve.

Fedora may be emotional twaddle, a hotchpotch of lurid nonsense, but performances like this touch the heart.

● 8, 10, 14, 16 and 23 June (0845 230 9769).

Opera in the park: Yvonne Kenny as Fedora



Alastair Muir

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