

The Arts

Hats off to the cowboy of the canvas



Pushing the boundaries: a detail from Old Dan Tucker, one of six new paintings by Larry Poons

"OUR cowboy Monet" is what punk star Patti Smith called American painter Larry Poons in the 1970s and that description has remained curiously appropriate. He came to prominence in the mid-Sixties as a protégé of abstract expressionists Agnes Martin and Barnett Newman and was championed for a long time by the American critic Clement Greenberg. From his earliest works to his latest, displayed here in his first major show in the UK since 1968, he has demonstrated a commitment to the painterly concerns associated with abstract expressionism: the expressive power of colour unencumbered by use in figurative form, compositional harmony and the sheer physical quality of the

EXHIBITION
Larry Poons: New Paintings
 Bernard Jacobson Gallery, W1
Nick Hackworth

paint itself. He has, however, constantly pushed the boundaries of his own language of painting, which is what, I guess, makes him a cowboy (along, that is, with his reported penchant for cowboy hats). Poons's willingness to innovate has borne fruit and these new paintings, all completed within the last two years, count among the most successful he has made. Over time his

paintings have become more complex. His career began with large, clear compositions of dots and shapes floating in colour. Now, working loosely with brush and finger, he creates very dense, multi-layered work. Myriad colours are applied in strokes, squiggles, blobs and more expansive, flatter passages. Various forms float on the surface: lines, arrows, circles and pyramids. At first glance, the six large paintings on show seem the result of an unsuccessful merger of a paint factory and a pizza kitchen. But there is method here and judgment. The dominant colours and hues — beiges, browns, muddy greens and yellows — are taken from the earthy end of the spectrum and work together with great harmony.

Moreover, Poons's handling of form and depth gives pieces such as Old Dan Tucker coherence so that no part looks out of place. Frank Stella, another US artist, writing about the reception of Poons's work, observed that "the public is not particularly attuned, or even sympathetic, to pictorial drama or originality". Obnoxious as that sounds, it's probably true. We are happy to appreciate the beauty of pure sound on its own terms, but less happy to do the same for colour, form and texture. Perhaps it is time to give the visual a break.
 ● From 30 May until 13 July.
 Tel: 020 7495 8575.

Day of unity gets lost in the mix

WORLD MUSIC
Africa Day Concert
 Festival Hall
Simon Broughton

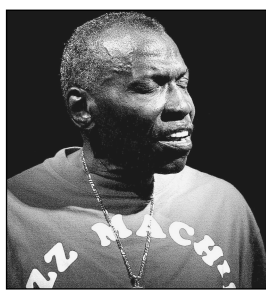
OH DEAR, what a mess. This was a concert for Africa Day, marking the formation of the OAU (Organisation of African Unity) 39 years ago. Not intending to draw parallels, it was shambolic. The billing was two of Mali's top draws — Toumani Diabate and Habib Koité, and UK kora and cello player Tunde Jegede. Toumani didn't show due to "last-minute transport problems", but as he is notorious for non-appearances, including the Damon Albarn Mali Music concert a couple of months back, you wonder why they booked him. But perhaps Toumani made the right decision. Jegede was first on with a couple of kora solos to demonstrate what a sublime and sophisticated instrument this 21-stringed gourd on a stick really is. Except it was ruined by buzzing amps and electronic howls and it got worse as his ensemble grew to a stage full of West African drummers, a horn section, guitars, a smattering of strings, percussion — and one of those DJ scratchers inaudible in the travesty of a mix. There was some good music here trying to get out, but it needed a producer to make it into a show. Jegede was directing the orchestra himself which meant him playing the cello with his back to us — very unsatisfactory — and nobody seemed in control of the balance. The first half petered out on a weak number as they ran out of time. Habib Koité and his band cranked things up a bit, but still spent more time looking anxiously at the sound crew rather than the audience and sending members of the band scuttling off to try to improve matters. People started leaving — and I wish I could have joined them. But by the end there was a crowd of devoted fans dancing at the front. A symbol of triumph over adversity.

LAST WEEK'S OPENINGS — WHAT THE CRITICS SAID

KEY	WHAT THE CRITICS SAID											
	Good	OK	Awful	No review								
	Evening Standard	Daily Mail	The Times	Daily Telegraph	The Guardian	The Independent	Financial Times	Daily Express	Sunday Times	Sunday Telegraph	The Observer	Independent on Sunday
FILM												
Biggie and Tupac	Good	OK	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Pollock	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Read My Lips	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Hart's War	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
The Majestic	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Thunderpants	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Not Another Teen Movie	Good	OK	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
THEATRE												
Up For Grabs	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Twelfth Night	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Bacchai	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
The Powerbook	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Homebody/Kabul	Good	OK	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
OPERA												
Don Giovanni	Good	OK	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Iphigenie en Aulide	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good

Drummer beats off the no-show blues

JAZZ
Elvin Jones's Jazz Machine
 Ronnie Scott's
Jack Massarik



Jazz icon: Elvin Jones

IT was just like old times at Ronnie's last night, with a jazz icon on the bandstand and one of his sidemen, young pianist Anthony Wonsey, absent without leave. These things occasionally happen. Chet Baker failed to turn up for work one night when he was the bandleader to boot (an act manager Pete King almost perpetrated on the wayward trumpeter-singer the following day). In this case, the icon was Coltrane's legendary drummer Elvin Jones, so everything was cool. "We're just gonna hafta play a little louder," Elvin told bassist Gerald Cannon in a booming stage-whisper as he kicked off a medium-paced EJ's Blues. Soon those whippy arms were snaking around the drums, setting up his unique polyrhythms in which the whole kit seemed to be talking to itself. Buoyed by a sizzling carpet of sound like this, nobody missed the

piano. Tenorist Pat LaBarbera and trombonist Delfeayo Marsalis floated through their solos, but then, with a slow ballad looming, Elvin's Japanese wife took action. Keiko, who nightly sets up Elvin's drums to within millimetres of his favourite position, collared singer Ian Shaw's pianist James Pearson and ushered him onstage. Tentative at first, Pearson felt his way through It's a Wonderful World with increasing confidence and was warmly applauded for his solo on this and the 3/4 burner that closed the session. A star was nearly born, but Wonsey arrived just before the second set with a tale of mistaken arrest. Soho has a million stories. This has been one of them.
 ● Until Saturday. Box office: 020 7439 0747.

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