

The Arts

Landscape of dreams

EXHIBITION

Peter Doig: 100 Years Ago

Victoria Miro Gallery

Nick Hackworth

ONE hundred years ago is an appropriate title for this exhibition, capturing as it does the sense of timelessness that pervades Peter Doig's best work.

For more than two decades he has been painting, in his various but distinctive figurative styles, landscapes and figures mixing reality, memory and imagination with a freedom that has led to him being described as a "radical traditionalist". He has painted houses and forests, canoes on lakes and, inspired by his Canadian upbringing, mountains dotted with skiers and snowboarders. Yet his chosen subject matter, some aspects of which might appear dangerously twee in the eyes of a neurotically fashionable art-scene, has not prevented commercial or critical success — Doig is a former winner of the John Moores Painting Prize and a former nominee for the Turner Prize.

He is now showing in London for the first time since 1998, at the Victoria Miro Gallery, the gallery that gave Doig, Chris Ofili and the Chapman Brothers their first major solo shows and that in 2000 migrated from Cork Street to the post-industrial wastelands west of Hoxton. The exhibition brings few shocks — familiar subjects and familiar styles are here — but it



The best of Doig: Gasthof, inspired by an old photo of a dam in Germany

does bring some of the most beautiful pieces that Doig has painted.

Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre, hanging on the back wall of the ground-floor gallery is the first work you see when entering this show — and it is the best. An oil work, as they all are, it is like a landscape from a dream but is inspired by an old photo of a dam in Germany. At

the centre of the piece, in the foreground, two figures in psychedelic fancy dress stand at the mouth of a walkway that tops the dam and, with it, curves around and away to the right, drawing you into the picture. Above the dam stretches a beautiful star-studded sky conjured by a succession of blue and green washes highlighted with touches of yellow, and below the sky,

a turquoise lake fading into darkness towards the shore. It is captivating and melancholy, the scene seeming far away and beyond reach. A similar lightness of touch is evident in Driftwood, where two figures float in a painting of a Trinidadian beach, and in a very pink painting of two children obscured by a flurry of snow. Not all the work is this effective.

Doig likes to experiment and a number of pieces here, notably Haus der Bilder, are painted boldly and flatly and look crude by comparison. But sometimes you have to take the rough with the smooth.

● *Until 22 May, at Victoria Miro Gallery, 16 Wharf Road, N1 (020 7336 8109).*

CLASSICAL

National Youth Orchestra

Barbican

Stephen Pettitt

YOUTH culture is all about the vacuous experience, the instant hit, the superficial. Right? Wrong. Youth is no disqualification from intelligence, sensitivity and skill. If it were otherwise, our cultural educational institutions would not be filled every year by thousands of talented,

Britain's real youth culture

motivated, thinking individuals, and our high cultural institutions would have died long ago.

Those who doubt need only hear a concert given by the National Youth Orchestra. Its latest, prepared during an Easter holiday course, took place under the guiding spirit of a sprightly looking

Sir Colin Davis. Clearly relishing the experience, he took his charges — as usual massed ranks of them, with doubled woodwind and brass sections and four harps — through two highly challenging symphonies from the early 20th century. Why compromise when your musicians are as eager and as hungry as this?

So we began with Sibelius's least-played symphony, the life-affirming, to my mind irresistible Third. The advantage of numbers showed itself through the richness of the string sound. Moreover, judging from the crispness of the relentless figurations of the first movement, there were no passengers on

board. There was also a special glow to the sound of the brass. All played with a knowing sense of goal. Every moment counted for something.

Elgar's Second Symphony would have to be mighty fine to trump this. And mighty fine it was. The slow movement can rarely have been given with such ripe, heart-rending intensity. And at the end of it all, the dazed expressions on their young faces showed that, just for a couple of minutes, they felt as pole-axed by their achievement as I did. Were all youth as committed, as giving, as alive to the richness of human spirit, then our ghastly, hate-torn world would have nothing more to fear.

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Monday 22 April

A lad's-eye-view of Heaven

THEATRE

Heavenly

Soho Theatre

Rachel Halliburton

WHATEVER kind of afterlife the Queen Mother is experiencing now, you can bet that beer and pizzas will not feature as much as they do in this blokeish, seemingly Carlsberg-sponsored, vision of Heaven. In order to address the mysteries of eternity, Frantic Assembly has turned to a short story by Gary Owen, who has presented a defiantly lad's-eye-view, ignoring metaphysics in favour of testosterone-inspired trivia.

Unfortunately Frantic Assembly's muscular choreography and eye-catching conceptual staging is often not sufficiently supported by this comic approach, which leaves Heaven looking less like an ideal than a hangover. Dick Bird's enjoyably surreal set places two white Ikea sofas so that one faces the audience and one is suspended from the

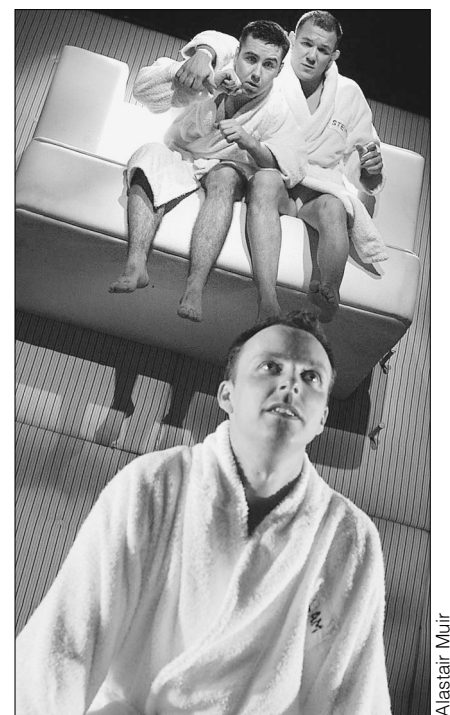
backdrop at a right-angle, yet the witty use of space transcends the lack of imagination all too evident in the dialogue.

There is no joy in bashing Frantic Assembly, which has dynamically advanced theatre's visual vocabulary and attracted younger audiences by taking its inspiration from club culture.

However, Heavenly spends too much time probing for easy laughs as it unfolds its story about three young men who have fallen off a cliff in Wales on New Year's Eve. Its main strength lies in the relationship it sketches between two of them, Liam and Steven, and the different emotional layers underlying their treatment of Steven's underdog brother.

The performers, Liam Steel, Scott Graham, and Steven Hoggett, are also the production's directors, and, as ever, they have evolved a compelling choreographic style, whose seeming gravity-defiance provides an intriguing visual exploration of the life-after-death experience. The future of this inspiring company lies in the hands of better writing, so that it can scale the heights for which it is evidently prepared.

● *Until 20 April. Box office: 020 7478 0100.*



Gravity-defying experience: Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Liam Steel