

Reviews

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"Rooted in bemused self-observation": Alex Heaton, Mo Nazam and Ray Bullock play the dozy male characters

Seinfeld for slackers

THE GREAT thing about Lance Nielsen's slacker comedy is that neither he nor his characters seem to know what they're talking about. Beginning and ending with a funeral, the scenario features three college friends sitting around gassing about girls, London transport and the anguish of earning a living.

One is a moody Asian who's about to get married, another is a banker who can't get a date, while the third is an over-sexed idler. None can figure out what is wrong with them or what they've got to do to put it right.

Like the American TV series Seinfeld, Nielsen's comedy is rooted in bemused self-observation. However, unlike Seinfeld, Nielsen's play exhibits an emotionally affecting tone with sub-

MAKING TIME ★

Old Red Lion, N1

Patrick Marmion

dued repartee and inconsequential anecdote. In particular, there is one priceless scene when the Asian friend, "Moped", re-enacts the course of his marriage as a horse race. The starting line-up includes such runners as Great Sex, Good Communication, Loving Relationship, Secret Affair, Messy Divorce, Mood Swings and Big Silences. You may guess which filly comes in first.

To match the deadbeat tone of his play, Nielsen's production feels as if it began rehearsals only that morning. Whether or not this is true, even moments of corpsing are stitched seamlessly into the

fabric of the show by the freewheeling cast. Accordingly, David Ilari's set is a pile of post-pubescent junk. The performances by Alex Heaton and Mo Nazam are purposefully understated, and the laconic Ray Bullock gently glows with his deadpan comic timing.

Interestingly, Nielsen has chosen to alternate this male cast with a female cast on different nights. It will surely be fascinating to see how women re-invent these avowedly male roles — some of Nielsen's mischievous lines will surely have to be doctored. In any event, this is set to remain a unique little play, cleverly designed to leave you feeling much like its dozy characters: amused, saddened and bewildered.

● *Until 2 March. Box office: 020 7837 7816.*

Lean times for shock troops

L.A. RAEVEN ★

ICA, SW1

Nick Hackworth

ANOREXIC and obnoxious, the identical, black-haired, female Dutch twins who make up L. A. Raeven have been causing a bit of a stink in the art world — a stink of pee, to be precise. In their quest to subvert society's fascistic aesthetic norms, the twins have been holding up their extremely slight body forms as ideals that people everywhere can aspire to. In the lower galleries of the ICA, two videos show the twins hanging around in an empty gallery space, being thin and not doing much apart from exhibiting obsessive-compulsive tendencies in eating identically small bits of food.

On two other screens, two young, scraggly male twins, made-up with dark rings under their eyes, imitate L. A. Raeven. Indeed, one is memorising a set of rules devised by L. A. Raeven to control eating and drinking habits. These two males are the first members of the "L. A. Army" that will consist of similarly perfect anorexics who will help spread the L. A. conception of the ideal human form.

Also — and this is the stinky bit — L. A. Raeven have decided to draw attention to the insidious use of "nice smells" by retail companies who, for example, pipe the smell of baking bread into their

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



Courting controversy: L.A. Raeven are seen by some as corrupting fragile psyches

shops to subconsciously increase consumer spending. In their own version of this olfactory persuasion, the twins have, judging from the smell, decided to pee into wine glasses left on the gallery floor along with other debris designed to give the place a charming, *outré* feel.

Peeing aside, the twins' championing of the aesthetics of anorexia has upset some liberal opinion — apparently, several broadsheets recently pulled planned features on this show, fearing accusations of corrupting fragile young, particularly female, psyches. As the twins point out, this is a little rich given the prevalence of images of sex and violence in

our media and they succeed in highlighting the illiberal character of political correctness. Despite this, L. A. Raeven are offering us nothing new artistically, their work falling into the tradition of Sixties body art, where the body became the medium for the message. Nor is their brand of "aesthetic terrorism" particularly aesthetic or terrifying. But for the sheer crassness with which they pursue their ideas, they deserve our applause.

● *Until 10 March. Tel: 020 7930 3647. Showing alongside the work of L. A. Raeven is that of Swedish video artist Annika Larsson.*

Pet sounds for West End boys

PET SHOP BOYS ★★

NME Awards, Astoria, W1

Max Bell

EAST END Boys and West End Girls might have been cursing the timing of last night's show from the Pet Shop men. Their current tour is a return to Uni land because they've already done arenas, theatres, musicals, outdoor clubs and festivals. While the Astoria goes G.A.Y. at the weekend it's usually the last place you'd go to for romance and cupidity. Or a degree, come to that.

Still, if the champagne and red roses were left to chill, there was one happy couple on display. Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe are just about to deliver their latest baby, Release. Despite the functional title, this isn't a return to total basics. It provided many interesting interludes among the 24-carat hits, not least the new single, Home and Dry, and the absurdly catchy I Get Along, which is about as close as the Pet Shop ever gets to the beach.

The opening, Disco Potential, throbbed away like a dance-floor filler for those whose clubbing days are otherwise a dim and distant memory. Being Boring, that sharp glance at post-Aids society, evoked the appropriate mixture of sombre reflection and survival guide.

Pet Shop Boys were doing their wry rock-style thing here. Frills weren't an issue. The backdrop consisted of several industrial-sized venetian blinds — shut, of course — so prying eyes concentrated on Tennant and Lowe as genuine, if languid, entertainers; percussionist Jodie Linscott was the most animated person on stage.

Red Letter Day and the typically mournful You Only Tell Me You Love Me When You're Drunk captured both sides of the Valentine's Day mood, although Love Is A Catastrophe was a funnier way to finish before the audience hummed Go West towards Old Compton Street. The Pet Shop Boys in Soho? Makes a lot of sense.

Another Tube jam

APOLLO CHAMBER ORCHESTRA ○

Conway Hall, WC1

Rick Jones

POEMS on the Underground have enabled Londoners to educate themselves in the most unpleasant circumstances. Readings from successive compilations frequently take place above ground with this orchestra, named after the Greek god of music and poetry.

Last night's valentine concert included three readings by poets, as well as settings of four poems from the latest edition, composed and performed by three pop vocalists including Jimmy Somerville, best known for being the lead singer in the Eighties pop group Bronski Beat. His famous falsetto was in pretty good nick during Auden's If I Could Tell You, but his music was a little thin and seemed in want of a drumbeat. Caroline Buckley made an engaging tango of Millay's What Lips. Paul Jason Fredericks fashioned a soul ballad of Elizabeth Jennings's Delay, which is a good choice for the Tube.

None of the vocalists enunciated very clearly. Pop singers never do. The strings were a little untidy, played at a more or less constant mezzoforte, and let themselves down with too many errant notes in Dvorak's Serenade Op 22. They wanted a lighter, more agile touch. Their best playing was in Takemitsu's Waltz from Three Filmscores, which was as corny and effective as a red rose.

● *The Apollo Chamber Players perform music by Wagner and Schumann with a reading of Coleridge's The Ancient Mariner on 21 February at St Michael's, Highgate. Tel: 020 8761 6565.*

Theatre Club

SUN is Shining, at the King's Head Theatre, tells the story of a turbulent love affair between a mixed-race City trader and a recovering alcoholic artist. Set in London and New York, Matt Wilkinson's debut play is a searing tale of love, betrayal and the quest for identity. Gold Card members can buy two tickets for the price of one (normally £12-14). Blue Card members can get £3 discount on the same price tickets. Offer available until 17 March (excludes 20 February) subject to availability. Ring the King's Head Theatre box office on 020 7226 1916, quoting this offer.

LUCKY GOLD CARD NO: G100991

The winner will receive two tickets for The Mysteries at the Queen's Theatre.

LUCKY THEATRE CLUB NO: 33028

The winner will receive two tickets for Noises Off at the Comedy Theatre.

To claim either prize, call Pat Holloway on 020 7938 7419 before next Tuesday. For information on how to join Theatre Club, call Wendy Farley on 020 7938 7701.