



A world of totty-and-testosterone beliefs: Shaun Prendergast and David Schofield playing the working men's clubs

The machismo trap

RICHARD Cameron's new play plants its seeds in a Yorkshire mining village caught between the deep-throated traditions of all-male choirs and the rock 'n' roll revolution. Set in 1962, the year when the single Love Me Do announced the Beatles to the world, it looks at the playful totty-and-testosterone beliefs of five miners whose liberal beer drinking is only outstripped by their conservative attitudes to sexuality.

The small and unpretentious Bush Theatre converts well into the rehearsal room at the Edlington Miners' Welfare Club, where a tiny upright piano and a few chairs provide the basic accessories for the Yorkshiremen seeking musical stardom. Only one of their number, Colin, is excited by the glamour that a guitar and a tight pair of trousers can offer — the other four are war veterans, who are happy to bask in the approval of working-men's

THE GLEE CLUB ★★

Bush Theatre

Rachel Halliburton

clubs with numbers ranging from Feniculi Fencula to Que Sera Sera.

Director Mike Bradwell has brought together a boisterous cast, which well evokes the kind of men who are happy to sing about masturbation together in the showers, but have problems accepting homosexuality.

David Bamber plays Phil Newsome, the church organist and group pianist who presides over the choir with the austerity of a maiden-aunt: in all his life he has only loved one man, but he knows this cannot be accepted in the same way as his heterosexual friends' infidelities, adulteries and relationship crises. Cameron has made small-town indus-

trial England a central canvas for his dramas, and this play poignantly details how the parochial tragedies of the characters' lives are subsumed in the show-must-carry-on cheerfulness of the choir's routines. David Schofield's Bant is wracked with misery over his ex-wife's affair with a budgie-keeping lover, yet leaps into drag for the choir's comedy acts and relentlessly teases everyone in the group; Oliver Jackson's Colin discovers that his girlfriend has tragically aborted her baby in order to help his comically abortive pop career.

The emotional power of the evening can be gauged by the songs' performances, which initially provoke giggles but end up forging a hotline to the heart.

Bradwell has selected dramatic dynamite to celebrate the Bush's 30th birthday.

● Until 23 March. Box office: 020 7610 4224.

Lost in the dark

ACCORDING to a 16 century proverb: "There's none so blind as those who will not see." This appears to be part of the problem with the vision behind Charlotte Gwinner's production of HG Wells's 1904 short story which she has adapted with playwright Simon Bent. The tale of a mountain guide who falls from a peak in the Andes, only to find himself in a society of blind people, is a Swiftian scenario rich in symbolic possibility. In this strange kingdom, they believe they are entombed in granite, that there is no night or day and that the birds flying above are angels. Seeing has no meaning and "eyesight" is only a sign of madness.

Wells's story is deliberately inconclusive, stopping abruptly when it feels like it just got started. In her programme notes, Gwinner endorses this refusal to go on by saying "good parables defy absolute interpretation and ask us to question ourselves". But if Gwinner never intended to take Wells's sketchy story further, why take it on at all? For example, her production turns a blind eye to the tale's possibilities as a political nightmare or as

COUNTRY OF THE BLIND X

Gate Theatre

Patrick Marmion

a vision of hubris. Equally, Wells's obsession with worlds filled by beautiful people who live by savage customs (here and in *The Time Machine*), is a barely glimpsed psychological dimension.

This is not to say that Gwinner's production is without resonance. Lara Furniss has transformed the Gate into a mini amphitheatre for a new season seeking to connect with ancient story-telling traditions. Furniss also covers the stage with woodchippings and moss, recreating the farmyard aromas of rustic communities. Bent boils his dialogue down to solemn, primal utterance — but this can also seem merely savourless and unimaginative.

Meanwhile, Gwinner's direction is painstakingly measured, beginning in darkness and groping towards the light — in the hope of revealing something profound. Sadly, no such revelation is at hand and, after barely 50 minutes, it's all suddenly over.

● Until Saturday 16 March. Box office: 020 7229 0706.

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

Life on the glib side

DOUGLAS HUEBLER ○

Camden Arts Centre

Nick Hackworth

POSTERITY treats few periods of history with respect, but for the Sixties, it appears to reserve a particular contempt. Its radical dreams have long since turned into empty clichés, living on only as fodder for endless parody, and the radicals themselves will be remembered principally for having been embarrassingly naïve. In art, one radical idea of the time was the "dematerialisation of the art object". The idea became the artwork, the art object became unimportant and conceptual art was born. As US artist Douglas Huebler, who was at the forefront of the movement, said: "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting. I do not wish to add any more."

Three decades on, Martin Creed was allowed to walk away with the Turner Prize for parodying that statement.

Exhibited here are a number of Huebler's seminal works from the period. In the main they consist of ruminations on chance and time manifest as nicely framed collections of photographs accompanied by explanatory pieces of text.

Duration piece #5 New York, 1969, is typical and consists of a series of images in Central Park. Each one records the direction from which the artist heard an individually distinguishable bird call and in which he would then walk, until hearing another call whereupon he would repeat the process.

Another work records random locations between his home and his art dealer's gallery. Happily there are also some funnier and more humane pieces, including some casual photographs of Flemish street urchins and one of an attractive, naked woman, half of whom, for complex reasons, is captured in 1973, the other half in 1974.

Fittingly, given his concerns, Huebler's entire oeuvre acts as a comment on the passage of time as it all looks dated. Though alleviated by flashes of humour, Huebler's musings on life now look glib and the conceptual form his work took, though of art historical significance, did not bring down the art market as some (but not Huebler) naïvely hoped. His work did however inspire countless generations of art students to similarly record their pedestrian thoughts and observations in the name of conceptual art. As I said, posterity has not been kind to the Sixties.

● NW3. Until 14 April. Showing alongside is the work of David Shrigley. Tel: 020 7435 2643.

Old star quality

KENNY BARRON/RON CARTER/BILLY COBHAM ★

Queen Elizabeth Hall

Jack Massarik

THE band reportedly demanded 50 complimentary seats, an almost Madonna-like request, but this didn't explain the jostling scum of latecomers at the QEH on Friday night. "It's a mystery," said the baffled but beaming promoter, Biyi Adepogba. "Last three days there's been a crazy rush for tickets."

Piano trios don't often do standing-room-only business, and pianist Kenny Barron, bassist Ron Carter and drummer Billy Cobham are hardly cutting-edge heroes any more. It's been years since their heyday and they hadn't toured together until their album, *The Art of Three*, appeared last year.

Nevertheless, star quality is an enduring thing. Their prime recordings — Carter with Miles Davis, Cobham with his fusion bands, Barron with Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Getz and many others — have been around long enough for everyone to admire, and their kind of jazz offered much finesse for a multi-generation audience to enjoy.

Carter is a true original, and the rich resonance of his bass notes was highlighted on *Mary*, a greasy slow blues with altered changes. Barron, eclectic as ever, reproduced smooth, Oscar Peterson-like runs on up-tempo numbers and patented chord-voicings by Bill Evans (*Autumn Leaves*) or Herbie Hancock (*I Thought About You*) on ballads.

Cobham, meanwhile, presented his non-rock side. Not since his days with Horace Silver can this thunderous drummer have played a whole evening of such unfussy, laid-back jazz in straight four-four time. Lovely stuff, but more than a tad too comfortable. Nothing conceptually new. You could say that, over the years, familiarity has bred content.



Strange vision: Martin Parr and Alison Seddon