

Smoke but no fire from the clip king

PASTY-faced Irishman Ed Byrne has been teetering on the big-time brink for longer than is decent.

In his current show he jokes that in 1999 he was invited to appear on US TV, but a kerfuffle over his visa application held him back.

Nowadays, he adds ruefully, he is presenting clip shows on British digital television. He certainly deserves better, even if he is not quite in the premier league.

It is easy to see why Americans go for Byrne. He steers clear of the Celtic surrealism of Tommy Tiernan and Dylan Moran and goes straight for the Vegas stand-up jugular with a veritable fusillade of slick, quickfire whinging.

Like a junior Jack Dee, he is outraged by everything from the Pope to internet travel companies via superfluous household instructions.

He is particularly good on smoking, bemoaning the current banning

COMEDY

Ed Byrne
Soho Theatre

Bruce Dessau

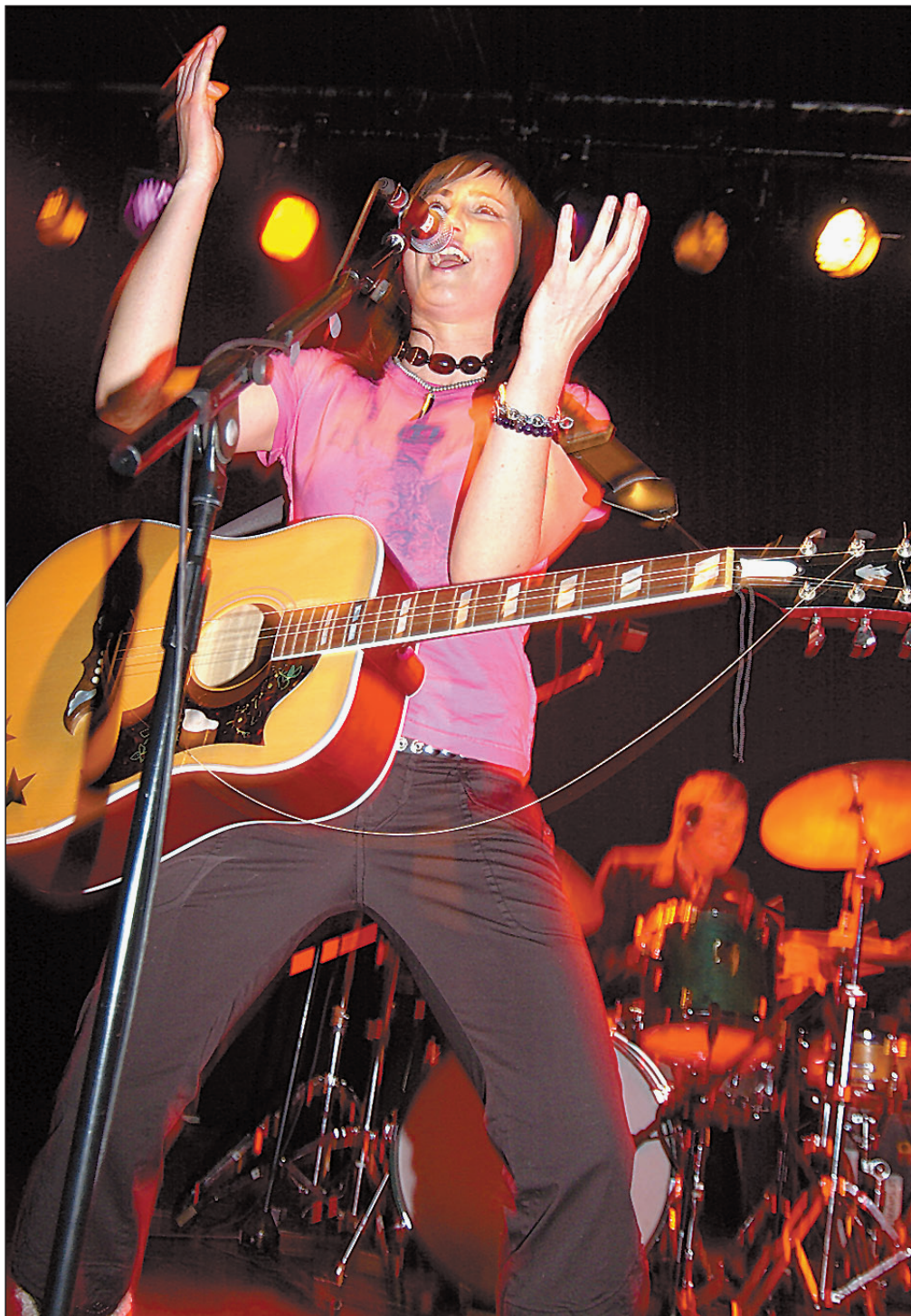
frenzy. For this skinny storyteller the only two places you should not smoke are in a dynamite factory and an oxygen tent.

He is equally tart on relationships, until too much arrogance creeps in as he takes both his current and past lovers to task for failing to meet his impeccable standards.

Somehow, though, Byrne never really ignites. He is rarely predictable, but neither does he feel special.

His set is peppered with critic-proof chuckles, yet it only truly excites when he does a nifty mime of the violent threats witnessed outside a Dublin takeaway. Full marks, however, for not mentioning Big Brother until the last minute.

● *Until 26 February.*
Information: 0870 429 6883.



Star quality: KT Tunstall managed to warm up a chilly audience with a seamless performance

Clap hands ... here comes KT

POP

KT Tunstall
ICA, SW1

John Aizlewood

DRESSED for routine maintenance work and so tiny that she would have trouble securing entry to all the rides at Disney World, let alone into her local pub, KT Tunstall, hardly looked capable of bringing warmth on the coldest of Tuesday nights.

Little wonder then that when the singer-songwriter rashly attempted to instigate a clapalong as early as the second song, the finger-clicking *Miniature Disasters*, she was greeted with stony faces and hands stuffed resolutely into trouser pockets.

Time for Plan B. Whereas less doughty souls would have bumbled on, Tunstall, all Scottish nurture and Irish-Chinese nature, embarked upon a charm assault, as she unravelled chucklesome, self-deprecating tales of strings breaking and top-lip perspiration. The melting was almost audible.

All this would have been pointless were she musically dreary. Tunstall's debut album, *Eye to the Telescope*, is an accomplished affair, packed with gender unspecific love songs. So are many others.

Live, though, her sheer eclecticism shone through. The scarf-waving *False Alarm* could have been the work of American AOR queens Heart and Black Horse And The Cherry Tree kept threatening to break into *These Boots Are Made For Walkin'*. Meanwhile, *Under the Weather* was slight but heart-wrenching and *Universe & U* a Spartan porch-song that had more in common with *South of Memphis* than the south of Edinburgh.

And yet, such was the clarity of Tunstall's vision and the technical expertise of her three bandsmen — equally comfortable on trumpet and cello as on keyboards and bass — that what could have been a disjointed mess became a seamless whole.

Close to the end, as the swirling cornucopia that was *Suddenly I See* climaxed, she again attempted a clapalong. This time, almost every pair of hands were raised. That's star quality: add it to quality songwriting and KT Tunstall becomes unstoppable.

Master of the lights fantastic

EXHIBITION

Dan Flavin: Works from the Sixties

Haunch of Venison, W1

Nick Hackworth

THERE are few artists as vulnerable to the traditional tabloid critical jibe, "I could do that", than Dan Flavin, the legendary American minimalist who died in 1996.

From 1963 on, his work consisted exclusively of configurations of the mass-made neon lights to be found in offices, factories and electrical stores. But the fact that Flavin constructed from such ordinary materials work that commands almost holy reverence is testament to the acuteness of his artistic instincts.

The six seminal works on show at Haunch of Venison, all made in the Sixties, include one of his first pure-neon pieces, the diagonal of 25 May 1963, a single red, eight-foot striplight mounted at 45 degrees on the wall, and one of the first of his series of works dedicated to the early Russian modernist Vladimir Tatlin.

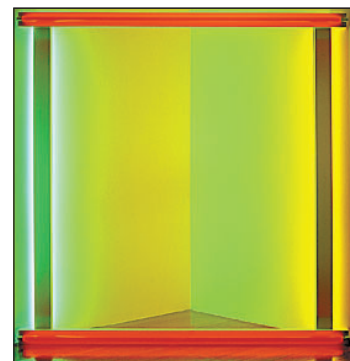
Prior to his neon-epiphany, Flavin, who had been raised a devout Catholic, had made kitsch paintings and assemblages that were parodies of religious icons, gently mocking the transitory impurity of the age of consumerism. They were self-consciously pathetic objects that Flavin felt were an honest reaction to the world around him.

Then, perversely, he created contemporary works that approximate to ancient icons in their purity and aura by deciding to exhibit only neon lights. His input was solely in the selection of tubes — 10 colours and five shapes — and configuration.

His works are often, understandably, seen as a tribute to the present age, given the newness and connotations of neon light. But Flavin was timeless in his ambition to generate epiphanies through the weird, inhuman and abstract purity of light itself.

Here, in the gallery which houses three white neon pieces, and the room filled with the beautiful combination of red, green and yellow light from a single work installed in a corner, his art continues to work with a power that belies its simplicity.

● *Until 16 March.*
Information: 020 7495 5050.



Light touch: Flavin's Bob and Pat

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