

## WHAT ELSE IS NEW...

## THEATRE

**The Deranged Marriage**  
Theatre Royal, Stratford East

★★★★☆

## Fiona Mountford

JUST when you think it is going to end with every fairy light in Slough a-twinkle and the forced feeding of sugary laddos to its 5,000 or so assembled guests, *The Deranged Marriage* does a surprising thing. It plucks up the courage of its own plotline and veers away from reductive feel-goodery. Think *Bend It Like Beckham*, only with stronger metatarsals.

Writer-director Pravesh Kumar keeps his intentions well hidden initially. The short, soap-y scenes, as "mutant ninja aunties" prepare for the arranged marriage between British-Asians Sona and Rishi are certainly enjoyable enough, but in a caricature-instead-of-character sort of way. Little do we know how big the doubts, and secrets, of the hesitant young couple are going to be allowed to grow.

Pooja Ghai has fun as Sona's ghastly aunt Lata, all competitive photographing and dowry bestowing, and also as a highly unwilling mother-in-law to Jenny (amiable Alicia Harris), her son's English wife. Yet if Ghai's is the turn that best encapsulates the broad first half, the excellent Harvey Virdi, as Sona's gentle widowed mother Hema, personifies the deepening complexity of the second. A good do, na?

● Until 2 July (0800 183 1188).

## JAZZ

**Troy Miller**

Pizza Express Jazz Club, W1

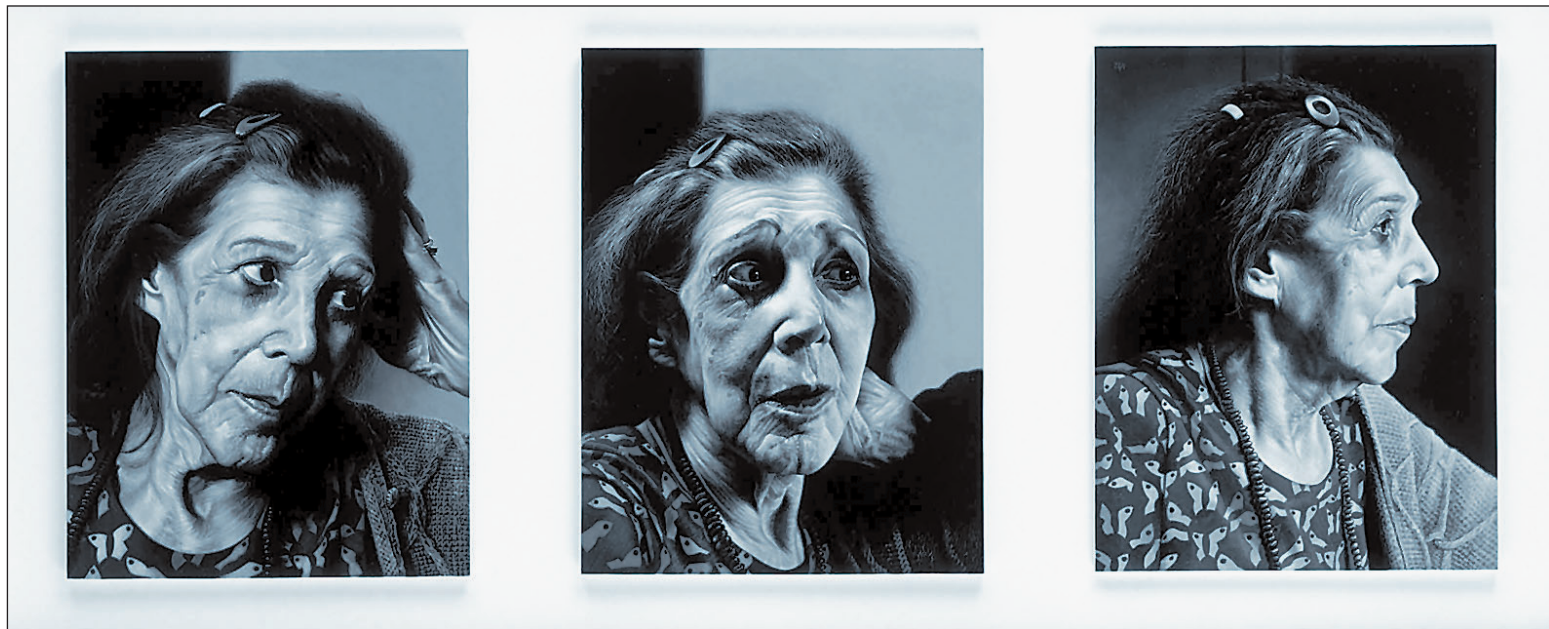
★★★★☆

## Jack Massarik

REMEMBER those brilliant tension-and-release games that Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Tony Williams used to play behind Miles Davis's solos? The buzz during this cosmopolitan group's album launch last night signified that such heroics had been miraculously teleported into 21st-century London.

Miller's album, *40 Days*, reveals hidden depths. He's a remarkably able producer, composer, arranger and keyboarder, but it was his drumming that set things alight yesterday. His solos were technically stunning and swung fiercely from start to finish. And time and again the teamwork of his new rhythm section, with pianist Jason Rebello and US bassist Michael Janisch, lifted the front-line soloists, Virgin Island saxman Jean Toussaint and Nigerian guitarist Femi Tomowo, clean off the ground.

Add the soul-drenched vocals of Eska Mtungwazi and you had contemporary jazz to stir the blood. Toussaint, carving out his tough post-Trane solos on soprano and tenor saxes, might have edited them by a minute or two, but Rebello never lost focus. Miller, I'd say, has truly arrived. His music raises the bar for melodic ingenuity and good old-fashioned rhythmic excitement.



Old school: Kitty, the prize-winning triptych by Andrew Tift, is skilful but its visual language belongs to photography not the future of art

# 'Photos' with few flashes

IN THIS, as in each of its 26 years, the BP Portrait Award deserves bitter-sweet praise for stubbornly championing a dying cause.

A record submission of 1,113 entries has not helped. The 56 works on show incite the same sense of dull mediocrity familiar from previous years.

Save for a few flashes, the wound inflicted long ago by the invention of photography would be confirmed as fatal. Indeed to exhibit some of these works, presented as the best that we can now produce, a mere pebble's throw from examples by Holbein and Titian seems a morbid act of unnecessary cruelty. Not that talent is

## EXHIBITION

**BP Portrait Award 2006**  
National Portrait Gallery

★★★★☆

## Nick Hackworth

absent here but the manner of its expenditure is telling.

This year's winner, Andrew Tift, 38, like the last, Dean Marsh, is a competent draughtsman, has an eye for detail and is painstaking in his approach. Kitty, a triptych of small, monochromatic paintings of Kitty Garman, Lucien Freud's first wife,

ably captures the subject listening, about to speak and finally in posed profile. Evidently skilful, Kitty succeeds in imparting more than a hint of the sitter's nature.

However the work's visual language, in common with most of the competent paintings here, belongs to photography, from the photorealist style to the framing and composition.

Yet if portrait painting has a future, it is surely as a genre that revels in the material quality of paint, retreating to what is unique to itself. Old expressionist ambitions, to conjure some essential quality of the sitter with the

self-conscious application of paint, make as much sense now as they did a century ago. But few here take the painterly route with any confidence.

Jonathan Yeo does so with a small study of Turner Prize winner Grayson Perry in transvestite mode, the work's incompleteness adding poignancy to its psychological insight, while Bulgarian Sergio Ostroverhy's portrait of firemen injects an engagingly, eccentric touch of Socialist Realism to the proceedings. But they are exceptions to a failing rule.

● Until 17 September.  
Information: 020 7306 0055.



On his last legs: Adrian Thompson as Mao Tse-tung

# It just gets better and better

THE vitality of London's operatic life was again in evidence last night with the superb revival of John Adams's *Nixon in China* in Peter Sellars's landmark production. While *Tosca* (1900), seen glamorously and starrily at Covent Garden only hours before, was the first operatic masterpiece of the 20th century, *Nixon in China* (1987) was one of the last.

Its subject matter, to Alice Goodman's poetic text, as glinting and polished as granite, is President Nixon's visit to China in 1972. Mao Tse-Tung, on the edge of senility, is still in charge, aided by the enigmatic Chou En-Lai, sickly and elegiac. As in *Tosca*, politics jostle with human emotion in this pivotal moment in history.

## OPERA

**Nixon in China/ENO**  
Coliseum

★★★★☆

## Fiona Maddocks

Everything about this opera grows more convincing with each encounter. The pacing, characterisation and vibrancy of Adams's score sound fresh as ever.

Chorus and orchestra, under former ENO music director Paul Daniel, were first class. As in 2000, Janis Kelly's nervy, fretful Pat Nixon is a model of singing and acting, while Judith Howarth's terrifying, glitter-

ing Madame Mao proves scarier than ever. Mark Stone as Chou and Adrian Thompson as Mao epitomised the barmy contrast of their historical and musical selves.

James Maddalena, who created the role of Nixon 20 years ago, is impressive as ever. Unsatisfied with being Nixon's uncanny double when last seen, he has added a red tie, a tiring bonhomie and an all-too-recognisable hair style to the role. He is Nixon as Tony Blair, a feat even beyond Rory Bremner. Who says opera cannot mirror the folly of politics? It can, brilliantly, at the summit, which is where this piece belongs.

● 17, 23, 29 June, 6 July.  
Information: 0870 145 0200.

# Stones clones gather moss

## POP

**Primal Scream**  
Garage, N5

★★★★☆

## John Aizlewood

After 22 years during which Primal Scream have evolved from fey indie kids to Rolling Stones clones via a dance boom they instigated, it's still a tricky call as to whether they are addled rock 'n' roll casualties for whom personal hygiene is a thing of mystical wonder or whether they are desperadoes, the last gang in town living high on the hog of decadence.

Last night's intimate show for the radio station XFM offered evidence for both arguments long before everybody's skin had turned to liquid. At their best, with stick-thin singer Bobby Gillespie short on words but long on attitude, they were lost

in the majesty of rock and the mystery of roll. The scrumptious opener *Movin' On Up* was a reminder that Primal Scream's dance and rock fusion once changed the face of British music. Alas, it would be the only dip into their masterpiece, *Screamadelica*.

There were compensations in their often appealing maelstrom of scuzzy sleaze. *Swastika Eyes* exuded belligerent menace and an almighty groove. *Shoot Speed/Kill Light* offered a symphonic swirl and, despite its naff title, the brand-new *Suicide Sally* and Johnny Guitar suggested they will not be going quietly for a wee while.

Yet, for all their tightness — and Primal Scream haven't been sloppy live for at least a decade — their musical world has shrivelled since 1994's *Rocks* (last night's set closer and still defiantly charmless) announced their conversion to The Rolling Stones.

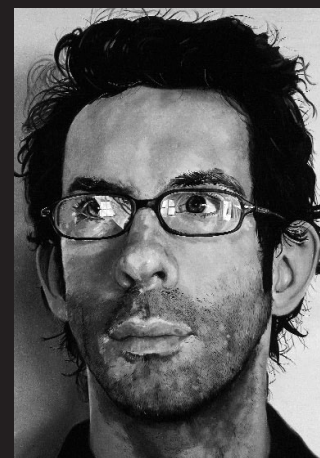
Clearly, they are in something of a rut and not merely in contrast to their early days when they hopped genres with each album. Thus the dreary Kowalski remained a riff in search of a tune and the brand-new *Dolls* (*Sweet Rock And Roll*) was as lumpy and lazy as its title threatened. To sink or to re-think? The choice is theirs.

National Portrait Gallery

1856-2006

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15 June – 17 September

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Matthew (detail) by Ben-Jamie © the artist

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