

The Arts

Royal performances

THEATRE

The Hollow Crown

Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford

Fiona Mountford

IF old-fashioned history textbooks could speak, there's a sporting chance that they would emit the vowel sounds currently to be heard shivering the doomed timbers of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. For five nights, the RST is playing host to Derek Jacobi, Ian Richardson, Donald Sinden and Janet Suzman — four of British Equity's most enunciated members — in a light-hearted look at "the fall and foibles of the kings and queens of England".

Although John Barton originally created this compilation show as a one-off divertissement to aid the verse-speaking skills of RSC actors, the piece has now had more than 40 years of touring success, largely internationally. It's a well-calculated formula: four estimable actors, usually of a certain age (although Ralph Fiennes did a stint before film stardom beckoned) plus accounts of various monarchs being contrary, lascivious, poignant or sometimes all three simultaneously. But what the Australians must have made of Donald Sinden, all blue velvet smoking jacket and quivering jowls, on *The Hollow Crown's* recent tour Down Under is anyone's guess.

At times there is more ham than on a pig farm, as Messrs Jacobi and Sinden, in particular, rise to ever more exaggerated heights of actor-laddishness. Richardson, the only one of the four who ever abandons his file with the script in, valiantly attempts to keep things on an even keel. He turns in a succession of well-judged performances, such as his rendition of Charles II's surprisingly touching poem *I Pass All My hours in a Shady Old Grove*. Suzman, a recent replacement for Diana Rigg, largely adopts an attitude of quiet bemusement, although her recitation from that "partial, prejudiced and ignorant historian" Jane Austen ("The King then made a long speech, for which I must refer people to Shakespeare's



Plenty of ham: Ian Richardson, Janet Suzman, Derek Jacobi and Donald Sinden declaim their way through history

play") is one of the highlights.

After a somewhat dreary trudge towards the reign of the Stuart kings, the second half perks up. This is largely due to the excerpts on offer: dry 16th-century chroniclers, such as Holinshed, can be replaced by the acid tongues of novelists Fanny

Burney and William Thackeray.

Those of a more frivolous nature will spot the show's main attraction: studying the reactions of the actors as they in turn watch their colleagues take solo turns. Sinden corpses as Jacobi gives his extremely camp Horace Walpole,

and squints in perplexity when Suzman fails to project adequately. It's that kind of evening, which you'll either flock to or run as far away from as humanly possible.

● Until July 20. Box office: 01789 403 403.

Old Mose still has a nose for a good title

JAZZ

Mose Allison Trio

Pizza Express Jazz Club

Jack Massarik

YOUNG Man Mose has matured into a spokesman for elderly angst. "I'm a Certified Senior Citizen," he declaims. "Just take a bus — every day there's more of us." But watch where you walk, because *The Fool Killer's Comin'*. Yes, the White Boy who Stole the Blues has aged. He's all pink pate and close-cropped white beard now, but there's still a glint of cussedness in his eye.

For more than 40 years, the husky-voiced sage of Tippecanoe, Mississippi, has been turning wry expressions into song-titles. Last night's opening set, for instance, contained *Tell Me Somethin' I Don't Know*, *Can't See For Lookin'*, *Watchin' Old Movies* ("the artist who's misunderstood, or the bad guy tryin' to do good") and *You Call it Juggin'* but *I Call It Runnin' Around*.

Some of these were written by other people, but under his clumpy piano-trio treatment, they all sounded similar. And that mangled keyboard style is now distinctly eccentric. His opening piano feature sounded like a speeded-up child's nursery-rhyme from a movie nightmare.

Deputising for Mark Taylor was Paul Clarvis, a drummer whose flexible sense of time nearly matched Allison's. He swished around, diplomatically avoiding any actual beats, while regular bassist Roy Babbington held things together. Mose is here for a month, but to guarantee instrumental interest, pick a night when guitarist Jim Mullen joins in.

● Until Sunday 28 July. Box office: 020 7439 8722.

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Plugging into the subconscious

DESPITE the title, the dreams dreamt by the 10 artists brought together in this exhibition are not exclusive to the age of electricity. They are dreams that have been inspired in many ages by the fall of night upon a great city, when grubby excitement is to be found upon its less salubrious streets. But in step with our time, the dreams made manifest here are neon-lit and centred on the world of the nightclub.

Appropriately, the curators have conjured the atmosphere of a nightclub, albeit a tawdry, seedy and empty one, in the unlikely surroundings of the long, thin, curving exhibition space on the ground floor of the Barbican Centre.

The "sculptors" and the one painter, Kirsten Glass, appropriate symbols associated with urban night life and use them to refer to the feeling of that night life, while the photographers and video-artists actually fill in some of the details, whether real or imagined. Jack Pierson makes the most obvious and underwhelming use of appropriated symbols in his "found neons", which are just that — simply typical neon signs

EXHIBITION

Electric Dreams

Barbican

Nick Hackworth



Fischerspooner: futuristic Gothic tastes

declaring things like "Adult Movie". Slightly more sophisticated is Jim Lambie's cute but expendable piece *Soft*

Cell, a wall-mounted working and turning turntable covered in blue metallic glitter.

Meanwhile, the vampy models who, collaged together, successfully inhabit Glass's retro, pop-art painting fluoresce gently in the ultraviolet light that bathes the work. Also effective is Martin Eder's attention-grabbing piece: a wall-mounted and lit sign that says "I Love Drugs" and a huge mass of broken polystyrene sheets covered with thin strands of cotton that look like cobwebs and stream out from the "I" of the sign, so that the polystyrene appears to be its dream.

Filling the room with Electro beats are two art-cum-music videos. The Berlin-based fashionable art/music collective Fischerspooner exercise their futuristic-gothic-punk tastes in the piece *Sweetness*, while the collective Donatella play around with fragments of mainstream fashion and chart hits in their more random and less interesting video.

If anything, *Electric Dreams* captures only too well the flavour of nightlife that always promises much with its glitter and its shine but often delivers so little.

● Until 26 August. Information: 0207 638 8891.

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