

## Going Out Reviews

# Shouting down the body politic

THERE is a beautiful work struggling to get out of this production, which attacks meaty issues with passion, but does not season them with enough subtlety. Florence Gibson's ambitious play takes the audience back to the late 19th century Reconstruction era in the United States, where the fight for both blacks' and women's rights dominated a political landscape fragmented by the recent Civil War.

Gibson channels these political tensions into three representative characters. Nance is a white feminist with a corset-exploding personality and language that could curdle the milk in a society lady's cup of tea.

Belle, a black woman from the South, embodies more homely qualities, although as chief breadwinner for her family, she fights the feminist battle from more realistic grounds than Nance's frilly society upbringing. Her husband Bowlyn is initially prejudiced against what he deems to be petticoat politics, but when moves by the Radical Republicans to ensure the black vote falls through, he starts to re-evaluate "equality".

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

**BELLE ★**

Gate Theatre

**Rachel Halliburton**

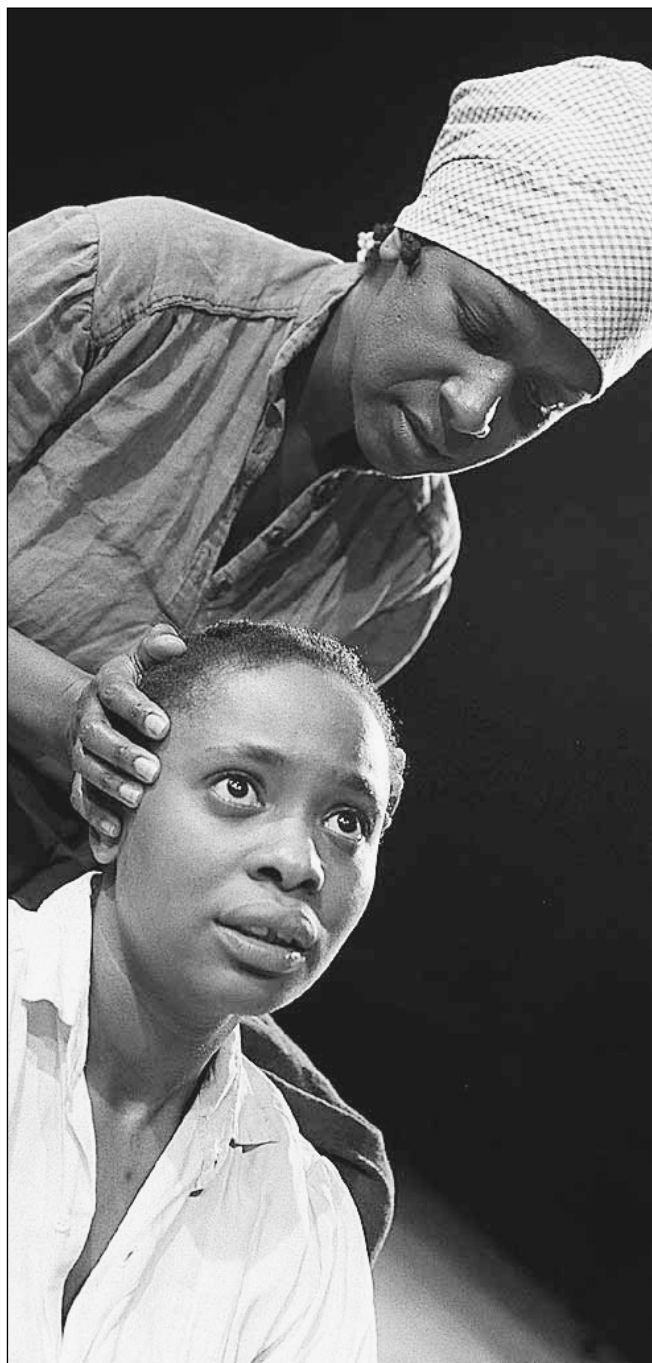
It often seems that director Deborah Yhip has over-estimated the theatrical space she must conquer. The audience sitting around Sara Perks's starkly wooden design can almost touch the characters. But their delivery is too loud and declamatory.

The script ranges from politics to poetry, but the preaching tone rings so strong that there are times when you lose the essential dramatic sense of the personal in the political.

This is a shame, because Gibson has chosen a fascinating area. And in the second half, the play's potential starts to shine through; ironically it is in more playful scenes, such as the moment when Nance and Belle hurl paint at each other while painting a political banner.

Theatre is invaluable to politics, because it demonstrates that the supremacy of ideas means nothing without acknowledging the complexity of individuals. Yhip would benefit by allowing that complexity to live from the play's start.

● Until 31 March. Box office: 020 7229 0706.



Fighting for rights: Sandra Yaw (top) and Tina Gambe

# Sinister side of the gameshow

**NATHANIEL MELLORS ★**

Matt's Gallery, E3

**Nick Hackworth**

BASED on "the physical landscape of a night's television", this exhibition both suffers and benefits in equal measure from its resemblance to the "real thing". Eight video works are scattered throughout the large darkened gallery, some projected onto large screens and others displayed on video monitors of various sizes.

A number of the pieces take aim, more or less explicitly, at standard TV programme formats. In Gameshow, an inane quiz is rendered amusingly creepy by its transposition into on-screen text, complete with Stephen Hawking-style voice-over. The dialogue jerks mechanically back and forth as if an Autocue was prompting every utterance, right down to the stutters and nervous giggles of the contestants. Transport Café apes the banality of the fly-on-the-wall format by being an extremely dull record of people hanging around a transport café, but somehow manages to get away with it and even raises a laugh or two.

Elsewhere, Nathaniel Mellors reveals an alarming fixation with Colonel Tom Parker, Elvis Presley's infamously exploitative manager. Bravely donning prosthetic and false facial hair, Mellors easily succeeds in emulating the low-down hound dog. In one piece, the Colonel Parker character chomps on the dog-end of a cigar

and fills us in on his own evening's television viewing. In another, the Colonel lies, inexplicably but to good comic affect, between the doors of an elevator that repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, attempt to close around him.

While clearly holding some kind of critical distance from its subject, the show retains an affectionate, rather than sneering, attitude towards the material it emulates and parodies. A



Hound dog: Mellors as Colonel Parker

# Far from frosty fantasy fable

**THE SNOW MAIDEN ★**

Guildhall School

**Tom Sutcliffe**

AT THE Royal Opera last June, Gergiev and the Kirov had a ball with Rimsky-Korsakov's Snow Maiden (Snegoruchka). Now, Guildhall students, in a memorably visual staging by Stephen Medcalf, show that this children's fable for grown-ups is not just musically charming, but magical theatre too.

Based on an Ostrovsky play, it's a sprawling ecological fable with the flavour of Oscar Wilde's Happy Prince but less weepy. So much peasant celebration is very heart-warming. It's about a pure innocent princess (embodiment of winter, a child of spring) and Grandfather Frost, who melts away to nothing, thawed by the joys of human love.

Isabella Bywater's painted pop-up-book set has room-walls that fold out from the sides of the stage. Fir trees and pink and blue skies line the view. A quirky, slightly punk-movement group represent spring's entourage of birds. And the school's galaxy of

young stars display their vocal prowess. A marvelous black bass baritone, Barry Martin, doubles as Frost and as the servant boyar of decrepit old Tsar Berendei with his still roving eye (Brefni Horgan, lyrical but commanding).

Estelle Kaique is potentially plangent as Spring. Two in-er-face tenors make a bold mark: Elliot Goldie as the peasant parent with whom Snegoruchka goes to stay, and Mark Cunningham as a herald. A poignant Croatian mezzo, Alenka Ponjavic, is the young shepherd Lyel, whom the Snow Maiden fancies. Sarah Redgwick, in the title role, is sweet without being sickly, peeling out rapturously in her silvery upper register.

● Tomorrow and Friday. Box office: 020 7638 8891.

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## LAST WEEK'S OPENINGS — WHAT THE CRITICS SAID

FILM	KEY														
	Good	OK	Awful	Evening Standard	Daily Mail	The Times	Daily Telegraph	The Guardian	The Independent	Financial Times	Daily Express	Sunday Times	Sunday Telegraph	The Observer	Independent on Sunday
Best in Show	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful
Born Romantic	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful
Dark Days	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful
The Watcher	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful
<b>THEATRE</b>															
Loveplay	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful
<b>DANCE</b>															
Mixed Bill - Royal Ballet	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful	Good	OK	Awful