

The Arts

Reborn in the USA

POP

Tim Burgess

Scala, N1

John Aizlewood

WITH seven commendable but hardly earth-shaking albums to their name, with their sales having peaked in the mid-1990s and with their singer Tim Burgess having decamped to Los Angeles, the game seems very much up for The Charlatans. Come September, Burgess's first solo album, *I Believe* should settle their affairs.

There is worse news for those who revere his group: Burgess has married an American and gone so native that *I Believe* is a love letter to his adopted home. Last night, it was as if The Charlatans had never existed.

With his American band, his cowboy hat, his occasional Ennio Morricone-esque melodica and his frankly ridiculous sideburns Burgess looked the part, even if his speaking voice — midway between Mark Owen and the Clitheroe Kid — fatally undermined the Mojave Desert effect.

Musically, he was all over the place and that place was the United States, particularly the early-1970s United States of

Gram Parsons and The Stills-Young Band. Fascinatingly and in the spirit of louche Bohemia Burgess now espouses, *I Believe* was unveiled in its entirety while his parent group was ignored.

He has even changed his voice. Gone is the baggy-friendly, Ian Brown-esque mutter, replaced by a striking falsetto Curtis Mayfield would not have sniffed at.

Most bizarre of all, Burgess's wholesale reinvention rather suits him. Say Yes, introduced with a less than convincing "I think we mean it", was propelled by bravura horns and a rattling power pop chorus. I really didn't think he had it in him to be this joyfully life-affirming and, I suspect, neither did he.

Elsewhere, influences tumbled from the most unusual closets. Oh My Corazon emulated the salsa section of Lionel Richie's *All Night Long (All Night)* while *All I Ever Do* almost lost its battle not to break into Yazoo's *Only You* and *Be My Baby* alternated between sweet ballad and tom-tom led frenzy.

Possibly as a treat, he concluded with a feedback-drenched *Life Is Sweet*, the minor hit he sang for The Chemical Brothers in 1995. It was the sound of another life.

● *Tonight. Box office: 08700 600 100.*



American Charlatan: Tim Burgess, a cowboy with the accent of the Clitheroe Kid

Chinese percussion concerto makes a big hit



PROMS 2003

Evelyn Glennie premiere

Albert Hall

Nick Kimberley

PIANISTS play pianos, violinists play violins, but percussionists? They play everything from gongs and bells to whips and xylophones. Evelyn Glennie's vast collection of instruments from all over the world causes problems for the composers who write for her: where do you stop? As she hares around whatever kit the composer assembles for her, Glennie's performances sometimes resemble gymnastic displays.

Yet while Chen Yi's *Percussion Concerto* (its European premiere here conducted by Yan Pascal Tortelier) has its callisthenic aspects, the composer's sense of musical drama adds genuine theatricality to the besequinned Glennie's exertions.

Born in China in 1953, Chen Yi suffered through the Cultural Revolution, emerging from a labour camp in 1970 to work for a Beijing Opera company. Her Beijing Opera experiences inform the concerto, notably in the use of the plangent gongs that give the form its distinct identity. While Glennie and the BBC Symphony Orchestra's own percussion battery engage in often frenzied dialogue, strings and winds try to calm things with emollient glissandos, from which the plaintive oriental microtones had been somewhat ironed out.

In the second movement, Glennie not only played, but also recited (indeed, almost sang) a Sung Dynasty poem, with no apparent trace of her native Scottish accent.

Then she upped the tempo again, battering the orchestra towards a climax that was more rock and roll than Beijing Opera. With many percussion showcases, such sound and fury substitute for original musical thought. Here the effect was exhilarating; Chen Yi clearly knows how to bring Western and Eastern modes into meaningful dialogue.

Opening with the overture from Paul Dukas's rare opera *Polyeucte*, Tortelier relished the luxurious textures of this evocative, at times sinister curtain-raiser; one almost wanted the whole opera, but that would probably have spoilt the effect.

Finally, Ravel's *Daphnis And Chloe*, a work which, shorn of its dance element, always seems episodic, if gorgeously so. With the BBC Symphony Chorus somewhat lacking in intensity, and moments of roughness from the brass, Tortelier's characteristically expansive performance didn't quite solve the problems, but he achieved a lucidity that balanced the irresistible and eventually all-engulfing wildness.

The business end of Mr Pop Art

EXHIBITION

Peter Blake: Commercial Art

London Institute Gallery

Nick Hackworth

ASIDE from his recent cameo role as a wizard in a Harry Potter film, Professor Sir Peter Blake RA, to give him his full title, is best known as one of the leading figures in the British Pop Art movement of the 1960s. His work is among the most representative and evocative of the period; Blake, now 71, was as at home with the culture of his time, as with a pair of warm slippers.

Where many Pop artists critiqued their culture, Blake illustrated it. He produced colourful paintings, collages, sculptures and drawings that were contemporary but nice, safe and unremarkable — and a world away from the uncompromising American Pop Art of the period.

He has maintained a similar style and strategy



Heads you win: Blake's *Class of 2000*, a collage for the Foreign Office to mark the millennium

ever since, apart from a whimsical, rustic, fairy-painting phase, and so his aesthetic has once again, thanks to our retro-obsessed culture, become acceptably fashionable.

That comfortable retro appeal shines through in this

smallish retrospective of Blake's commercial work from 1960 to the present, which will be followed immediately in mid-September by an exhibition of his sculptural work.

As well as assimilating elements of popular culture

into his fine-art work, Blake added to it directly through the quantity of posters, album, book and magazine covers he produced, which are here on display.

Blake's most famous work, in any genre, is the cover for The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper's*

Lonely Hearts Club Band, a winning, zeitgeist-capturing — and creating — collage of famous faces (though one later trumped by Richard Hamilton's blank design for The Beatles' *White Album*). The collage is Blake's medium par excellence. It has allowed him, throughout his career, to simply, and literally, stick his favourite elements from different periods together.

Typically, images of flock wallpaper and archaic bric-a-brac sit next to pictures of pop and film icons, with bright stars, hearts and bands of colour. The wizardly results are to be seen in works that range from early magazine covers to a recent Paul Weller album cover and a collaged crowd scene created for the Foreign Office to commemorate the millennium (*Class of 2000*).

Gentle, colourful and slightly sickly sweet, Blake's style helped define his period. After all, the Sixties weren't really that exciting.

● *Until 11 September.*