



The Arts

Classic police procedural proves far from routine

THEATRE

This Story of Yours

New End, NW3

Dominic Maxwell

YOU would be forgiven for thinking that John Hopkins's 1968 play should be as relevant as a 10-bob note. After all, its subject matter — a frayed provincial policeman hunts a paedophile — has become numbingly familiar from countless TV thrillers. Some will recognise this case from Sidney Lumet's 1972 film version, *The Offence*, with Sean Connery. And yet Guy Retallack's sinewy revival is a provocative entertainment that makes Hopkins's successors look childish by comparison.

The action unfolds over three confrontations between detective sergeant Johnson and his wife, his boss and the suspect. "I may have killed a man tonight," a drunken Johnson tells his wife at the start, sharing the horror of his work for the first time in their childless marriage. Too late. In a powerful central turn, Anthony Cord shows 20 years of suppression seeping out through Johnson's pores. He can't be sanguine like Christopher Gillling's patrician detective chief inspector. And so, as Andy Edwards's set trades MDF cocktail cabinets for interrogation rooms, we see the simmering sergeant finally boil over.

The material is meaty enough to make actors gnaw each other's bones, but the cast never lose control in this harsh world of casual violence. Paul Hamilton is superbly opaque as the suspect, a mirror image of Johnson but with kids, status and — possibly — a penchant for doing the terrible things our man can't help but imagine. This rich piece of writing takes the storytelling muscle that Hopkins honed on 53 episodes of *Z-Cars* and mixes in a bleak poeticism of its own. Nothing else here can quite match the virulent sadness of the Johnsons' first-act fist fight. But this remains an arresting depiction of loneliness and loathing that will loiter in the mind for a long time.

● *Until 11 October. Box office: 020 7794 0022.*



Dee Conway

Mesmerising: an enduring image of flying leaps was made as the Pipers, including Oxana Panchenko and William Trevitt, performed with perfect detail and process

Entirely of our time

DANCE

George Piper Dances

Sadler's Wells, EC1

Sarah Frater

IMPROBABLE as it may seem, Michael Portillo was at last night's opening of *George Piper Dances*. You wouldn't think the one-time contender for the Conservative Party crown would follow contemporary dance, but he obviously knows more than he lets on as Michael Nunn and William Trevitt are entirely of our time.

The former Royal Ballet duo formed the Pipers, as they're known, in 2001 and they commission new work only from contemporary dance-makers. Not for them revivals of little-seen gems from way back when, thank goodness. Instead, it is new choreography alongside the handicap larks from their rehearsals, the dash from theatre to studio, alongside video glimpses of

the dance-makers. The mood is part boy band, part planet chill-out, although the dancing is utterly serious.

For their Sadler's Wells debut, the five-strong Pipers performed a mixed bill of four new and new-ish works. The highlight was easily Russell Maliphant's *Critical Mass*, a duet for Nunn and Trevitt and an hypnotic piece of dancing. It mixes capoeira-inspired moves with lifts and balances, and mock fights with downy-soft partnering. There are

three sequences, the first and third powerfully rhythmic, the middle section smooth and languid, like chocolate sauce poured on vanilla ice-cream. The piece hints at the tensions and resolution between the two men, but it is as much about pace and velocity as combat and truce.

Critical Mass stole the show, although Christopher Wheeldon's *Mesmerics* was also well received. The neo-Balanchinian piece included all five of the Pipers (Nunn and Trevitt, plus Oxana Panchenko, Hubert Essakow and the very foxy Monica Zamora) and its enduring image is the flying, soaring leaps. The women run to the men, who catch them mid-flight, and then hold them up high in perfect arabesques.

Equally good was the short duet, *Approximate Sonata, I, V*, by choreographic heavy-hitter William Forsythe. The piece was about detail and process and it was expertly danced by Trevitt and Panchenko. However, it did look a bit rushed, as if Forsythe had sped through on his way to other things.

The piece with unexpected appeal was Cathy Marston's *Non Exeunt* for Panchenko and Zamora. Admittedly, her video musings about Ophelia and Lady Macbeth soon got on your nerves, but the dancing was gentle and pretty, with Panchenko and Zamora in dresses and flat ballet slippers, the antidote, in other words, to the muscularity of much of the programme.

● *Until 27 September. Box office: 020 7863 8000.*

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EXHIBITION

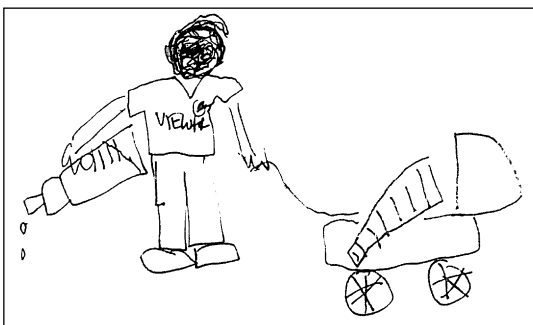
**Bloomberg New
Contemporaries 2003**

Wharf Road, N1

Nick Hackworth

SINCE 1949 the annual New Contemporaries exhibition has showcased, supposedly, the best student art in the UK. Any recent graduate can submit work for consideration and this year 1,200 hopefuls were whittled down to the select 32 on show here. For them, inclusion will be enormously helpful in the difficult period after graduation, bringing attention from dealers, critics and the wider public. The usefulness of that exposure is testified to by an "alumni" list that includes Howard Hodgkin, David Hockney, Damien Hirst and Gillian Wearing.

This worthy enterprise



Rolling a joint: sketch of a recent Mark McGowan stunt — he pushed a leg of lamb around in a pram to protest against abusive parenting

deserves support. Recently, however, the show has been irredeemably average and this year is no exception. More depressing, though, is the sense of a missed opportunity. There was, floating in an ocean of dross, some good student work this year. Sculpture, particularly that at Chelsea school of art, was notably strong. Sadly, none of it is to be found here.

Among the inexplicable selections here are: a video of a

dog wandering along the Venice waterfront for about a minute, another shot from a car endlessly circling a roundabout, and the efforts of someone who has doodled on reproductions of work by Van Dyck and Velasquez with a spirograph. Beyond a certain shallowness, these and the other failing artworks bear no common characteristic, so at least they can retain their precious claims to individuality. The few high points were

similarly eclectic. The most beautiful images here are Daniel Cramer's haunting photographs of dark forest scenes. Sigrid Holwood has produced some painterly landscapes and Stephen Pierce some equally successful, tightly painted renderings of weird, alien forms.

Meanwhile, the most amusing work comes courtesy of two shameless self-publicists. Mustafa Hulusi employs the simple but successful tactic of sticking his name all over the place, including a picture of Tony Blair. Mark McGowan exhibits reports of his various humiliating performances-cum-media stunts. Recently he pushed a peanut seven miles to Downing Street with his nose, handing in the nut as a protest against student debt. Which goes to show that fortune favours the pushy.

● *Until 26 October. Box office: 0845 120 7550.*