

# The Arts



Alastair Muir

Shot in the dark: Will Keen as the Duke and Janet McTeer as the Duchess

## Songs of praise that will rock the heathen

### POP

#### Delirious?

Underworld, NW1

David Smyth

IN this cool-obsessed world of 24-hour entertainment channels, where unknown musicians can leap from the pages of the style press to the stuffy broadsheets in a matter of days, a five-piece rock band from Littlehampton have been at the forefront of the real underground for years.

Delirious (the name has a silent question mark, but in the interests of legibility, let's leave it out here) formed 10 years ago, started out playing at church halls and became increasingly popular by selling their records in churches and Christian bookshops worldwide. Today they are huge, outselling Robbie Williams in America two to one, but still the heathen have never heard of them.

Last night's show, a small one for them, was nominally to mark their 10th anniversary, but more importantly to show off their talents to a godless major record label. Suits from BMG were in the audience, finally taking notice of a band at the top of a very lucrative market.

Contemporary Christian music generates a massive \$800 million a year in the US.

They would have been impressed by a crowd who worship Delirious religiously, and a set of songs of praise that rocked in a far from cringeworthy way. The band dress like Pop-era U2, and have an enjoyable take on the Irish megastars' muscular, stadium-rock sound. Committed pagans will need to overlook the relentlessly worshipful lyrics if Delirious are to have the impact on the wider world that they so fervently desire, but anybody present could hear that the devil doesn't quite have all the best tunes.

# Thrills but no chills

THE gruesome extremities of this great John Webster Revenge Tragedy have rarely been surpassed. There remains something disturbingly modern about the playwright's dark, despairing view of a cruel, godless world. But Phyllida Lloyd's modernish-dress production, with faces video projected on screens or on a perspex mirror beneath the flight of steps that dominate the stage, disappoints. It only succeeds in transporting The Duchess of Malfi into a neutered, neutral no-man's land where the course of true sex-appeal runs sluggish and horrors are ingenious rather than blood-chilling.

### THEATRE

#### The Duchess of Malfi

The National's Lyttelton

Nicholas de Jongh

The secret, unofficial marriage of the Duchess (Janet McTeer) to her household steward, Antonio, is a charmingly amorous affair rather than a fatal, erotic passion, defying class barriers and conventions. You could not tell they come from different rungs on the social ladder: Charles Edwards's placid Antonio is too stiff and solid to

be the ambitious homme fatale who would plausibly induce Miss McTeer's handsome, inviting, statuesque Duchess to fall from grace.

Webster set his scene in the depths of decadent Italy. Miss Lloyd's production is more concerned with spectacular effects — unimaginatively exploited — than the timeless drive of sexual desire and depravity. The atmosphere, despite sycophantic courtiers, thuggish guards, gun-shots and characters who remain sitting ghost-like on the steps after they have been dispatched, remains unfairly mild. Will Keen's down-market Duke, the Duchess's incestuous, crazy

twin brother, plots her death and then goes out of his guilty mind without succumbing to serious grief or guilt, though he makes a convincing lunatic. Ray Stevenson's wicked Cardinal oddly keeps his cool.

Lorcan Cranitch makes a bland, glaringly miscast Bosola. He dispatches the satirical shafts and sneers of this angry, young malcontent, with the ardour of a tired barman collecting the glasses at 11pm. He throws away Webster's great lines — and too many have been edited out of this production — as if they were theatrical refuse. When subjecting the Duchess to psychological torture and a

death-process that parodies a marriage masque, he chills no blood. The troupe of madmen, mildly gyrate on the steps, their faces in video close-up, with a cacophony of music, alarm-bells and shouts, though all their speeches have been excised. The effect is artily bathetic. But Miss McTeer, high-voiced and child-like, hair awry, composure gone, is powerfully torn between stoic dignity and disintegration. She curses with a hoarse, fierce vehemence — passion splendidly discovered in death.

● Until 10 March. Box office: 020 7452 3000.

# The lure of foreign affairs

IN A breathless bid to generate publicity at a time when immigration and nationality are once again high on the political agenda, the ICA has hyped the fact that foreign nationals gain free admission to their latest group show, Publicness, while luckless Brits will have to pay the usual entrance fee. Seemingly a self-serving topical stunt, the bizarre admissions policy is actually an initiative by Jens Haaning, one of the artists in the exhibition, designed to provoke questions about immigration, racism and the ownership of culture.

Even if you are not a foreigner, the exhibition is worth seeing because it highlights an odd but increasingly important strand of contemporary art practice, "intervention art", that has evolved from the traditions of performance and conceptual art. Along with his fellow exhibitors, Matthieu Laurette and Aleksandra Mir, Haaning does not make art objects intended for gallery display

### EXHIBITION

#### Publicness

ICA

Nick Hackworth

Instead, all three occupy a grey area somewhere between art, direct social and political action and eccentricity, and work by interacting with people and institutions to realise their creative ideas.

Haaning's interventions play upon people's innate prejudices against foreigners. For example, he plastered Geneva with thousands of copies of a poster he created in Arabic that, since 9.11, many would assume carried anti-Western invective but, in fact, told an old, Arabic joke. Mir displays a video of her one-day event First Woman on the Moon, where she involved an entire Dutch community in a mock-moon landing,

and plans for a beautiful piece of public art, a meadowfield in the midst of a rundown area of Glasgow. Laurette, meanwhile, uses more demotic forms of engagement, including numerous appearances on crap French TV shows and the staging of lookalike events, one of which took place at the ICA last night (featuring the pictured Mr Bean), to investigate the idea of spectacle in modern society.

Though many would be hard pressed to recognise some of the activities of these artists as art, their way of working is likely to become ever more prominent, and in its further erosion of the distinction between cultural production and life it holds both the promise of invigorating life with the idealism of culture and the danger of infecting art with the mediocrity of everyday life.

● Until 16 March. Box office: 020 7930 3647.



A spectacle in modern society: "Mr Bean" at lookalike convention by Matthieu Laurette

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