

The Arts



Depth of vision: with the men away working in the cities, women carry goods to the market in Chimbote, Ecuador

For the benefit of that Latin sparkle

WORLD

I Love Cuba

Camden Centre, NW1

Sue Steward

AFTER Saturday's extraordinary anti-war rally, the Cuban Solidarity Campaign's "I Love Cuba" revue was a fitting follow-on for the politically inclined: "Don't attack Iraq" T-shirts mingled with Che Guevara logos. In this New Labour era, the benefit event is something of an endangered species, but Cuba remains an attractive cause for many.

I Love Cuba was planned long before the smell of war filled the city, but guest speaker Harold Pinter, declared that Saturday's "manifestation of resistance" — and other occasions of pan-global resistance — were inspired by Cuba's long struggle against the "monstrous force: America" (applause).

Pinter was a toff among the mockney vowels and f-words of the leftist alt.comedians who followed him. They raided the march for stories, and trashed the war, the Americans, and, of course, Dubya. Fast-talking Mark Thomas, a latter-day Ben Elton, spewed rage and painted sharp portraits of the marchers, while a besuited John Hegley read his gloriously surreal poems and ignored the war, the march, and Cuba.

After the high-energy verbals, the appearance of London's dashing salsa band Merengada was most welcome. The dynamic saxophonist/flautist Nina Jaffa danced through their salsa and merengue repertoire with swinging hips and moves to match those of the two chunky lead singers. Jaffa's sequined halter-top and mariachi-tight trousers lent the evening some necessary Latin sparkle. Merengada's 1998 salsa-reggae cover of "No Woman No Cry" remains one of Latin music's greatest novelty hits, while their fast, rocking merengues are easy for gringos to master. The audience twirled in moves inconceivable in London nearly two decades ago when the CSC was founded and neophyte salsa fans in this same venue, discovered their hips.

Merengada's rhythm section — pioneers of the UK scene — are reminders of how few bands have survived the late Nineties switch from live bands to DJ's discs: the occasion could equally have been a protest against the near-death of live Latin music in Britain.

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Truly moving images

SEBASTIAO Salgado is a hero. Whether they like it or not, all artists ultimately conform to one of two types; those who practise art for art's sake and those who use art to engage with and, hopefully, improve the world.

Salgado is the epitome of the latter. One of the greatest ever socially engaged photographers, the Brazilian, now 58, has spent much of the past three decades working for the major photo agencies depicting the lives of the world's poor and dispossessed, producing images for both the media and his own projects that

EXHIBITION

Sebastião Salgado

Barbican

Nick Hackworth

argue for social change.

This exhibition, Salgado's first major show in London in almost 10 years, brings together 350 photographs, taken between 1993 and 1999 in more than 40 countries throughout Asia, Africa, central Europe and Latin America. They have been thematically grouped to depict famine, war,

environmental decline, urban poverty, rural disaster, the recent explosive growth of cities in Asia and the plight of refugees and economic migrants worldwide.

Salgado's body of work, however, elevates itself above mere reportage by dint of its unremitting emotional intensity, its beauty, its didactic aims and its sheer quantity, which speaks of the dedication of its creator and creates an overwhelming cumulative impact greater than the sum of its parts.

The images themselves are as diverse as humanity; every one could inspire an essay. In

one a Rwandan refugee lies dying of cholera in a camp in Zaire, surrounded at a slight distance, by a traumatised crowd. I have never seen an image of man who seems more alone.

In another, a line of Ecuadorian women travel to their local market across landscape of incredible grandeur. While in another — an image that transcends descriptive clichés of beauty and could have been plucked straight from the imagination of Gabriel Garcia Marquez — some young Yanomami Indian children play on the banks of

the Amazon, the air around them thick with butterflies.

Salgado, then, is not simply a messenger of doom; his work shows life as it is for the vast majority of the world, both in its beauty and its pain, but his political argument is clear none the less. For his ability to communicate his message so powerfully and purely in an age long since jaded, and in which politics is so hamfistedly treated by contemporary artists, Salgado deserves the highest praise.

• Until 1 June. Information: 020 7638 8891.

Kicking the vocal kerb

POP

Hil St Soul

Jazz Café, NW1

Paul Clark

THE Brit soul scene has always had a penchant for a chunky, chugging groove and even when our American cousins traded it for swing and latterly R'n'B we kept the faith via artists like the Brand New Heavies, Omar and D-Influence. Hil St Soul are part of this legacy and remain unmoved by fad or fashion.

Zambian-born and London-raised frontwoman Hilary Mwelwa was, by her own admission, feeling "dodgy" last night after a bout of flu but she was determined to muster something from her jaded vocal chords. After the strain of the perky party number Alright and the churning funk of Nostalgia, Mwelwa sought help from a glass of lemon and ginger and

appealed for a vocal replacement from the audience. Cue Beverley, a singing super-sub in the front row who brought the house down with a stirring, word perfect a capella of Sounds Of Blackness's gospel anthem I Believe.

"I'm thinking of giving up," quipped Mwelwa, taken aback.

Regaining the mike and the spotlight, Mwelwa rolled through a number of tracks about broken relationships. Before the stripped, bass-led Blue Tears she chirpily remarked that her heart had been "kicked to the kerb". This was followed by the fragmented pain of the ballad Pieces and by the time she reached Lonely Road she was ironically laughing at the emerging theme.

Mercifully, the excellent cover of the Stevie Wonder-penned Until You Come Back To Me, arranged around an acoustic guitar, was a more joyous affair. She left the stage with a sore throat, and on the set evidence, a bruised heart.

Bold, beguiling and Bach

DANCE

Resolution!

The Place

Sarah Frater

RESOLUTION drew to a close last week, and with it came some of the best performances of the six-week dance festival. Friday was an especially strong night, with work that restored your faith in contemporary dance (much of the festival sorely tried it).

First was Claire Croizé, a French artiste whose solo is best described as virtuoso head wagging. This may sound ludicrous, as does her programme note about creating dance "in the absence of technical precision and self control". In fact, it was a bold and fascinating piece, performed by the entirely convincing Croizé.

Friday was also noteworthy for Sarah Fahie and Antonio Caporilli, an

extraordinary pair whose choice of Bach and Handel seemed genuinely radical compared to the digital crash favoured by most Resolution! choreographers.

Fugue for a Furnished Flat portrayed an angsty couple, and included spoken text that was leaden in the extreme. However, their precision dancing was captivating, he speedily nimble, she with luxurious poise.

Another highlight of the final week was a repeat performance by Smallpittklein on Wednesday. Martin Lawrance was scheduled to appear, but injury kept him off the stage. Unlucky for him, but lucky for Thomas Small, whose sustained choreography put much of Resolution! in the shade. His five dancers swept across the stage, combining broad leaps with small-scale shimmies and waggles. The music was the usual digital smash, but the dancing was beguiling. There was also a lot of it, and thankfully little angst — a combination more Resolution! choreographers could embrace.