

More soap than roses

THEATRE

Days of Wine and Roses

Donmar Warehouse
Nicholas de Jongh

RECOVERING alcoholics may experience rueful shudders of recognition and lashings of empathy for the jaunty, young Donal and Mona in *Days of Wine and Roses*.

The couple leave Belfast for London life and drive themselves to booze, brawls and the big break-up. The process from start to separation, by way of marriage, takes eight years, nine scenes and a hundred crawling minutes that not even the forceful, emotionally volatile performances of the talented Anne-Marie Duff and Peter McDonald can redeem.

What on earth persuaded the Donmar's remarkable artistic director, Michael Grandage, to inflict this creaky, pretentious American television soap opera from 1958 upon us?

JP Miller's *Days of Wine and Roses*, made into a movie with Jack Lemmon and Lee Remick, treads in Eugene O'Neill's footsteps as if it were boldly pioneering. From the early moment when Donal, a bookie obsessed by that champion racer Arkle, takes out a hip-flask and volunteers "a quick nip to warm the cockles of your heart",



Bruised boozers: talented duo Peter McDonald (Donal) and Anne-Marie Duff (Mona) give forceful and emotionally volatile performances

nothing sounds fresh.

Miller casts a false, romantic halo around his two young boozers while charting their predictable decline and fall. The crucial question of what goads the Belfast pair to ruin their lives with alcohol is never seriously considered.

Owen McCafferty, who won the 2004 Evening Standard New Playwriting award may have shaped a new, two-character version of

Miller's original. In essentials, though, little has changed. A familiar dramatic-alcoholic line is drawn in Peter Gill's quasi-Brechtian production, with furniture, resting rear-stage, trundled around between scenes. Actors change costumes before us.

Donal picks up Mona at Belfast airport in 1962 and proposes on Westminster Bridge a year later. A baby and bottles of whisky, high

spirits and verbose celebration of Arkle's Gold Cup triumph abruptly follow on. For reasons left shrouded in mystery the couple drown their happiness in alcohol, leaving Mona in denial and Donal's job threatened. Scenes of sado-masochistic violence and interdependence, when Peter McDonald's sturdier, suffering Donal erupts with rage, only calm down with his wife's ironic reminder:

"We're two people who look after each other."

A lank-haired Miss Duff, whose charming perkiness gives way to vulnerability and dishevelled lethargy, makes a powerful impression as Mona. Her abandonment of husband and child is, though, like the play itself, charged by capricious pessimism.

● *Until 2 April.*
Information: 0870 060 6624.

Turning clutter into art

INTERESTING rubbish is a fair summation of the work of Japanese artist Tomoko Takahashi. Since she moved to London to study at Goldsmiths College in the early Nineties, she has made sprawling installations constructed from a sea of unloved, left-over litter.

For her first major UK show since being nominated for the Turner Prize in 2000, she has transformed the Serpentine into a fascinating, crazy kingdom of the disowned and discarded — like the handiwork of a deranged child with too much time on their hands.

She has taken more than 7,600 objects reclaimed from skips and bought from car-boot sales and arranged them in her distinctive obsessive-compulsive style to form quasi-domestic spaces in

EXHIBITION

Tomoko Takahashi

Serpentine Gallery
Nick Hackworth

the gallery: a reception, a garden, a kitchen/HQ, though none are literal representations. A vast array of objects, from washing machines and park railings, to toy soldiers and dice, impossible to take in with one glance, are arranged in a semblance of order. In the garden area, a small spread of green sponges forms a section of "grass", near which various gardening tools are neatly lined-up.

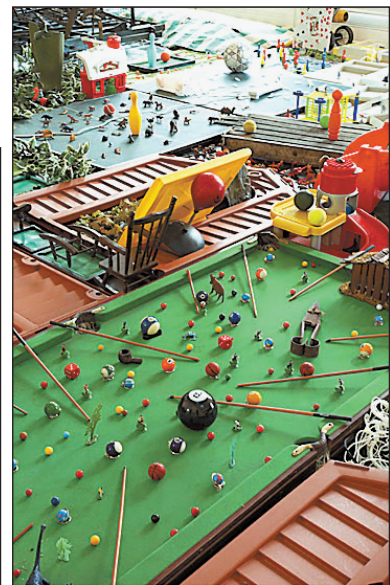
The main kitchen/HQ space has a floor made of game boards buried under an abundance of detritus. The

results are oddly spectacular. One typical interpretation of Takahashi's work is that it is an ecologically motivated critique of capitalist wastefulness.

While that element is here, highlighted by the "give-away" day on Sunday 10 April when the public can take whatever they like away with them, Takahashi's love of games and rules suggests that her work is mainly an aesthetic and psychological way of imposing a fragile order on our cluttered domestic and urban environments.

And, one that presents an interesting alternative to the bland ideology of today's interior-design makeover programmes. If you can't beat the chaos, play with it.

● *Until 10 April.* Information: 020 7298 1515.



Tomoko Takahashi's My Play-station at Serpentine 2005 — garden

Poet of the piano shows his pedigree

JAZZ

Fred Hersch Plus One

Pizza Express Jazz Club, W1
Jack Massarik

NOTHING exposes the musicianship of two players like the jazz-duo format, a challenge that the formidable Fred Hersch takes in his stride. Described by the New Yorker as "a poet of the piano", he has progressed from star sideman (with Art Farmer, Stan Getz

and Joe Henderson, among others) to academic (he teaches at the New England Conservatory) and a solo pianist of rare flair.

His vast experience showed last night in his intelligent comping behind Michael Moore, an American clarinetist and alto-sax stylist with whom he worked in Boston years ago. Their compositions and improvisations blended cleverly to provide chamber-jazz of impressive quality.

Hersch's opening number, Sandwiches

and Brandy, featured the clarinet, with Moore's jazz intonation warming up the instrument's classically cold, vibrato-free tone. Lee's Dream, Hersch's boppish revision of You Stepped Out of a Dream, was dedicated to alto-sax icon Lee Konitz. Moore's breathy alto sound recalled Konitz, and Hersch's piano promptings reminded us of Konitz's old mentor, Lennie Tristano.

Other highlights were Canzona, a beautiful minor-key ballad, and Jelly Roll Morton's classic, Mr Jelly Lord,

introduced by Hersch as "in every sense the oldest piece in our repertoire". Its modernised clarinet-and-piano harmonies charmed a full-house audience that surprisingly did not include Mayor Ken Livingstone. What with Hersch being not only Jewish but HIV positive, it seemed like a PR opportunity wasted, but there's always tomorrow.

● *Series continues with Moore (tonight), Norma Winstone (24, 27) and Andy Sheppard (25, 26).* Information: 0207 439 8722.

Schubert with all his buttons undone

CLASSICAL

Ian Bostridge/ Mitsuko Uchida

Wigmore Hall
Nick Kimberley

IT WAS Ian Bostridge's 1995 recording of Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* which definitively signalled the arrival of a high-class young tenor, and a Brit to boot. He is now in the front rank of Schubert singers, his status confirmed by the fact that his new recording of the cycle features Mitsuko Uchida, one of the supreme Schubert pianists of our time.

Bostridge's voice has darkened in the last 10 years, and if his Schubert has lost an element of youthful directness, his sense of vocal drama has heightened. Too much so for those who like their Schubert buttoned up.

Bostridge wears his shirt defiantly unbuttoned, his demeanour a blend of martyred saint and raddled pub raconteur. He grabs the listener by the lapel, forcing us to confront his anguish head on.

The separation of head and chest voices is sometimes stark, as if each delineates a separate character, and at certain moments his headlong attack blurs consonants. Hardly a syllable emerges without emphatic colouring, but although his approach to vocal expression may be overwrought, it is forged in the heat of the moment. You either go with him, or you resist.

The Wigmore audience went with him, and so did Uchida. From the start, her involvement was apparent in the way that she mouthed almost every word.

More importantly, her piano playing was no mere accompaniment, but an emotional anchor that kept the performance from hurtling over the edge. Not that her Schubert is cold; far from it. Her experience in shaping the exquisite lines of Schubert's piano sonatas enabled her to follow Bostridge, or to lead him, according to the demands of the moment.

If every Schubert performance was this charged, we would be exhausted, but there is room for different approaches, and I for one would love to hear Bostridge and Uchida again.

Just not immediately.

● *7.30pm Thursday*
Information: 020 7935 2141.