

## The Arts

# Goddess on the verge of an orgy

WHAT makes Michael Clark unmissable is not his beauty (great though it still is), or his choreography (which is sometimes excellent and sometimes not), but the sense that you're watching something that could turn into an orgy.

If that makes Clark sound vulgar, it's not meant to because he isn't, although he is louche in a rarefied sort of way. However, Clark is still interested in pushing things, and there is a real sense of adventure — choreographic and sexual — when you watch one of his shows.

You certainly sense it with *Oh My Goddess*, Clark's latest mixed bill that returned to Sadler's Wells last night (it opened Dance Umbrella there last year). Second time around, *Goddess* seems both more rigorous and more risky.

The solos, set to Erik Satie's piano *Ogives*, are tough classical dancing, only refracted through Clark's

## DANCE

**Michael Clark:**  
*Oh My Goddess*

Sadler's Wells

**Sarah Frater**

subversive prism. They have hints of a Grecian frieze, and if you've seen the Royal Ballet's current Diaghilev programme you'll catch echoes of Nijinsky's *Faune*.

Clark's solos for himself feature considerable flex and thrust, first to T Rex, and then to PJ Harvey. The only complaint is that his black polo neck and cropped black treads make him look like a gloomy existentialist and not the style-maker he is.

Clark's eight-strong troupe, including the man himself, tore into the programme, which was also set to music by The Human League, Sex Pistols, and prog rockers CAN, plus Satie and the



Sense of adventure: Michael Clark's troupe brought *Oh My Goddess* back to Sadler's Wells last night

caterwauling Harvey.

The highlight was easily Can, *Did to CAN's Oh Yeah* with the dancers in flesh-coloured costumes and the backdrop vividly lit. *Oh My Goddess*, to Harvey, had some brilliant stage patterns, and some great bottom-shaping dresses, while *Submishmash*

saw the dancers belting through the moves in big pants and Artful-Dodger tatters.

This last piece nods to clubland and winks at the Scottish dancing Clark excelled at as a child, plus it has the tribal appeal of big-scale ballet, only faster and

larkier. It reminds you of Clark's classical ballet training, and the fact that he's been an independent dance maker for 20 years. Celebrations are expected later this year. Don't miss.

● *Until tomorrow.*  
Information: 0870 737 7737.

## Conjurer of the keyboard teases out his own version of the truth

IF YOU did not already know that Mikhail Pletnev had a reputation for eccentricity, you might guess as much from the way he meanders on to the stage. Last night's recital was packed full of idiosyncrasy, but to riveting effect: not a single bar was prosaically executed.

By coincidence, Pletnev played the same two Beethoven sonatas — opus 10 No3 in D and opus 13 in C Minor (the *Pathétique*) — as did Maurizio Pollini in the same series two months ago.

Where Pollini sounded superficial and unduly precipitate, however, Pletnev used dynamic contrast and flexible tempo to create new perspectives on the music. Like Pollini he eschews conventionally Beethovenian rhetoric, but Pletnev replaces it with sphinx-like rumination.

## CLASSICAL

**Mikhail Pletnev**

Festival Hall

**Barry Millington**

The slow movement of the *Pathétique* was simply extraordinary: a subtle recalibration of note lengths and phrases that generated a mesmerising lilt. You can't get mad with Pletnev's whimsicality, because, just as you do, he produces a dazzling turn of phrase or some utterly unexpected gesture that compels you to review your understanding of the music.

Like a conjurer, he's continually pulling something astonishing out of the hat. And certainly there was magic aplenty in his delivery of Tchaikovsky's too-rarely-

heard 18 *Characteristic Pieces*, opus 72, which he revealed as a delightful set of album leaves for friends and colleagues, dating from the composer's last year.

The prodigious virtuosity of the *Polacca* drew a spontaneous ovation, but elsewhere Pletnev's truly miraculous pianism was less demonstrative: an immaculately weighted melodic line, a dialogue liberated from surrounding textures, a long trill so delicately floated that the notes seemed to dissolve into the ether.

In both technical and interpretative terms, Pletnev defies belief. The very reverse of a titanic keyboard pounder, he searches, questions and teases out his own version of the truth. What more could one ask of an artist?

## Gift of the gab with no strings attached

IN HIS adopted homeland of Australia, Irishman Jimeoin (pronounced Jim-Owen, clearly an indecisive mother) is a star, which explains why so many expats crammed into Soho to hear his amiable blather about the puny rain and the way water doesn't leave rings around the bath.

But you don't need to be Australian or Irish to appreciate an instinctive gift of the gab.

You do need structure, though. The angular star ambles on and simply trots out a succession of old-wave observational gags. Isn't it annoying when you forget to turn the kettle on, aren't other people's dreams dull unless you feature in them? Sharp, but without much point.

Occasionally, he will uncover gems such as how friends demand every detail when listening to gossip and

## COMEDY

**Jimeoin**

Soho Theatre

**Bruce Dessau**

still don't believe it: "Who? What? Where? When? ... No." He cleverly illustrates how men only ever re-enact fights they've won, shimmying like a celtic Lennox Lewis.

This is a strange, contradictory performance, shuttling between haphazard muttering and bravura storytelling. The climax typifies this — a brilliant little ditty about the oddments we keep in drawers followed by a disposable joke about the meaning of life. Comedy to make you smile, no strings attached.

● *Until 18 May.*  
Information: 020 7478 0100.

## Up to the minute art of the old school

### EXHIBITION

**Mike Nelson:**  
*Triple Bluff Canyon*

Modern Art Oxford

**Nick Hackworth**

IN form, the work of 37-year-old British artist Mike Nelson is utterly contemporary. His installations are built environments, like surreal, disjointed but perfectly realised film sets, the equivalent of a David Lynch movie.

When nominated for the Turner Prize in 2001, he recreated part of the Tate's storerooms, storing there the remains of a previous work as a critique of the institution, and was so convincing that many critics and visitors failed to notice the work at all, believing themselves simply to be in the back rooms of the museum.

In the intellectual scope and sensibility of his work, however, Nelson, exhibits virtues that so many of his contemporaries lack: a willingness to make art that speaks about something other than itself, a willingness to embrace both low popular and high culture, and a willingness to evoke emotion and empathy unashamedly, without ever descending into cliché.

In Oxford, his latest installation addresses the conflict in the Middle East, the world of conspiracy theories, the history of Land Art that was born in America in the Sixties and the idea of the artist as alchemist, turning base thoughts into cultural gold.

Leading us into Nelson's parallel universe is an octagonal cinema foyer. Upstairs, the full force of the fantasy takes hold. In one room, Nelson has recreated his studio, where a video plays of a conspiracy theorist explaining the awful meaning of the logos used by multinationals, such as Shell and Exxon.

In the other, an old wooden tunnel, like the entrance to a disused mine, protrudes from a mountain of sand, and leads into a hut, that, like the few oil drums scattered around, is almost totally submerged by the sand. The whole piece pulls together such a multiplicity of ideas that though it has a strong immediate, emotional and intellectual impact, it still tantalisingly leaves you only on the edge of comprehension, wanting to understand and feel more.

● *Until 4 July.* Information: 01865 813 830.