

# Mad, deafening and gloriously OTT

## POP

**Muse**  
Shepherds Bush Empire  
★★★★☆

David Smyth

THE IDEA of a band like Muse playing an intimate set is like Caligula having a quiet night in doing a sudoku. As the Devon trio reunited for their first home soil gig promoting next week's fourth album, they were not interested in getting up close and personal with the lucky fans who won free tickets on their website. This relatively dinky venue was in serious danger of having its roof blown off.

For since the vast success of 2003's *Absolution*, Muse have existed comfortably in the King Kong kingdom of the arena-sized show, even headlining at Glastonbury in 2004.

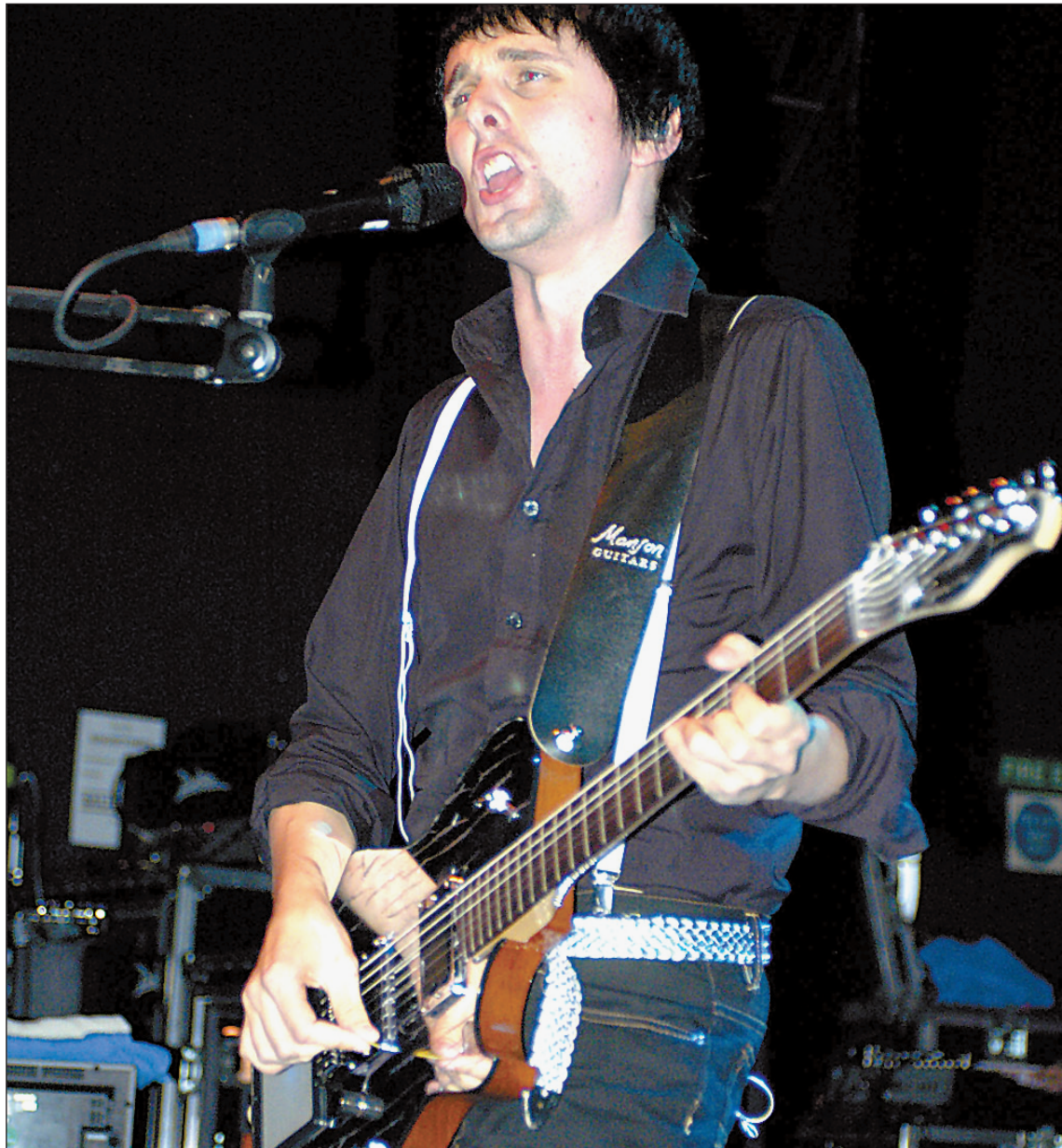
The bigger the space, the bigger the sound and the spectacle they produce to fill it. With numerous new songs sounding wilder and more unhinged than ever, this evening was like witnessing the War of the Worlds in the cupboard under the stairs.

They didn't stint on the visual treats despite the smaller scale. Three huge floor-to-ceiling tubes looked ready to beam the band up to Mars at any moment. Several mysterious boxes twinkled with multicoloured lights, and three large screens blitzed the eyes with fast-changing images. Frontman Matt Bellamy was not wearing his mad scientist's lab coat, but the sense of deranged experimentation was still there.

Opening track *Take a Bow* featured ominous trembling synths from new fourth member Morgan Nicholls, while Bellamy intoned: "You will burn in hell for your sins."

The closing number, *Knights of Cydonia*, was even more bananas, a charging mastodon of a song that shot off in a hundred different directions and saw crowd surfers tumbling over the barriers like lemmings.

In between, the band tried out a few new sounds, most successfully on new single *Supermassive Black Hole*, a funky, sexy hip swinger that could



**Wild man:** even without his mad scientist's lab coat, Matt Bellamy offered a sense of deranged experiment

appear on one of those constantly advertised R&B compilation CDs. *Map of the Problematique* showed a dance music influence in Dominic Howard's thumping drums, while *Starlight* was a delight, the use of possibly their most basic melody-

making for a hugely affecting love song.

Less immediately captivating was *Soldier's Song*, a lilting piano ballad that offered the rare sight of Muse being drowned out by audience chatter. But ear melting older songs

such as *Stockholm Syndrome* and *Hysteria* ensured that the band could not be ignored for long.

They are still mad, deafening and gloriously over the top. Those arenas are going to be shaken to their foundations this time around.

## Global vision blinds talent-spotters

IF NEW:CURRENTS was anywhere else, no one would take much notice. Because it's at the Opera House, albeit in the Clore rather than the main stage, we dutifully traipse along and sit through two hours of mediocre performance.

We go in the hope that the honed eye, and the very considerable reach of the ROH2 directors will ferret out little-known and little-seen talent; that they are watching and waiting where the rest of us cannot.

But it's not to be. Although billed as "a season of some of the most exciting contemporary dance in the UK", last night's opening programme was better suited to a community hall than the nation's premier lyric theatre.

What, for example, is Chitra Sundaram doing at the Opera House? She has some allure as a bharata natyam dancer, but you can see far

## DANCE

**Summer Collection**  
**New:Currents**  
Clore Studio Upstairs,  
Royal Opera House

★★★★☆

Sarah Frater

better ones at venues across London. The South Bank, for instance, and Sadler's Wells.

Do we really need it at Covent Garden, especially when it's not top-notch?

Likewise Jackie Guy, an older dancer with a robust, emphatic stage presence.

His *Innings 84 Not Out* was a sincere tribute to his mother; yet it

felt more like a private therapy session than a public performance.

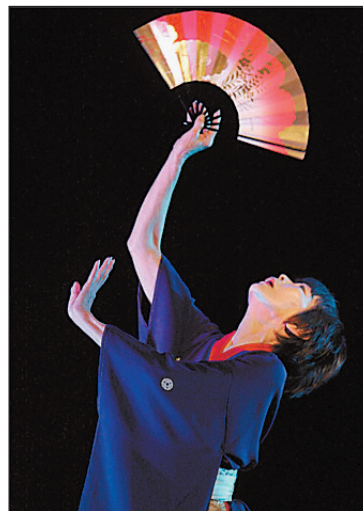
*Fragrant Orchid*, by Jacqui Chan, and *Shadow*, by Anh Ngoc Nguyen, were better.

The first was an enactment of a rather feeble 11th century Japanese novel about unrequited love (cue wailing and wafting), the second an "abstract treatment of a traditional Vietnamese folk legend about a family falling apart" (cue wailing and rolling).

The problem, you suspect, is that the performers were chosen to fit an agenda rather than because they are urgent talents straining to be seen.

"Artists living in Britain drawing on global cultures" is a great title; the result is less special.

● Until 8 July.  
Information 020 7304 4000.



**Wailing and wafting:** Jacqui Chan performs *Fragrant Orchid*

## WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

### THEATRE

**A Midsummer Night's Dream**  
Barbican Theatre

★★★★☆

Fiona Mountford

WE HAVE possibly spent too many nights in dramatic Dream-land of late and require a restorative dose of daytime normality. First there was Tim Supple's magnificent India-set version at Stratford, then arrived an enjoyable Edwardian England account at the Open Air Theatre. Now comes Korea's turn, courtesy of the Yohangza Company. It's the Athenian wood, Puck, but not as we know it.

It's actually not Puck as we know him either, as adaptor-director Jung-Ung Yang has superimposed the folklore of his homeland onto Shakespeare's framework of mixed-up young lovers. Thus Oberon and Titania have their roles reversed and become Gabi and Dot and the rest of fairyland the sprite-like Dokkebi.

Unfortunately, what Yang omitted to lift from the original is any real sense of magic, peril or poetry.

I must confess that my fellow audience members whooped and cheered, but to me this tiresomely over-eager production resembled a Christmas panto that has somehow time-travelled to June. Yang's pared-down text alternately whizzes over and lingers excessively on all the wrong parts of the story, and takes an unwise and lengthy detour into lavatorial humour. If Shakespeare had an estate, it would be muttering darkly about brand image.

The actors also dance and play percussion, and some of the ritual movement, especially from the eye-wateringly bendy-kneed young bucks, is indeed impressive. The stripped-pine set, seemingly assembled from an Ikea flat-pack, is much less so. Still, the appealing Ji-Young Kim makes her petite *Byeok-Hermia* so ferocious that she amusingly threatens, *Crouching Tiger*-style, to become airborne at any minute.

The Dokkebi appear to have infiltrated the surtitles, as they stop and start and irritatingly fail to translate all of the singing. Not, then, the kind of *Dream* you want to tell everyone about the next morning.

● Until 1 July.  
Information: 0845 120 7550.

### EXHIBITION

**World into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East**

British Museum

★★★★☆

Nick Hackworth

ONCE the cradle of culture, the Middle East is now, in the eyes of most Westerners, merely a cauldron of bloodshed and political turmoil. *World into Art* serves as a reminder that beyond the headlines, life and art continue apace.

Built around the British Museum's growing collection of contemporary Middle Eastern work, the show brings together 74 artists from across the region.

Rather conservatively, the curator has stuck to art derived from the Arabic calligraphic tradition. There is another strand of modern Middle Eastern work — political video and documentary — that is not even referenced here. A strange decision, but one that spares the public hours of badly shot film.

The best pieces are austere beautiful calligraphic ones, such as Hassan Massoudy's exquisite book cover, an articulation of the following lines by 12th century poet Ibn al-Arabi: "*I follow the religion of Love/Whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith.*" Two thick, wave-like strokes of dark aquamarine ink, which dominate the page, curling down in ever fainter swirls, are enough to infuse the phrase with elegance and romantic promise.

Elsewhere, as in Nassar Mansour's highly stylised rendition of Kun, characters that spell "be", we see the subtle and profound tendency of Islamic art to push written script to the edge of abstraction, a style that recalls the austere and abstract qualities of the desert in which Islam was born and a reminder that beauty flourishes in many forms.

● Until 3 September (020 7323 8299).