

Theatre

GIGI

Open Air Theatre
Regent's Park
LONDON ★★

"Thank 'eavens for leedul girls/ For leedul girls get beeger every day." The Lerner and Loewe musical *Gigi* is not going to win any awards for political correctness with its story of a girl being groomed for the family business of high-class prostitution. So you could argue that it's wittily defiant of the Open Air Theatre to stage a revival now. This was the first musical I was taken to see at the cinema as a toddler and no one thought it incongruous. How times have changed.

Timothy Sheader, the director, insists that "the courtesan in the *belle époque* is an important chapter in the liberation of women". OK, but I can't help recalling, in this context, the perverse reading of Pinter's *The Homecoming* that suggests it's a feminist triumph when the young woman goes on the game for her disgusting in-laws.

But audiences will roll up for this show wanting Gallic glamour, elegant frocks, evocative tunes and strenuously witty dialogue. And it mostly delivers the goods. Topol puts on a huge charm offensive without being, well, offensive, in the

Maurice Chevalier role of the smarmy bon-vivant uncle. Thomas Borchert is on song in every sense as the romantic lead - he's extremely appealing as love steals up on the character and reveals chunks of vulnerability in the practised sophistication.

Lisa O'Hare is mightily winning once *Gigi* starts to blossom into womanhood. Before that, she seems too experienced to convince as a gamine trainee cocotte. One of the great joys of the production is the lovely, sly wit of Steven Edis's orchestration, which gets up to all kinds of clever cheek as it gives a fresh boost to such well-worn numbers as "The Night They Invented Champagne" and "I'm Glad I'm Not Young Anymore". There's humour in the design, too (by Yannis Thavoris), as pillar-box hoardings open up and unfurl to reveal classy mirrored interiors. Millicent Martin brings her personal warmth to an attractively understated portrayal of Mamita, while Linda Thorson is gloriously over-the-top as the formidable Aunt Alicia.

Gigi is a poor man's *My Fair Lady*, a less emotionally involving rehash of the *Pygmalion* myth. But it's a pleasant way of spending a summer evening in the park.

PAUL TAYLOR

To 13 September
(08448 264 242)

Classical

LUCERNE FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA / ABBADO

Lucerne Festival
LUCERNE ★★

Slow-moving woodwinds etched out Debussy's "Nuages", the first of his *Trois Nocturnes*, slowly but surely pulling focus on the festival's opening concert. It's something of a paradox that Debussy's brand of impressionism demands absolute clarity - and the medieval city's handsome concert hall delivers it, blending and delineating to perfection.

But you can only get out of an acoustic what you put into it, and Claudio Abbado's Lucerne Festival Orchestra has one of the most refined palettes in the world. This is an orchestra of principals, star soloists who leave their egos at the stage door; they play for each other as well as for us. In the outer movements of the Debussy, the music seemed to find its own space; the central "Pêtes" was, by contrast, all darting light and rhythmic clarity, its trumpet-led procession arriving with jubilant whoops from the cellos.

A pity, then, that the worldless "Sirens" of the final nocturne seemed to infect the soloist, Elina Garanca,

in her reading of Ravel's *Sheherazade*. This is a piece where the inflections of the French texts carry so much of the musical characterisation that Garanca's unidomatic enunciation made her just another "instrumental" colour blended into the orchestral texture.

Abbado's fabulously accomplished reading of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* inspired playing of almost indecent relish. Come "the witching hour" of the finale, signalled by especially lurid glissandi in oboe and flute, Berlioz's grotesque knees-up for the sisters of the night brought string playing of such sensational unanimity that it was as if we and not the opium-crazed artist were hallucinating.

That musical hangover quickly lifted the following morning. In an ingenious programme spanning four centuries, Gabrieli segued into Schnittke and Frescobaldi into Gubaidulina as though the intervening years had simply dissolved. The juxtapositions were breathtaking, the virtuosity of the playing jaw-dropping. It was pure theatre to be spirited from the Renaissance to the Gothic through the rude imaginings of Schnittke, whose "Schall und Hall" for trombone and organ blew a few momentous raspberries for posterity.

EDWARD SECKERSON

FIVE BEST Films



Man on Wire

(12A, JAMES MARSH, 94MINS)

Captivating documentary charting Philippe Petit's audacious attempt, in August 1974, to walk a tightrope between the towers of the World Trade Center. Nationwide

FIVE BEST Plays



Timon of Athens

(SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE, LONDON)

Lucy Bailey's graphically imaginative production stars Simon Paisley Day as the wealthy lord who somersaults from the excess of philanthropy to inordinate misanthropy. (08710 9919) to 3 Oct

FIVE BEST Exhibitions



Hadrian

(BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON)

The life, loves and legacy of the emperor who transformed the character of the Roman world are celebrated with sculptures and artefacts in bronze and marble. (020-7323 8181) to 26 Oct

BEST OF THE REST



Talks: Jeremy Scahill

(ICA, LONDON) The writer discusses the use of private armies with the journalist Stephen Armstrong. (020-7930 3647) tonight

Elegy

(15, ISABEL COIXET, 112MINS)

Ben Kingsley is engaging in this classy adaptation of Philip Roth's *The Dying Animal*, playing an English professor who falls for one of his students (Penelope Cruz). Nationwide

Hellboy II: the Golden Army

(12A, GUILLERMO DEL TORO, 119MINS)

Ron Perlman returns as cigar-chomping demon and crimefighter Hellboy in this witchy brew of ghouls, guns and gizmos. Nationwide

Six Characters in Search of an Author

(MINERVA THEATRE, CHICHESTER)

Rupert Goold's madly ingenious multimedia adaptation of Pirandello's play shifts the action to the world of drama-documentaries. (01243 781 312) to Sat

Brief Encounter

(CINEWORLD HAYMARKET, LONDON)

Kneehigh's highly imaginative mixed-media adaptation of the classic movie is an artful straddling of stage and screen. (08712 301 562) to 21 Dec

Psycho Buildings

(HAYWARD GALLERY, LONDON)

Artists do fantasy architectural installations, and despite the "Psycho" billing, it's an extremely child-pleasing summer-months show. Rachel Whiteread features. (0870 380 0400) to Mon

Cy Twombly

(TATE MODERN, LONDON)

Burning colours, garbled splurges, shimmering streaks, mythic resonance by an American artist doing romantic gestural painting. (020-7887 8888) to 14 Sept

Pop: Black Kids

(ACADEMY, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE)

Funky-fresh melodic flourishes, cheerleader harmonies and groovy twists on indie-pop basics from Reggie Youngblood's Floridians. (0844 477 2000) tonight

Pop: Dizze Rascal

(IRONWORKS, INVERNESS)

The Bow selecta celebrates his first No 1 with a set of rough, taut rap. (020-7589 8212) tonight

Wall-E

(U, ANDREW STANTON, 103MINS)

Pixar's latest dazzlingly inventive animation is a largely wordless eco-sci-fi drama, set 700 years in the future, about the love between two robots. Nationwide

Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day

(PG, BHARAT NALLURI, 91MINS)

Frances McDormand is a prim but near-destitute governess who spends a day sorting out the love life of an American socialite (Amy Adams). Nationwide

The Railway Children

(NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM, YORK)

York Theatre Royal's adaptation of E Nesbit's much-loved classic is performed on a rail track with a real steam engine. (01904 621 261) to Sat

The Female of the Species

(VAUDEVILLE THEATRE, LONDON)

Joanna Murray-Smith's play about a feminist scribbler was inspired by the time Germaine Greer was briefly held hostage by a devotee. (08708 900 511) to 4 Oct

Ben Nicholson

(ABBOT HALL, KENDAL)

Famed for his pure and wily-lined abstractions, Ben Nicholson appears here as an artist of place attached to particular areas of England. (01539 722464) to 20 Sept

Roger Hilton

(KETTLE'S YARD, CAMBRIDGE)

On the borderline of abstraction, figuration and alcoholism: images by the post-war British painter, with wild rhythms and raw colours. (01223 352124) to 21 Sept

World:

Oliver Mtukudzi

(JAZZ CAFE, LONDON) Blistering *tuku* music from the Zimbabwean guitarist and his band. (0870 060 3777) tonight

Classical: The Sleeping Beauty

(ROYAL ALBERT HALL, LONDON)

Valery Gergiev helms the LSO in a complete account of Tchaikovsky's ballet. (020-7589 8212) tonight

PREVIEW

Cinema treats bring flavour from the East



Songbirds: Singaporean musical '881' plays at the festival

Film

FESTIVAL OF ASIAN FILM
Asia House
LONDON

This is a year in which Asia has become inexorably embedded in worldwide culture. As the Olympics continue in China's capital, Beijing, and films such as *Lust, Caution* achieve huge critical acclaim, Asia House has launched its inaugural Festival of Asian Film to promote Eastern cinema to Western audiences.

This year's festival is due to feature a number of films that have enjoyed immense success in their home nations or internationally. *881*, a Singaporean musical, is due to be shown as the first movie in the programme. "It was the highest grossing film in Singapore in 2007 but is not likely to go on general release in the UK as it's a subtitled musical," says the festival's programmer, Heng Khoo. "Nevertheless we believe this film will attract audiences with its coverage of the unique Singaporean Getai art form."

Khoo is hoping that the festival shows Asian cinema

can be as successful as anything Hollywood has to offer. He adds that the festival will also show the kind of environment in which crossover stars such as Ang Lee and Chow Yun-Fat started their careers. "Asian directors such as Mira Nair are acclaimed way beyond their home countries, and we regularly see Asian actors appearing in Hollywood box office successes and becoming household names," he says. "Hollywood has been remaking Asian Films for years, such as *Infernal Affairs* [remade as *The Departed* by Martin Scorsese], *The Ring* and *Dark Water*."

In fact, Khoo is optimistic that the influence of Asian cinema on world culture can only increase in the coming years, as further Asian films are remade for Hollywood audiences. "Sony and Walt Disney are buying the rights to Asian titles such as *Kung Fu Hustle* and *Hero* and releasing them in the multiplexes, not just in art-house cinemas. Not a week goes by when there aren't at least one or two foreign films released in the UK. This is the century of Asia."

LUKE GRUNDY

22 to 28 August
(0871 703 3991)

Book Now

Don't You Leave Me Here

Featuring classic songs from the 1930s by Jelly Roll Morton, including "Animule Dance" and "The Crave", Clare Brown's play follows two of the originators of jazz - Morton and Tony Jackson - from the greasy creep-joints of New Orleans to the hot clubs of Chicago. Sarah Punshon directs. West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds (0113-213 7700) 27 September to 18 October

Beachdown Festival

As a new festival, Beachdown has no musical traditions to comply with, resulting in an eclectic line-up: a healthy batch of softcore indie balanced by a plethora of heavier Brighton bands. As well as walkabout theatre, cabaret and comedy, the food is provided by local suppliers. Devil's Dyke, Brighton (0844 567 0635; www.beachdown-festival.com) 27-28 August