

## The Arts

# Ice maiden melts in a hothouse of controlled passion



PROMS 2003

Deutsche  
Kammerphilharmonie  
Bremen/Harding

Albert Hall

Barry Millington

NOT for nothing was she known as the Ice Maiden. But would the Russian violinist Viktoria Mullova perhaps thaw a little in the Royal Albert Hothouse?

Mullova has, in any case, adopted a different lifestyle and image in recent years: no longer the glacially austere Soviet defector of the Eighties, but a hip, jamming partner in trendily accessible arrangements of dubious merit. Both her body language — turning frequently to fellow players as well as the audience — and the Mediterranean hues of her loosely tied dress (olive green with lemon edging) underlined that informality, though, to be honest, the Sibelius Violin Concerto would have benefited from rather more passion.

Its composer may be associated with the frozen tundra of the north, but in this, as in many of his works, there is an open-hearted directness of utterance, when inner emotion has to break through the outer shell. The warm-blooded second subject

of the first movement — the soloist high above the staff first in sixths, then in octaves — is a case in point.

One would have liked more ardour here, and more grandness of gesture generally. But it was (especially given the sultriness of the hall) an impressively accurate account and one which, particularly in the latter stages, had passages of at least controlled abandon.

Mullova's orchestral partners were the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, who, under their English music director Daniel Harding, boldly began with a suite from Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*. Minuets and marches that on many modern-instrument orchestras would have sounded lumpen, were here exquisitely poised. Period trumpets and timpani also enhanced the stylish delivery of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony by this fine orchestra and conductor. Lively articulation in the fast movements, superbly balanced woodwind sonorities in the *allegretto*, and strongly propelled rhythms throughout all contributed to a sense of elation.

Full credit to this exceptional group of musicians for following up with an encore by Webern (one of the Five Movements, op. 5). Too often, sublime conclusions are ruined by supposedly crowd-pleasing trifles. This team demonstrated that consistency of tone can be more satisfying still.



Each character's loneliness comes through as clearly as a seagull's call: Eve Best as Masha with Ben Daniels as Vershinin in *Three Sisters* at the Lyttelton

# Silences that speak

## THEATRE

### Three Sisters

National's Lyttelton

Rachel Halliburton

IT IS now commonplace to note that the Eskimos have at least seven different words for snow — but far less normal to encounter a production with at least seven different types of silence. Katie Mitchell's daringly paced, elegiac version of *Three Sisters* excavates every nuance from Chekhov's text for a meditation on time worthy of this drama, written in the decade that Einstein first developed his relativity theory.

After a slightly faltering opening, where it was necessary to strain even from row F to hear certain words, Mitchell sends the first frisson down the spine with a distinctly supernatural moment when the room darkens, a vase smashes, and curtains blow wildly in the breeze. Lorraine Ashbourne's

wiry and world-weary Olga is remembering when the sisters' father died, and suddenly the past invades the present as his memory is felt as strongly as any evocations of Hamlet's father's ghost.

For the first time the characters' collective emotion creates a silence where time seems to slow down — in huge contrast to the convivial jokey atmosphere where Fedotik sneakily takes a voyeuristic photo of Andrey kissing his disastrous bride-to-be, Natasha,

or where Masha's husband Kulygin (a delightfully stilted Angus Wright) and her lover, Vershinin, stagger in wearing inappropriate antlers. Such moments of companionable comedy frequently lift the tone of this three and a half hour evening, allowing it to glitter with irony and mischief, even though each character's loneliness ultimately comes through as clearly as the call of a seagull.

While Kristin Scott Thomas's performance dominated Michael Blakemore's production of *Three Sisters* in the West End this April, the sense of tight-knitted yet conflicted love between the National's three sisters is strident in an evening where Olga is seen almost kissing Masha's cuckolded

husband with a mixture of compassion and desire, and the youngest, Irina, is treated protectively as a virginal doll.

Against Vicki Mortimer's vast set, which divides the stage in two so that, for instance, events in the high-ceilinged dining room can clearly be seen from the drawing room, Anna Maxwell Martin's Irina gradually grows from naif to firm-jawed pragmatist, while Eve Best's Masha suppurates with guilt and black-edged frustration.

Mitchell's poignant pacing makes hours feel like spell-binding years. How appropriate that the art-form itself perfectly demonstrates the illusion of time.

● Until 4 October. Box office: 020 7452 3000.

# Celebrating the essence of humanity

## EXHIBITION

### MILK

The Broad Walk, Regent's Park

Nick Hackworth

IN 1999, a New Zealand publisher, Geoff Blackwell, launched MILK, an acronym for Moments of Intimacy, Laughter and Kinship, the world's largest ever photographic competition. Inspired by the seminal Fifties New York exhibition *Family of Man*, which was intended as a photographic reminder to a war-scarred world of the universality of human values, Blackwell invited the world's photographers to submit work that celebrated the universal essence of humanity at the turn of the millennium. Whether drawn by the \$750,000 prize pool, the largest ever, or the enterprise's touchy-feely values, 17,000 photographers from 164 countries submitted more than 40,000 photographs.

The 300 winning entries have now been published in three books, *Family*, *Friendship* and *Love*. They are also being displayed in



Touchy-feely: *Swinging Girl* by Wilfred Van Zyl

an open-air exhibition format that is touring the world and is currently pitched in the eastern end of Regent's Park.

The images, as one would expect from the project's title, come from the populist end of the spectrum of photography. In them, sexes, races and generations unite harmoniously over life's little jokes or comfort each other in times of need. Images of classic postcard moments abound; two cute dust-covered urchins embrace in a

street in rural China, a crocodile of blind men led by a child walk down a Calcutta street, a look of absolute wonder is caught on the face of a tiny baby as his mum takes him for an underwater dip in the local pool.

Also well represented is that other popular category of postcard moment, the comic and vaguely surreal. The epitome of this genre being an image of two indigenous Indonesians, in full tribal get-up, complete with bones through their noses and stone-age equipment, pausing so that one can light up a fag.

Unsurprisingly the most moving images are those that depict that unnegotiable fact of life — death.

Of these, the several images by Jack Dykinga, a Pulitzer prize-winning photographer, stand out. They record the last days of his friend, Tim Caravello, as he died of a brain tumour while being nursed by his wife Linda. Even these few images and the still fewer facts disclosed about them are enough to create a well of empathy in even the most hard-bitten of cynics.

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