

## Going Out Reviews

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Striking sparks as Lancelot and Guinevere: Andrew Murphy and Monica Zamora in Arthur

# A love triangle that makes you want to scream

GLASS HEARTS ★★

Southwark Playhouse

Rachel Haliburton

DAVID Spencer's play starts on territory familiar to Royle Family fans and progresses to the ninth circle of relationship hell. As the play develops, the circle constricts, drawing the audience into a vortex of romantic delusion and the psychological cancer of self-loathing.

The action begins with a documentary voice-over, describing how a cow becomes aware of imminent slaughter by smelling the fear and adrenaline of those preceding it. Throughout this portrayal of a love-triangle in a TV-dominated lounge, that image of a witless animal struggling helplessly towards its own destruction adds to the sense of catastrophic claustrophobia.

Tina has the sex appeal of a tub of lard, but when Darren agrees to set up home with her, a romantic paradise seems to beckon. Simon Scullion's set evokes a basic five-roomed flat where the tokens of Tina and Darren's love reach their apogee in a fake tiger-skin bed-head inset with a cassette recorder to play everything from Frank Sinatra to Dusty Springfield.

Tina has a handicapped son, Ollie, and has been sterilised after delivering her second child still-born. Her problems start anew when Carol, Ollie's 17-year-old babysitter, catches Darren's porn-fuelled attention, and moves into the flat.

Although the echoes of Spencer's latest work are strongly televisual, both the structure and the lit-fuse tension make it a compellingly theatrical piece. The key factor in transforming Glass Hearts from a stereotypical story about a middle-aged man dumping his lover for a younger, perter model is inescapably Karen E Jones's powerful portrayal of Tina's fermenting discontent as she demotes herself to the doormat of all doormats to keep his love.

Director George Ormond has drawn out beautifully understated performances from Adrian Lohead as Darren and Lorraine Hodgson as Carol to complete this strikingly unquilateral love triangle. There is no backhand to this compliment: it makes you want to run screaming from the theatre.

● Until 19 May. Box office: 020 7620 3494.

# Sketching a king's legend

THE choreographer David Bintley is not afraid to think big. He can take a highly complex narrative, strip it to the bones, and stage it clearly and comprehensibly. In the first section of Arthur, his two-part dance drama about the legendary British king, the curtain rises on a line of 20th century refugees who are quickly scattered by a gang of thugs armed with automatic weapons. A woman is raped, and we take the point — as if we needed telling — that war was hell in the 6th century and is equally hellish today.

Cut to a group of British chieftains attempting to address the internecine strife that followed the departure of the Romans. Their costumes, by Jasper Conran, are of the non-specific contemporary fascist school. A leather-jacketed Uther Pendragon catches sight of Igraine, wife of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall, and is instantly smitten. Avid for sex, he harnesses the aid of the magician

ARTHUR 1/Birmingham Royal Ballet ★  
Sadler's Wells  
Luke Jennings

Merlin, who turns Uther into Gorlois's double for the night.

Igraine's daughter Morgan le Fay smells a rat, but by then Igraine is pregnant with Arthur and the real Gorlois has been killed by Uther's troops.

In revenge, Morgan will seduce her half-brother Arthur and give birth to the baleful Mordred, his slayer. Arthur's wife Guinevere, meanwhile, will betray him with Lancelot.

All of this Bintley makes crystal clear, but at the expense of characterisation and atmosphere. So plotty is the action that the principal players are barely sketched. Merlin, for example, played by Joseph Cipolla, is an enigmatic blank, while

Robert Parker's Arthur is little more than an affable smile. There's some fine dancing woven into the production — Leticia Muller's Morgan le Fay is promisingly wanton in her seduction scene, Andrew Murphy and Monica Zamora strike sparks as Lancelot and Guinevere, and Parker's work is exceptionally fleet and clean — but it's performed by characters that we aren't really given the chance to get to know. Less narrative might have meant more depth.

The production occasionally gets a little too metaphorical for its own good. In one scene Lancelot entertains Guinevere's friends by dancing in a unicorn costume against a projected back-drop of oilseed rape plants. Strange days!

● Part two tonight.  
Until 12 May. Box office: 020 7863 8000.

# Zhen's conflict resolutions



Chen Zhen: Crystal Ball, 1999

CHEN Zhen, a conceptual artist who died last year, lived most of his life in China. Then, in 1986, he moved to Paris, "a spiritual run-away", as he put it, from his native land. Once in the West, he abandoned painting in favour of conceptual sculpture, which he used to explore his experience as an individual displaced in another culture. Thankfully, most of his work avoids the glibness that lies in wait for art that deals with multiculturalism, but though it avoids cliché by being heavily idiosyncratic, it remains hit-and-miss.

The show's centrepiece is Jue Chang (Fifty Strokes to Each), which you are likely to hear before you see. It's a formation of massive wooden frames from which hang weird beds and chairs in serried ranks, each one turned into a drum with animal hide stretched over where the seats and mattresses should be.

Visitors are invited to bash away with drumsticks. It makes for an odd peace icon but that's how it was conceived, commissioned by an Israeli gallery to promote peace in that fractious land — 50 strokes refers to a Buddhist method of conflict resolution. Most of the

CHEN ZHEN ★  
Serpentine Gallery  
Nick Hackworth

other pieces are just as obscure but less fun. Inner Body Landscapes, for example, are a number of vaguely organic structures constructed out of candles. Armed with the knowledge that Chen Zhen saw holiness in the ubiquity of candles and built collaborative sculptures of them with children from favellas in Brazil, then the pieces become endowed with a certain resonance. If viewed without this context in mind, they stand dumb and ugly.

It's sometimes hard to take this old-school seriousness with a straight face. But push past the temptation to mock and we discover a body of work of serious intent and laudable integrity.

● Until 3 June, 020 7402 6075.

Ratings: ○ adequate, ★ good, ★★ very good, ★★★ outstanding, X poor

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### HOW TO BOOK

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