

# The Herald The Arts Reviews

arts@theherald.co.uk

**DON'T**  
**ROSIE KAY DA**  
**Beacon Arts Ce**  
**Brunton, Musse**  
**THE choreogra**  
**army training fo**  
**Scotland on a r**  
**research with E**  
**Pieter C. Schor**  
**visual artist par**

## Fun and games as Chitty hits the stage with a bang

### Theatre

#### Chitty Chitty Bang Bang

Festival Theatre, Edinburgh  
 Neil Cooper

\*\*\*\*

WHEN Jason Manford's down-at-heel inventor Caractacus Potts customises a rusted old banger in this new touring revival of Jeremy Sams' stage adaptation of the Roald Dahl-scripted 1968 musical film, he gets a lot more than he bargained for with the flying machine that results from his tampering.

Inspired by Ian Fleming's short story, awash with a trademark Bondesque array of customised cars, cartoon villains and exotic locales, the film's bank holiday friendly songbook by Richard and Robert Sherman remains intact.

James Brining's co-production between West Yorkshire Playhouse and former Festival Theatre boss John Stalker's Music and Lyrics company uses all the resources at the director's disposal to hone a facility for musical theatre developed while he was running Dundee Rep.

With Chitty Chitty Bang Bang's adventures on land, sea and air brought to life by a mix of hi-tech back projections and old-school engineering, Manford helms the show as nice guy Potts opposite Charlotte Wakefield's Truly Scrumptious. This allows Phill Jupitus considerable leeway to ham it up as Baron Bomburst alongside Claire Sweeney as his Baroness.

In the spirit of the teamwork the show advocates, the supporting cast are dealt a generous share of the fun. Sam Harrison and Scott Paige have a ball as Bulgarian buffoons Boris and Goran, and Jos Vantylers' Childcatcher is a malevolent Goth sprite. On opening night, Hayden Goldberg and Caitlin Surtees were one of three teams of child actors playing the Potts offspring.

But it is the full-on ensemble scenes that count, be it the mockney morris dancing display, the Sweeney-led samba extravaganza or the music box magic that liberates an entire nation in a tale designed to unleash the collective child within.

### Music

#### Scottish Chamber Orchestra

City Halls, Glasgow  
 Keith Bruce

\*\*\*\*\*

IT is easy to overstate the "mystery" of Mozart's last three symphonies, touting them as pure musical statements unsullied by the commercial motives that lay behind most of the composer's work, as he must surely have seen them as potential revenue-earners rather than any sort of final missive to posterity. And so they have proved, if not for him.

The very well-filled house for the opening concert of the SCO's new season was justification enough for Principal Conductor Robin Ticciati returning to repertoire with which made this orchestra made what many still consider the definitive recording under the late Sir Charles Mackerras.

But of course there is more to it than that. Although many of the players on the platform also feature on that recording, there are a number of new faces in key positions since then, and more for this new season.

And Ticciati's approach has taken the influence of period instrument researches that informed the Mackerras reading a significant step further. As well as the familiar sight of natural horns and brass, the string players were here using gut strings for the first time, a difference that very swiftly stopped sounding remarkable, but was notably warm and intimate. How long before the SCO winds also deploy period instruments for some repertoire? A purist might quibble that the clarinet melody at the end of No 40 and the oboes in the Jupiter were just a shade too bold and bright in the context.

It was certainly pacy – Ticciati knocked several minutes off Mackerras's time for the Jupiter on record – but the performance also sounded beautifully fluid and almost perfectly balanced.

As he took his position among the musicians for a bow (no podium for this baton-free approach), it was very good indeed to see the conductor back among the band following his back surgery.



**MUSIC BOX DANCER: Truly Scrumptious goes round and round, while, from left, Phill Jupitus, Ewen Cummins and Jason Manford also keep us entertained in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. Picture: Alastair Muir**

### Glasgow Americana

#### An Evening with Chip Taylor

Classic Grand, Glasgow  
 Rob Adams

\*\*\*\*

An evening with Chip Taylor invokes a cast much bigger than the legendary songwriter and his long-time friend, guitarist John Platania. It's a journey through Taylor's life, including his golf-pro father's insistence that his boys be excused school on Monday afternoons to honour unlikely "services", with some 60 years of songs mined from country music and rock 'n' roll's progress from Bakelite radio days onwards.

Taylor is a quietly spoken septuagenarian with several lifetimes, it seems, of experiences. One of his brothers is actor Jon Voight (the other, Barry, is as big in geology as Chip and Jon are in their respective fields) and his tale of leaving the cinema after marvelling at Bill Haley's musical triumph in Blackboard Jungle, only to find Jon intent on dissecting the film scene by scene, maybe explains how they both found success.

His songs with recollections of Chet Atkins, Jimi Hendrix, The Troggs, Lionel Ritchie, Elvis Costello and the ill-starred Evie Sands, and Platania expertly weaves in blues, country, rock and soul licks, Taylor's mastery with words and music – and

mischief – almost sings for him.

He's no sage in an ivory tower. He's written enough hits to be comfortably off – Wild Thing, Angel Of The Morning, Any Way That You Want Me all figure – but he relates to the world, feels refugee children's pain, asks who's going to build Trump's wall and spontaneously serenades the noisy neighbours in the club upstairs. The sense of community he creates is natural and it's little wonder that prison audiences, as this crowd does also, sing along lustily to his cheekiest, but alas unprintable here, refrain.

### Theatre

#### Francis The Holy Jester

Scottish Storytelling Centre,  
 Edinburgh  
 Neil Cooper

\*\*\*\*

"Please," says Italian actor Mario Pirovano after a lengthy introduction to his interpretation of his long-time collaborator Dario Fo's solo study of Saint Francis of Assisi. "Relax. It's only theatre." Given what happens over the four "episodes" that follow, such a pre-cursor to the main event is self-deprecation as arform.

The first two pieces find Francis dealing with a possibly symbolic wolf before being forced to make a speech to war-torn Bologna. So

powerful is his stand-up satire, it seems, that peace breaks out three days later. Both are sublime, but it is the second half's extended riff on Francis' attempts to tell the gospel in a more down-to-earth lingo than Latin where Pirovano really flies, before things finish up with the saint's final transcendent hours.

In between playing assorted popes, cardinals and other animals, Pirovano presents Francis, not as the beatific Dr Doolittle figure he has been mythologised as, but more akin to Robin Hood, a man on a mission blessed with a common touch who wanders the world with his band of brothers spreading the word. All this is as far removed from the figure whom the late Margaret Thatcher named her favourite saint as can be.

Penned by Fo in 1997, the play was brought to life by Pirovano as part of Dancing With Colours, Whipping With Words, a month-long celebration of Fo's work and its influence, including the first ever UK exhibition of Fo's paintings.

There was a time when Fo's work was a regular fixture of Scotland's theatre calendar. In the current political climate that seems beyond parody, on this showing, we need his and Pirovano's sense of the ridiculous more than ever.

### Visual Art/Architecture/ Music

#### Maggie's Culture Crawl

City of Glasgow  
 Jan Patience

\*\*\*\*

AT the same time a nation sat down to watch BBC's Scotland's Still Game, back on the small screen after almost a decade, I sat down in a pub not unlike Jack and Victor's howff, The Clansman.

The Molendinar Bar at Tennent's Wellpark Brewery was the fourth stop on Maggie's 10-mile sponsored Culture Crawl around Glasgow on Friday night.

Half pints in plastic glass, bag of ready salted crisps in hand, blethering about Jeremy Corbyn and the death of Labour in Scotland with pals. A ceilidh band playing in the corner. See me? See cultured?

Hundreds of walkers had gathered earlier at Zaha Hadid's distinctive Riverside Museum by the banks of the River Clyde for the cancer care charity's first ever Culture Crawl in Glasgow. We were cheered on our way by Zumba instructor LeeAnn Mitchell, gamely joined on stage by Partick-based PC Alan Dunsmuir.

Maggie's does sterling work supporting anyone affected by cancer at 19 centres across the UK, online and abroad. Many of the orange T-shirt clad walkers had their own personal reasons for taking part.

Our crawl took us via the bonnie banks of the Clyde and ended at Maggie's Centre in Gartnavel Hospital in the city's west end. En route we stopped at BBC Scotland's HQ, the Gallery of Modern Art, Wellpark Brewery, Theatre Royal, Kelvingrove Bandstand, Glasgow University and the Botanic Gardens.

At each stop we were royally fed, watered and entertained. A personal highlight was the chance to catch our breath and take weight off our feet at the Kibble Palace where Glasgow's own community orchestra Gamelan Naga Mas played traditional Javanese and Balinese by candlelight.

On reflection, a special night for all concerned.