

YOUR NATIONAL  
CULTURE GUIDE



NEW RELEASES

**The Shape of Water** (MA15+) For his latest foray into romantic fantasy, *The Shape of Water, Mexican director Guillermo del Toro (*Pan's Labyrinth*, *Crimson Peak*) delves into not only a now-distant America of Cold War paranoia but also into Hollywood's much-loved genre cinema — science fiction, musicals, film noir. The year is 1962, the place is Baltimore and the protagonist is Elisa (Sally Hawkins), who has been orphaned since birth and who is unable to speak, though she can hear perfectly well. Elisa works as a cleaner at the Occam Aerospace Research Centre. There is something large and mysterious contained in a water tank in the lab: a "gillman" discovered in a remote part of the Amazon and transported to this facility by scientists in the hope and expectation that this "asset" will give America some kind of advantage over the Soviet Union. The creature is savage, but when Elisa secretly encounters it/him there's an instant connection. *The Shape of Water* is, indeed, a fairytale — a very romantic, very eclectic, very grown-up and strangely beautiful fairytale.*



QUEENSLAND

MUSIC

**The Manganiyar Seduction** The Manganiyar Seduction sees 40 desert musicians from three generations of Manganiyars perform in a 36-windowed "jewel-box". The performers hail from India's Thar Desert. *Queensland Performing Arts Centre*, Corner of Grey and Melbourne streets, Brisbane. March 1 and 2, 8pm. Tickets: \$99-\$124. Bookings: 136 246 or online.

VICTORIA

COMEDY

**The Best Of, Ultimate, Gold, Greatest Hits World Tour** An observational stand-up couldn't get away with the show's title, but comedian Jimmy Carr (pictured, top) is that old-fashioned creature, a one-liner comic, with 20 years' worth of finely chiselled gags in the vault. Carr is something of an outrage comic, and the fact *The Guardian* hates him may tell you all you need to know.

PENNY DURHAM

*Arts Centre Melbourne*, 100 St Kilda Road. Tickets: \$89.90. Bookings: 1300 182 183. January 26-February 19.

TASMANIA

CLASSICAL

**Emperor Concerto** Acclaimed pianist Nelson Freire performs Beethoven's Concerto No 5 alongside music by Mahler and Shostakovich. Marko Letonja conducts the TSO. *Federation Concert Hall*, 1 Davey Street, Hobart. March 9, 7.30pm. Tickets: \$33-\$104. Bookings: 1800 001 190 or online.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

THEATRE

**Memorial** Alice Oswald's lauded poem *Memorial* takes its cue from Homer's ancient Greek epic *The Iliad*. Oswald focuses on the personalities of the 215 soldiers who perished in Homer's tale of the Trojan War. Actress Helen Morse transforms Oswald's poetry in this theatrical adaptation, alongside an original score by Golden Globe nominated UK composer Jocelyn Pook for a live ensemble of international singers and musicians. Circa's Yaron Lifschitz will create haunting physical shapes with 215 performers drawn from the Adelaide community. *Adelaide Festival Centre*, Dunstan Playhouse, Festival Drive. Tickets: \$69-\$79. Bookings: 131 246. March 1-6.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

THEATRE

**You Know We Belong Together** Black Swan State Theatre Company kicks off its 2018 season with *You Know We Belong Together*: a personal story concerning the experience of love as a person with Down syndrome. Co-creator and host Julia Hales tells her tale of love, relationships, acceptance and belonging, all while dreaming of becoming a *Home and Away* star. *State Theatre Centre of WA*, 174-176 William Street, Perth. Tickets: \$36. Bookings: (08) 6212 9292. March 1-4.

**Edited by Sofia Gronbech Wright** Full reviews of new films will appear in *The Weekend Australian* on Saturday

Send event information to [listsings@theaustralian.com.au](mailto:listsings@theaustralian.com.au)

Norman wisdom reflected in tapestry's journey to Britain

The Bayeux artefact is an enduring symbol of UK-European links

DAVID AARONOVITCH

In 1966, when I was 12, Britain marked the 900th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings. The post office issued commemorative stamps with scenes from the Bayeux tapestry and I have never forgotten them. You looked at those figures in their mail and robes, at those ships and thrones as depicted by people who saw such things with their own eyes, and you were almost there yourself.

Six years later the great *Treasures of Tutankhamun* exhibition came to the British Museum, thanks to an Egyptian government with which we had been at war not all that long ago. Nearly two million people saw it in nine months. The effect of putting the boy king's gold mask, great sarcophagus and extraordinary gilded furniture on display turned us Tutankhamun-mad and flooded the shops with Tutankhamun pencil sharpeners, vacuum flasks and slippers.

The power of objects — real

ones you can stand in front of and move your eyes around — is almost mysterious. Go and see the bust of Nefertiti in Berlin and you realise that no postcard can do her justice. And the Bayeux tapestry is the most important artefact in English history. Had it been housed in London it probably would have been seen by half the nation by now, but for most of its 950 years it's been in a small Norman town more than two hours by train from Paris. It has never left France.

It's much bigger than people think, so its impact when it comes to Britain — as French President Emmanuel Macron has promised — will be extraordinary. People will almost walk among the characters, as the story moves from England to the Channel, to Normandy and back to England and the final battle. It's not the world's first graphic novel, as some have suggested, but there is nothing like it in the world.

The Norman invasion was the most transformational event in English history. No wonder Halley's comet appeared to the English in 1066 to presage it. The comet, of course, is in the tapestry too, along with the naughtily naked man in the margins, who was given clothes by Victorian seam-



The Bayeux tapestry has not left France in 950 years

stresses when they made a copy. He'll be just about at toddler eye-level when it goes on show at the British Museum and will take some explaining.

William the Conqueror remoulded the country in a way no one has since. He turfed out the Anglo-Saxon nobility and laid the foundations for the aristocracy we still have today. His *Domesday Book* was the most comprehensive pre-modern survey of demography and economic activity. He and his successors helped the

development of our language, giving it 10,000 words, of which we still use three quarters. Parliament, sovereign, judge, damage, servant, colour, poet, beauty, question, enemy and destroy — all words consequent on the invasion depicted in that tapestry.

The Normans created much of our landscape, built the castles and cathedrals, established that hunting was for the rich and poaching was for the poor. The Jews came over with the Conqueror. As the anti-history *1066 and All*

Soft diplomacy rarely receives much attention in Britain. If there is a strategy, I've not noticed it

That summarised it in 1930, "the Norman Conquest was a Good Thing, as from this time onwards England stopped being conquered and thus was able to become top nation". That's why it's a huge thing that Macron has offered us. The tapestry symbolises the connection between Britain and the Continent at a moment when we appear ready to loosen our ties. And, ironically, it symbolises goodwill.

Since objects have the power to move us, they are often used as part of diplomacy. Of course, since the English cannot resist looking a gift horse in the mouth, the Macron gesture is already being described by some as grandiose and ascribed various imperial motives.

Macron is getting good at this. Or, rather, France is. Two months ago he was in the Gulf helping to open the Louvre Abu Dhabi, displaying 300 works of art loaned by French galleries and museums, in-

cluding works by Leonardo and van Gogh. The loan was part of a 30-year deal between the UAE and France, said to be worth \$US1.1 billion (\$1.38bn).

But what is it all for? Tristram Hunt, former Labour MP and now director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, says it goes beyond an interest in culture or a desire to attract more tourists and is really about rebranding the Gulf state as "a major geopolitical player". For France, Hunt says, it signals "the long-term insinuation of soft power" in an area where Britain has held sway.

But soft diplomacy rarely receives much attention in Britain. If there is a national strategy, I've not noticed it. The British Council rumbles on unremarked in press and parliament, the World Service shines everywhere but here. Perhaps it's time to Macronise British culture, and get stuck into the serious business of lending stuff to others. Perhaps the UK could relocate a Banksy to Paris, give them the zebra crossing on Abbey Road and throw in Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire* (immortalising a ship that helped defeat the French at Trafalgar). Alternatively, it could just let them have Guernsey.

THE TIMES

Michael Clark is touring his latest quirky triptych

JANE CORNWELL

Back in the more shockable 1980s, Michael Clark was known as the bad boy of British dance. A Royal Ballet School graduate with technical rigour, a vivid imagination and a passion for music, art and design, he formed his own company aged just 21 and proceeded to stir up controversy with performances that variously involved giant dildos as props, outfits that bared his dancers' butts and cameos from friends including English post-punk band the Fall and the late Australian performance artist and club king Leigh Bowery.

"Working with non-dancers like Leigh helped me rediscover the wonder of dance," Clark says when we meet in the lounge of a central London hotel, having padded in wearing coat, trainers, trackie daks and an extra-large safety pin angled through the top of his right ear. "I'd become disillusioned with the form but Leigh encouraged me by seeing things completely differently."

What saved Clark's work from tipping over into spectacle or — with the big-bellied, cartoon-clown-like Bowery in the cast — pantomime was the beauty and precision of his choreography. Early shows such as *No Fire Escape from Hell* and *I Am Curious, Orange* may have featured raucous rock guitars and creatively wielded police truncheons, but they were delivered with a grace that recalled such renowned choreographers as classicist Frederick Ashton and modernist Merce Cunningham, while inventing a dance language of their own.

More than three decades later, give or take some wilderness years (injuries, drugs, financial crises), Clark, now 55 and with a CBE from Buckingham Palace, is still making work, eschewing his old, over-the-top provocations for a more playful quirkiness.

The most rebellious elements of his current show, a triptych featuring eight dancers and titled *a simple, rock 'n' roll... song*, are in its aesthetic. The music includes two minimalist piano pieces by Erik Satie, *Land* by Patti Smith (the epic poem-song with its "horses, horses" mantra), and the career-spanning tracks *Aladdin Sane* and *Black Star* by Clark's late friend David Bowie.

There's a left-field edge to the costumes — silver and tangerine Lycra, black PVC flares — that Clark has co-designed with Stevie Stewart, formerly of cult fashion duo Bodymap, and the op art lighting of revered video artist Charles Atlas. And it's short: to a simple, rock 'n' roll... song features just 50 minutes of dance, or it did when it ran to critical acclaim last year at London arts centre the Barbican, where Clark is artist-in-residence. The work's Australian premiere this month may well be an extended version; today at least, that's the plan.

"I didn't mean to leave people wanting more, but I do like to get to the essence of what something is," says Clark in his open, genial way. "That's why I find Satie so stimulating. Aside from the fact that the music world don't seem to rate him very highly, he takes things down to their trace elements. I put on Satie when I'm shaving since I try and shave

Rocking with a dance rebel



British choreographer Michael Clark says he still has the spirit of a dancer but not the capacity

with as few strokes as possible. I'm 55. I don't want to be looking at my face for too long."

Clark is still a handsome man. But three decades ago, all big lips, shaven head and jutting cheekbones, he had a frail otherworldliness that belied his ability to jete and jest. It's little wonder, really, why he has long garnered the support of creatives from a range of artistic disciplines: filmmaker Peter Greenaway cast him in *Prospero's Books*; gallerist Sadie Coles held an art auction to keep his company afloat; musicians Jarvis Cocker, Wire, Scritti Politti and Bowie are all previous collaborators, along with classical ballet icon Rudolf Nureyev.

"In 1984 I got chucked out of Nureyev's Paris apartment by one of his chefs for kissing a boyfriend. It was one of those evenings: Margo Fonteyn, Jackie Onassis, Stravinsky's manager, myself..."

The idea of the outsider is threaded throughout Clark's oeuvre. It's there in the gender-

bending work he did with Bowery; in the hazy-eyed realism of his dance to *Heroin* by the Velvet Underground; in his 2001 comeback show *Before and After: The Fall* (a collaboration with British visual artist Sarah Lucas); and in his charged response to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. It's there, all of it, in him.

The youngest of five children, four of them girls, born to dairy farmers in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, Clark learned traditional Scottish dancing from the age of four, practising his moves while holding on to a chair: "I remember thinking that when I'm five I'll suddenly be able to do all sorts of new things, but of course life's not like that. It's more like farming; you have to keep doing the work."

"I still have this attitude of wanting to really understand things from the inside out," he says. "For me this is what modern dance is all about."

Clark was a student at London's Royal Ballet School, where classical ballet "was all about looking virtuous, turned out, nothing to hide", when the inside-out philosophy was presented by visiting teacher Richard Alston of contemporary dance company Ballet Rambert. "Others dismissed modern dancers, called them ballet dancers who can't jump. But I took what Richard said very seriously."

His was never a conventional path, having arrived at the Royal Ballet School after attending daily dance lessons in the town nearest to his parents' farm: "It was a different culture; the ballet girls in Aberdeenshire taught me how to shoplift. I was a sensitive child and a magnet for bullying; if someone threw a stone it would always hit me in the spot where there was blood everywhere."

He blithely wore Y-fronts under his tights; his dedication and ability made him cocky. He was already a star pupil when he was caught sniffing glue; he says he knew he was good enough to

get away with it. Then he discovered punk. "I'd train all week, then go to punk concerts on weekends — darker, theatrical acts like Siouxsie and the Banshees and the Sex Pistols. So there was this dual thing going on that later I was able to bring together."

Aged 17, Clark jumped ship and joined Ballet Rambert, visibly shaking throughout his first solo. It took him 18 months, a period that spanned his father's suicide ("A brutal thing to do to the people you've left behind"), to learn to channel his nerves into dancing. Once he'd nailed it he went freelance, devising work that was big on extremes — sacred and profane, formal and free — and very often featured his friends.

"It wasn't me thinking that my life was so interesting I could put it onstage and that was enough. I loved those people and it was a way of integrating my life and my work. I didn't ever want to compartmentalise." Founding his own company meant making work he could perform in. "I didn't want to be a dancer who got too old and then became a choreographer, or an alcoholic, like many do."

'I still have this attitude of wanting to really understand things from the inside out'

MICHAEL CLARK

In 1987 he and Bowery brought *No Fire Escape in Hell* to Australia for six weeks. Critics hated it. "The general reaction was, thanks but we've already got a modern dance choreographer" — he thinks they meant Graeme Murphy — "and we don't need another. I have a lot of relatives in Australia but only one of them, a policeman, came to see the show; he wasn't too impressed with the truncheons."

"I was trying to highlight the sexual nature of dance," says Clark, whose company last visited Australia in 2010 with rock 'n' roll triptych *Come, Been and Gone*. "I felt that dance had denied its sexuality in order to be taken seriously. Someone said that 'dance is a vertical expression of a horizontal urge', and I wanted to embrace that."

"I don't feel the need to do it now," he shrugs. "I've always admired artists whose work changes over time, like TS Eliot or Rembrandt. Or Patti Smith and David Bowie. I met Bowie a few years before he died when he came to see a show I did in New York. The first thing he said to me was, 'Michael, this rock 'n' roll costume-make-up-dancing thing, it will never catch on.'"

Clark still makes the occasional cameo. Indeed, a coming top-secret collaboration with a major name looks set to reinforce his status as the elder rebel statesman of contemporary dance.

"I'm a non-dancer now; I have the spirit but not the capacity. But I can still do it enough to know how it feels to be inside it, which is what counts. I don't want to be asking my dancers to do something impossible. I'm never going to be sitting in a chair telling people what to do."

That's not rock 'n' roll, I say. "No," says Clark with a grin. "It really isn't."

*To a simple, rock 'n' roll... song* is at the Sydney Opera House, January 30 to February 4, and at His Majesty's Theatre, Perth, February 14-17.

Tensions surface at school reunion

THEATRE

Tonsils and Tweezers By Will O'Mahony. Jackrabbit Theatre. Kings Cross Theatre, Sydney, January 17.

JOHN McCALLUM

Things together want to be apart and things apart want to be together. This motif opens Will O'Mahony's breathless play, referring at first to binary stars orbiting each other but soon expanding to become a metaphor for a strange friendship and for relationships in general.

This new production (the play was first produced at Perth's Black Swan State Theatre Company in 2016) packs a great deal into barely over an hour of stage time. Tonsils and Tweezers are two friends who appear to be meeting up in anticipation of their 10th-anniversary school reunion but something is not quite right. In a dizzying series of interchanges between them, and between them and people from their past, it soon becomes clear that there are things hidden. And Tweezers has a gun.

The script is fast-paced and full of dark comedy. Woven into the unfolding story of Tonsils and Tweezers' friendship are speeches from *Macbeth*, in which Max (James Sweeney), the school bully, now a self-styled property developer, is about to perform the title role. It seems at first an appropriate thing for him to take on, but it is not he who commits the crime at the heart of this cluttered play.

There is also Beth, a mischievous figure who was close to the boys, played with a wonderful brightness by Megan Wilding. As the central friends Travis Jeffery and Hoa Xuande portray a complex relationship that includes flashes of understanding between them.

The show is produced by the independent company Jackrabbit Theatre and is directed by Michael Abercromby at the Kings Cross Theatre, a small venue with a traverse stage, upstairs in a well-known hotel.

The design by Patrick Howe has a glistening black polished floor and a triptych of video screens on the wall on which the orbiting stars and other stylised impressions of the action are played.

There are effective sound and lighting designs by James Yermeyev and Liam O'Keefe. The company consists of graduates from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts.

The densely patterned texture of this show sometimes makes for confusion, and I cannot say that it all came together for me. But the revelation at its centre and the presentation of the compromised friendship at its heart are both strong.

People move towards each other and then apart again.

And sometimes this leads to acts of violence.

Tickets: \$22.45-\$37.75. Bookings: online. Duration: 65min, no interval. Until January 27.