

YOUR NATIONAL
CULTURE GUIDE

NEW RELEASES

Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool (M)
Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool is based on Peter Turner's 1986 memoir of the same name and centres on his off-on relationship with Gloria Grahame (28 years his senior) that ended with the death of the actress from cancer in 1981. It's an intensely emotional experience grounded in the chasm-like differences between this odd couple. Ultimately, *Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool* is an extremely rewarding romantic drama and should appeal even to those unfamiliar with Grahame — and the well-cast Annette Bening and Jamie Bell make it especially memorable.

DAVID STRATTON ★★★★★

In the Fade (MA15+)
Diane Kruger (pictured, below) plays Katja, a tattooed, bottle-blond German woman who marries Nuri (Numan Acar) in the prison where he is serving a four-year sentence for drug-dealing offences. We then move forward a few years. Katja returns from taking a Turkish bath to discover that the shop they own has been bombed and her husband and son have been killed. The police immediately suspect a drug deal gone wrong and perhaps the involvement of the Albanian mafia. But when Katja said goodbye to Nuri and Rocco that morning, she had noticed a woman who left a bicycle outside the premises. The police trace the bike to Edda Moller (Hanna Hilsdorf) and quickly discover that she and her husband, Andre (Ulrich Brandhoff), are members of a neo-Nazi organisation. Courtroom thrillers invariably make riveting cinema, and *In the Fade* is no exception.



DS ★★★★★

NSW

EXHIBITION

I Am of You
Fibre artist Catriona Pollard uses foraged and discarded plant material and traditional basketry and assemblage techniques to present nature in a fresh light for the viewer. "I Am of You" offers glimpses of shapeshifting natural forms, from unnoticed branches, leaves and seedpods into shapes that celebrate the abundance of nature and our place in this universe," Pollard says. *Sturt Gallery, Corner of Range Road and Waverly Parade, Mittagong. Inquiries: (02) 4860 2083 or online. April 15-June 3.*

ACT

EXHIBITION

Behind the Lines 2017: The Year's Best Political Cartoons
Last year was another tempestuous one in politics, giving the nation's political cartoonists plenty with which to work. *Behind the Lines 2017* straddles the realms of fact and fiction through the exploration of last year's best political cartoons, capturing the spirit of our democracy in all its passion, scepticism and humour. Presented by The Three-Ring Circus. *Museum of Australian Democracy.*

18 King George Terrace, Parkes, Canberra. Daily, 9am-5pm. Tickets: \$2. Bookings: (02) 6270 8222 or online.

QUEENSLAND

FESTIVAL

Bleach Festival
Using the Gold Coast's world-famous natural landscapes as unconventional venues, the Bleach Festival is a platform for expression, curated to encourage community ownership and participation, provide legacy-building capacity and ultimately play a role among the world's leading performing and visual arts festivals. It begins on March 29, with 31 venues across the Gold Coast hosting music, dance, theatre, cabaret, circus and installation events on beaches and in parks, shopping centres and old country halls in the hinterland. *Various venues. Gold Coast. Tickets: varied prices. Bookings: (07) 5525 6468 or online. March 29-April 15.*

VICTORIA

EXHIBITION

Unfinished Business
Unfinished Business is a survey exhibition illuminating the diverse scope of feminist art practices, including painting, performance, photography, film, community engagement and cultural activism. The exhibition presents new commissions and recent work alongside selected historical projects, programs of film and performance, and a publication with contributions by art historians, artists and theorists from the 1970s to the present. *Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 111 Sturt Street, Southbank. Tues-Fri, 10am-5pm; Sat-Sun, 11am-5pm. Admission: free. Inquiries: (03) 9697 9999 or online. Until March 24.*

TASMANIA

CLASSICAL

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

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

DANCE

Bennelong
In *Bennelong* (pictured, top), Bangarra artistic director Stephen Page writes new histories that reclaim some of the stolen territory and the people who lived on it, who owned it. Beau Dean Riley Smith is the towering Wangal man Woollarawarre Bennelong. Page and his creative collaborators, including dramaturge Alana Valentine, take what can be gleaned from distant records and transform accepted fact into the immediate and richly allusive languages of movement, music and visual art.

DEBORAH JONES
Adelaide Festival Centre, Dunstan Playhouse, Festival Drive. Tickets: \$89. Bookings: 131 246 or online. March 15-18.

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

Angels
from
on high

Scenes from French company Gratte Ciel's *Place des Anges*, which tells of a gang of renegade angels granted 24 hours' parole from heaven. The aerial show, which has been performed in urban environments across the world, is on nightly in Adelaide's Botanic Park as part of WOMAdelaide



There's something going on in the sky above Arles, that historic city in Provence, southern France. Or at least in the sky above the town square. Outside the bank, the boulangerie and the souvenir shops selling lavender potpourri and prints by Vincent van Gogh, people are stopping in their tracks and gazing up.

Suspended overhead, attached to cables secured through attic windows, tied to the roof of the theatre and the clock tower of the town hall, a dozen or so "angels" in climbing gear are flying, dancing and somersaulting through the air.

Tonight, when the moon comes out and the dreamy, ambient music starts, there will be white costumes with wings and white props including suitcases, umbrellas and a giant inflatable cherub. Oh, and a tonne of white feathers.

It's rehearsal time for Gratte Ciel (Skyscraper), the Arles-based company whose aerial spectacular *Place des Anges* (Place of Angels) made its debut in this square 10 years ago. Since then the show has crisscrossed the world, wowing crowds everywhere from South Africa and the Americas to Britain, Europe and Australia.

And like this anniversary performance, part of a free annual street theatre festival, each performance of *Place des Anges* takes place in an urban environment as part of an ongoing dialogue with architecture, an exploration of our relationship with cities.

Gratte Ciel's forthcoming stint at WOMAdelaide — the four-day music and arts festival hosted in Adelaide's Botanic Park — will be the first time the show has been staged in public gardens. Of the 32-strong French cast, 16 aerialists, gymnasts and dancers will be on the zip-lines.

"The angels in Adelaide will come from the trees, out of nature," says cast member Jane Huxley as she crouches on the edge of the clock tower's cupola, a local landmark visible for kilometres, the region's famously strong mistral wind buffeting the zip line to which she has clipped her harness. "It will be a different kind of energy," she adds with a smile. "A different kind of magic."

I'm holding tight to the top of a ladder, my head just above the parapet. We're up high, too high for this occasional vertigo sufferer; out there in the air, the angels in their puffa jackets and earmuffs are unperturbed. "We need to do several run-throughs

Brace for a feather storm as French company Gratte Ciel brings its aerial spectacular to the sky above Adelaide

JANE CORNWELL

during the day because we can't see the ground at night," the British-born Huxley says, before a radio signal from technical director Stephane Girard — a silver-haired speck below — has her zooming away, upside-down.

A trio of performers whiz by, kicking their legs as they dangle from a spinning wheel. Someone jumps from a roof and slides down the building on a rope, fast.

Critics have swooned over *Place des Anges*. But as lyrical and lovely as the show looks, especially during the snowstorm of feathers that ultimately blankets the ground ("Some people stuff feathers up their jumpers and walk off looking like Michelin Men," Huxley says before flying away), there is also a punkish, do-it-yourself feel to a show that tells of a gang of renegade angels granted 24 hours' parole from heaven and who are drawn to earth, wings moulting, by temptation.

"In reality it is quite boring to be an angel," Girard, 53, says once I'm back in the middle of the cobblestone square, where a huge wind is keeping the cables taut. "No sex, no drugs, no alcohol. All that creating flowers, doing good works." He shrugs good-naturedly. "So every few hundred years these angels get to let loose and have a f.cking great party."

There are two major strands — two major zip-lines, if you like — to the story of Gratte Ciel.

There's the fact *Place des Anges* was the final work created by Pierrot Bidon, the maverick director who brought his fabulously anarchic French circus troupe Archaos — think juggling chainsaws, monster trucks, motorcyclists in flames — to Australia in 1990.

That same decade Bidon joined forces with Gerry Cottles's Circus of Horrors (whose publicity stunts included the largest human mobile, or 16 men suspended from a crane 50m above the Thames), then relocated to Rio de Janeiro and formed community conscious circus and circus school Circo da Madrugada.

Meanwhile, back in the mid-80s, as Archaos was changing the face of circus — replacing

visions documentaries hosted by Nicolas Hulot, an environmental activist and the current French Environment Minister.

"I told Pierrot I wanted to add to trapeze to make it feel more circus-y, and he replied that circus is more about spirit, and we had plenty of that. Pierrot loved anything new and interesting, anything with big gestures." Another smile. "So naturally he wanted to work with us."

Girard and Bidon set about writing a show with rope tricks at its heart, which L'eau then staged while Bidon went back to work in Brazil.

For several years various individuals to-ed and fro-ed between Marseilles and Rio, performing in Circo da Madrugada, cooking up ideas for a new company that would blend circus skills with climbing ropes.

"We wanted a fusion of rope and circus, of people coming from the mountains and from the sawdust ring. So back in France we whistled loudly" — Girard puts his fingers in the corners of his mouth and mimes — "and said 'French climbers, come! Circus friends, come!'"

Circo da Madrugada was staged under vast tripod-like scaffolding that put the audience in the centre and the performers (including one-time gymnast Huxley) on the periphery and often down into the crowd.

But this time Girard and Bidon wanted a bigger canvas. "Pierrot said, 'We will open a new stage.'"



'One tonne of feathers is one tonne of love'

Girard glances up. "And this stage will be the sky."

Bidon had already written a show about recalcitrant angels that Circo da Madrugada performed in Rio in 2000 as part of Brazil's 500th anniversary celebrations. The feathers they'd sprinkled over the crowd had come from pillows and doonas bought in second-hand shops. It was pretty but it was too sparse, not quite magical enough. In France they opted to buy feathers in bulk, only to discover the nearest feather dealer sold minimum blocks of one tonne.

"Me and Pierrot locked eyes and started laughing because we knew it was perfect," says Girard. "It took us two years to find a festival director who would let us do it; finally here in Arles they said OK. We did the show and let the feathers go —" he would rather I don't reveal how — "and the poetry of it!"

"I didn't realise that people would feel so transformed by this feather storm," he continues. "They were running, jumping, hugging each other, like kids. Then we did the show at the Chalon Street Festival (Chalon dans la rue), where many of the international producers go, and they all wanted to book *Place des Anges*."

Gratte Ciel took the show to Madrid, Nancy, Kiev; for the most part, Bidon went with them, even after he'd been diagnosed with cancer.

But in early 2010, just as the company was about to leave for Buenos Aires, came the news that his condition had deteriorated.

"We wanted to cancel but Pierrot insisted that we pack that container and get to Argentina. He told us to not worry about him as he would be dead tomorrow. We thought he was joking." A pause. "He died the next day."

It's some trajectory: from Archaos and anarchy, potholing and darkness, to the all-white *Place des Anges* in the sky.

"That was Pierrot. Archaos was one of the best shows of its time and years later, almost without thinking, we wrote this deeply human spectacular." Girard smiles, gestures at a passing cloud. "He's up there somewhere, watching. Maybe he'll be inside the feather storm. He always used to say that one tonne of feathers is one tonne of love."

Place des Anges runs nightly at Adelaide's Botanic Park from tomorrow to March 12 as part of WOMAdelaide.

Pianist
suffering
Tourette's
'shut out'

Nick van Bloss has asked orchestras to explain rejections

LUCY BANNERMAN

He has been hailed as "one of the greats", dazzling audiences from Miami to Tokyo. Such is his "freakish genius" that one Grammy award-winning producer went so far as to say Nick van Bloss was "the greatest pianist postwar Britain has produced". Yet in the past 10 years van Bloss has been snubbed by nearly all of Britain's top orchestras. He has drawn the unhappy conclusion that music bosses are afraid to hire him because he has Tourette syndrome.

The 50-year-old is tormented by 30,000 tics and spasms a day, but through "a miracle of brain chemistry" the syndrome does not affect his virtuoso performances of Beethoven and Bach. The symptoms go as soon as he



Van Bloss

sits down on the piano stool. "It's a blessed relief," he says.

Reassurances that his Tourette's is "the non-swearing kind" have fallen on deaf ears, he claims. With the exception of the English Chamber Orchestra, with whom he performed to critical acclaim at Cadogan Hall in 2009 and at Wigmore Hall, to which he will return this year for its prestigious Pianoforte series, van Bloss says he had been rejected by British orchestras.

He has written to six demanding to know if he is being discriminated against because of his disability, after hearing rumours that some managers were put off "by my backstory".

The orchestras were the Royal Philharmonic, the Philharmonia, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the Halle in Manchester. Each strongly denies any allegation of discrimination, saying they are inundated with hundreds of requests from talented soloists every week for a tiny handful of places. They insisted their selections are based solely on musical merit.

But van Bloss says: "No one ever says it's because I'm not good enough but I'm still being rejected. I want to know why. These orchestras are just not used to being questioned. But question them I will, not only for my sake but for the sake of all disabled and diverse musicians."

Promoting diversity is a condition of the £35 million (\$62.3m) funding that the six orchestras received from the Arts Council for 2015-18. They will receive £47m more across the next four years. "As far as I know I'm the only concert pianist in the world who has Tourette's," he says.

Van Bloss, a former child prodigy from London, conquered his condition, which affects about 300,000 people in Britain, after a 15-year absence from the stage, to make his comeback in 2009. His admirers include Sir Nicholas Kenyon, managing director of the Barbican, who praised his "wonderfully fresh" and "exciting" interpretation in a four-star review, and Michael Haas, a Grammy-award-winning producer who worked with van Bloss on two albums. Haas says it was a "scandal he gets more work abroad than he does at home".

"He is one of the greats," he says. "He has a freakish genius. This is a man who learned the Goldberg variations overnight and then played them perfectly from memory the next morning."

John Summers, Halle chief executive, says he had been unaware of van Bloss's disability when he listened to his recordings. "Even had we been aware of it, Mr van Bloss's condition would not have entered into our decision-making."

The Bournemouth orchestra said it took issues of disabled musicians and diversity very seriously. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra said they were opposed to any discrimination.

THE TIMES