

“There are still lots of Turners in Waldringfield, the village I’m from. Sailing is very much in my blood, and one of my uncles is a boatbuilder.”

Annie’s sculptures borrow freely from the equipment and detritus you might find in the mud at low tide.

Most notably there is a series of cage-like structures which suggest metal but are actually laboriously constructed from rolled clay.

lump of concrete in an old tyre would serve the same purpose.

Other pieces are inspired by old ladders which are washed up with the tide, though in a dream-like way they taper at bow and stern, morphing into phantom boats. The Deben estuary is only a few miles from the site where Britain’s most celebrated phantom ship, the Viking burial at Sutton Hoo, was discovered.

If they were made of different materials, you might almost imagine that some of these pieces

Even so, the weight of the damp clay can pull them into different shapes.

“They get to the point where they have a life of their own. The firing process quite often changes them further because I over-fire – I take the clay to the point of melting. You put it in a metal box and fire it to incredible temperatures – 1,230 degrees centigrade. It’s out of your hands, and it’s very exciting.”

It’s nearly 25 years now since Annie Turner graduated from the Royal College of Art. Is her

REVIEWS

Howard weaves a flight of fancy on stage

Russell Howard

Warwick Arts Centre

★★★★★

Arguably the funniest Russell in British comedy at the moment, the Bristol-based stand-up comedian Russell Howard has risen to great prominence in the past year or so. A series of star turns on BBC 2’s topical panel show *Mock the Week* have done no harm, allied with his delightfully ramshackle radio show on BBC 6Music – which he hosts with fellow comedian Jon Richardson, in a slot previously manned by Russell Brand.

But it’s on the stage where Howard’s comic mind is truly set free. Over the course

of two hours, he mused over the value of life, childhood and sweets, mixing and matching the everyday with the fantastic.

Weaving the kind of flights of fancy that only the most acutely observant comics are capable of, he keenly displayed his improvisational skills especially when verbally sparring with an initially reticent audience.

He consistently surprised with odd yet engaging points of reference, and resisted the temptation to pursue straight-ahead gags, instead preferring surreal lines which created all manner of dizzying images. As the show progressed, he enticed the audience into greater levels of participation, with the performance feeling more like a particularly mind-bending chat than the usual stand-up conventions.

The evening ended with an impromptu game of football, which isn’t something often seen at comedy gigs in clubs, let alone in theatres. It seems to fit with the all-encompassing approach to entertainment exuded by Howard, who managed to wring hilarious moments out of the most mundane topics, bringing a fresh outlook to the well-worn staples of the stand-up circuit.

Having explored an array of subjects with such childlike zeal, the audience couldn’t help but listen and laugh with the same sense of wide-eyed wonder. Charming and brilliant, this show was packed with wonderfully precise anecdotes and off-kilter humour, leaving us gasping for more.

Simon Harper

Adrenaline on overdrive

Sinfonia of Birmingham

CBSO Centre

★★★★★

Michael Seal and Laurence Jackson had quite a day on Sunday. Not only did they rehearse and perform as orchestral members (Jackson in fact the leader) in Andris Nelsons’ inaugural concert as music director-elect of the CBSO, they also had the little matter of this concert with the Sinfonia of Birmingham in the evening.

And the adrenaline was thumping on overdrive from both musicians, Seal conducting with his customary authority and clarity, Jackson delivering an enthralling account of the Beethoven Violin Concerto.

His tone sweet and silvery, his phrasing beautifully turned with an easy fluency of bowing, Jackson interpreted this greatest of all violin concerti not as an epic Everest to be scaled “because it’s there”, but rather as an intimate communing between soloist and orchestra, sharing the riches of the composer’s material.

There was a heartening trust and empathy between Jackson and Seal (who as a violinist himself obviously understands the work from the inside), and this account was perfectly scaled to the intimacy of this welcoming venue.

Mozart framed the evening, beginning with a rich, full-blooded *Don Giovanni* Overture, string response zippy, winds cuttingly balanced within the textures.

His *Haffner* Symphony concluded proceedings, again clearly-textured and shapely, its feline charm blended with extrovert operatic gestures, and a fine example of Seal’s capacity to make these capable players perform above their individual abilities in a band of much distinction.

Seal, violinist and conductor, revealed another string to his bow with his own deft arrangements for wind band and a handful of lower strings of movements from Janacek’s piano suite *On an Overgrown Path*.

So successful were these that they sounded like interludes from Janacek’s inimitable operas, and the players responded with relish.

Christopher Morley

Frenetic and furious

Dream Theater

Wolverhampton Civic

★★★★★

Prog rock is a genre loved by its fans for its bafflingly dense and complicated nature – epic guitar solos, concept albums, noodling synthesizers and the like.

So it’s always a good sign to walk into a venue and spot a drum kit set up that looks like something from the moon landing.

And in the following couple of hours, drummer Mike Portnoy worked his way through every single one of the dozens of skins strapped to the scaffolding around him – all at once, it seemed like sometimes, when his drumming got to its most frenetic.

Not that the rest of Dream Theater had any problem keeping up. Formed at the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston, the band has to be one of the most technically talented groups of musicians around. But it’d be pointless unless the songs were good. Which, luckily, they are.

With many clocking in at more than 10 minutes long, there’s not as many songs as you might hope for in a gig, but the band managed to pack as much detail into one of their scorching prog epics as most albums. Even in the middle of a keyboard solo so fast and complicated that player Jordan Rudess’s hands became a blur, the band still had an innate sense of melody that keeps their prog-metal wigouts tuneful and compelling.

And the heavier sound they’ve developed over their last three albums, although it makes them sound lumpen on CD, just added more energy to an already furious live set.

They ran through the gamut of metal clichés, from lighters-in-the-air cheesy ballad solos to balls-to-the-wall heavy riffing, which gets a large proportion of the hirsute heads in the Civic banging, to some surprisingly tender musical interludes.

Whatever you like musically, Dream Theater do it, and they do it well.

Tom Scotney