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- LITERATURE - MEDIA ARTS - MUSIC - PERFORMANCE - PHOTOGRAPHY -

Seasons
Greetings

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DECEMBER | 2013

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Fragile Dreams Still Fly

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M A G A Z I N E

- 05 Our Contributors
- 06 Letter from the Editor
- 08 A Winter's Dance
- 11 The Greatest Christmas Films of the 21st Century
- 17 Up & Coming with Matthew Hewitt
- 25 On Stage With... Ashleigh Baker

Contents

- 30 Photographer of the Month
- 35 Spoken Word Vs The Written Word
- 39 EXCLUSIVE: In rehearsal with By Jove Theatre
- 45 Winter with Ellie
- 48 2013 Christmas No.1 Contenders
- 52 Dickens: Inventor of Christmas?
- 55 Miro's Unmissables
- 57 Fiction of the Month with the Creative Collection

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Letter FROM THE EDITOR

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TWEET JOSH



A s fairy lights begin to dance in darkened doorways and the fireplace crunch inaugurates cosy evenings of television, everyone can look forward to another festive season. Here at Miro it is certainly no different! In this issue the whole team has put their heads together to bring you the best bits of Christmas creativity, from this year's Christmas number one contenders to a beautiful reflection on Charles Dickens' influence over Christmas.

Massive congratulations must go to Natascha Van Niekerk who is the winner of Miro's Autumn photography competition with some absolutely stunning portraits. Make sure you keep your eyes peeled for these and her – definitely one to watch. Thank you to everyone else who applied we had so many wonderful entries and we will do our best to keep up to date with all your projects, hopefully featuring some of them throughout the new year.

Speaking of the New Year, I'm very pleased to announce that most of our team are signing on for a full year of Miro, meaning that they will continue to bring you the very best talent in the creative sector. Our plans for next year are absolutely huge and It would be an honour to have you with us. As always if you would like to join the team then just drop us an email. Check out our social networking sites to follow us into the new year and beyond...

#LiveToWonder



#LIVETOWONDER

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FOLLOW US INTO 2014

A WINTER'S DANCE

- By Andrea Peipe -

The world is such a different place to me in winter. Fields, which are green and lush in summer, are frozen and silver-white in winter. In a way, winter suits me as a photographer because I prefer darker and more mysterious photos in comparison to lighter, happier, summery photos. I welcome the desaturated colors that winter provides, when everything seems to be white, black, grey and blue. I enjoy taking photos in all four seasons but there is something different, almost magical, about the winter season.



What is different about winter as well is the fact that you have to work fast. You have to have your concepts properly thought through and ready to put into practice because your model (and yourself) will get cold very quickly, especially if your model is only wearing a dress or the like for your photo. But it is all worth it because the mood you will be able to create in your images in winter is so spectacularly different to the other seasons.

This particular photo was taken in the early days of January of 2013. It was such an incredibly cold day and it was pouring. Snow would have been ok but pouring rain made it very difficult to work in. I was trying to keep my camera dry (I had already given up on the idea of keeping myself dry) but in addition to the pouring rain, there was also a strong wind which made it impossible to hold the umbrella in addition to taking photos. We stayed at the lake for only the shortest time possible and we were properly frozen through afterwards. But the mixture of the wet (and therefore reflecting) wooden jetty and the completely frozen lake is something you only achieve in the winter season and is one of the reasons why I love taking photos in winter. Despite the cold.

Follow Andrea



GREATEST Xmas Films OF THE 21ST CENTURY



- With Louise Parker -

It's December! Which means we all have roughly twenty five days to cram in as many heart-warming, tear-jerking, cheer-filling films as possible, all in the name of the most wonderful time of the year. Something that has become apparent, however, as I look at my burgeoning collection of celluloid Christmas delights, is that most of the real "oh my goodness, I need to go and buy fifteen Christmas jumpers, a snow machine and several hundred candles in sparkling cinnamon, IT'S CHRISTMAAAS" films, are offerings of the twentieth century. Over ten years into the twenty first century surely cinema's contribution to Christmas should be greater? *White Christmas*, *The Shop Around The Corner*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, even *The Muppet Christmas Carol* are all films that frequently hit the top spots of the 'greatest Christmas film' lists that are scattered across the internet; and they all hail from something of a different era. The twenty first century is kind of letting us down on the festive front it would seem. Look no further than *Holiday in Handcuffs* (2007), *Christmas Caper* (2007) or *Four Christmases* (2008) to name but a few upsettingly bad festive faux pas. Note: somebody really should have told Seth Gordon and Vince Vaughn that vomit is neither hilarious nor festal. So what exactly is it that makes a good Christmas film? To help you find some of the gems hidden amongst the amazing clangers produced in the twenty-first century, here are (in my humble opinion) ten of this century's finest offerings.

10 - The Nativity Story (2006)

Directed by Catherine Hardwick, *The Nativity Story* is pretty much exactly what it says on the tin. It traces Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem to escape King Herod's cruel law which meant every baby boy under the age of one had to be killed. It is all very serious and several of the performances lack heart, with the grave exception of Keisha Castle-Hughes as Mary, who brings a beautiful mix of steeliness and sensitivity to role. It is really her performance and the genuine tension which Hardwick manages to inject into an old and well known story that warrant this film's place on the list.

9 – The Polar Express (2004)

Coming in at number nine is Robert Zemeckis *The Polar Express*. It tells the story of a young boy who has decided Santa is not real, however on Christmas Eve Tom Hanks arrives with a magic train bound for the north pole and our young protagonist learns to 'believe' despite a number of mishaps and near death experiences along the way. The motion capture CGI does tread that thin line between 'oooh, super realistic' and 'oooh super creepy'. However, the aesthetic of the film is beautiful, very festive and it even has its own Christmas song – perhaps one of the keys to a great Christmas film? Maybe one that will be enjoyed more by kids than adults though.

GREATEST Xmas Films

OF THE 21ST CENTURY

8 - It's A Very Merry Muppet Christmas Movie (2002)

NBC's television special begins with Christmas trees, coloured lights and tinsel and as *The Polar Express* has taught us, a festive aesthetic is a must on the checklist of what makes a good Christmas movie, so we're off to a good start. However, it is difficult to watch this film without drawing comparisons to Disney's masterpiece *The Muppet Christmas Carol* and sadly, it doesn't quite hold up. Maybe it's the lack of eye candy that is Michael Caine (no? just me? Moving on then...)

7- Serendipity (2001)

This is maybe one for those of you who need a bit of a middle ground to ease yourself into the Christmas spirit. While perhaps not *technically* a Christmas film, the action does begin during the shopping season in New York and what's more festive than New York in the snow? It's a fairly standard rom-com, but totally enjoyable if that's your thing. Perhaps more focused on the protagonists' relationship than Christmas itself, but the story's themes of fate and destiny do have a Christmas ring to them.

6 - The Holiday (2006)

Nancy Meyers' 2006 romantic comedy didn't fare too well critically, however commercially it was a worldwide success and that is perhaps something to do with how perfectly it captures that cozy fireside feeling. Two women (Kate Winslet and Cameron Diaz) unsatisfied with their current situations in life sign up to an online 'house swap' site – Winslet ends up in sunny LA for the Christmas period and Diaz in the sleepy Surrey cottage. It's sweet and funny, if a little predictable, but as I said, cozy and if there was ever a cozy time of year, it's Christmas.



Cameron Diaz · Kate Winslet · Jude Law · Jack Black

a film by
Nancy Meyers
the Holiday
from the Director of *What Women Want* and *Something's Gotta Give*



5 - 8 Women/8 Femmes (2002)

It has snow, it has songs, it's in French and the perfectly colour blocked 50s costumes are to die for. What more could you ask for? A Christmas film needs to look good, and this one certainly does. Written and directed by François Ozon, *8 Women* is a Christmas murder mystery. It is quite stylized and very adorable, however, its downfall is that it does have quite a dark ending that takes away from the festive delight. Additionally, aside from the snow and occasional reference to it being Christmas it doesn't have a hugely Christmassy feeling. It is absolutely worth a watch though; it's funny, quirky, intense and certainly plays into the family tensions aspect of Christmas...maybe just a little bit too much.

4 - How The Grinch Stole Christmas (2000)

The Grinch, the first of Dr Seuss' children's books to be turned into a feature length film, tells the tale of the jaded, hairy, green, Christmas hating Grinch (Jim Carey) who with the help of Cindy-Lou Who (Taylor Momsen) is able to unlock his deeply buried Christmas cheer. One of the leading reasons this film makes the list is because it has that rare charm of being able to entertain both adults and children. It is funny, but in true Seussian fashion, it doesn't pander to its audience and is clever in its humour. It also has its own Christmas song (sung so adorably by Taylor Momsen before she became a goth) which we have established is very possibly a key ingredient needed in the mix to make a great Christmas film.



3- Joyeux Noel (2005)

It may be an unconventional choice, set during the Great War with most of the action taking place on the front line, it doesn't exactly scream Christmas merriment. However the beautiful thing about this film is that it taps into that whole love, kindness and ironically for a war film, peace, trope but in a completely non-cloying, non schmaltzy way. Its festive factor aside, this is a fantastic film in its own right, beautiful and heart-breaking, watch it if you fancy a festive weep.

2 - Elf (2003)

It is funny (I would wager the funniest film on the list) and it is charming and it is absolutely overflowing with Christmas cheer. Buddy the Elf (Will Ferrell) discovers that he's not actually an Elf, but a human and journeys to the big city to track down his real dad and ends up falling in love with Jovie (Zooey Deschanel). It features reworkings of classic Christmas songs, there are a lot of outdoor snow scenes and it's set in New York; that's three pretty big boxes ticked already, but the factor that firmly secures *Elf* in the number two spot is the fact that its protagonist is genuinely delighted about Christmas. It is difficult to watch Will Ferrell running around screaming his excitement for all things festive and not become even a wee bit infected by his love of Christmas.

1 - Love Actually (2003)

It may be an obvious choice, but ringing in at number one, it's *Love Actually*. Richard Curtis' film follows ten different stories which all explore love in some way in the five weeks running up to Christmas. It's like a filmic advent calendar! The different stories interact just a touch, enough to keep a through line and give a bit of a frisson to the action, but not to the point where it's forced and annoying. Liam Neeson is there making everybody cry, it has beautiful Christmas cityscapes, Ant and Dec are hanging out; there are so many things right with this film! It is festive, romantic and features a stellar cast. Get the mulled wine out, stick on your Christmas jumper and let *Love Actually* transport you to a Christmas state of mind.





So have we learnt what exactly it is that makes a good Christmas film? Some of the factors that cropped up consistently in the films listed above include: a committed Christmas aesthetic, songs seem to add a bit of a Christmas factor and nothing that has too morbid a theme - unless there's a bit of a silver lining *à la Joyeux Noel*. However, it seems the bottom line is that it has to be a good film in its own right. The strongest films on the list, notably *Love Actually* and *Joyeux Noel*, are wonderful films regardless of their association with Christmas. They have something unique about them (whether it be the performances, the writing or the cinematography) that coupled with a

few festive ingredients makes for a delightful Christmas viewing. Perhaps the twenty-first century's problem is that a lot of films (the aforementioned *Four Christmases* being a prime example) just seem to run with 'Christmas' as a theme, rather than crafting a decent story or relatable characters. It is also worth noting that it takes time for anything to become a 'classic', and this list taken into consideration, maybe the twenty first century isn't doing so badly after all.

KHUSHI



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UP & COMING

- With Matthew Hewitt -

KHUSHI

London-based singer-songwriter K H U S H I is quite frankly brilliant, and has certainly staked his claim to be one of my favourite artists of the year. It was just over a month ago, on a dreary November afternoon, that I stumbled across his new single 'Magpie,' and its B-Side 'Never Never,' and it's fair to say that, since then, I have been well and truly infatuated. His brand of music had me hooked from my first listen and I genuinely believe that he could go a really long way. So, last month, I decided to catch up with the man behind the music, Kalim Patel, to talk about everything from his music to his love of fruit smoothies.

FOLLOW KHUSHI

You can keep up with
K H U S H I
via the links below and make
sure you listen to his tunes !



BEHIND THE MUSIC

First things first – where does the name KHUSHI come from?

Khushi is my childhood name, so everyone who knows me from when I was young still calls me that.

I've seen your music categorised as indie-acoustic, folk-pop, and even the wordy 'indie-pop-with-a-grown-up-edge,' so I thought I'd settle it. If you had to describe your music how would you go about it?

'Tenderpop' is a term that someone, somewhere, mentioned once and I feel least uncomfortable with that. It means nothing really, but it rolls off the tongue a treat which is a bit more than can be said for the 'indie-pop-with-a-grown-up-edge' mouth congestor!

Listening to your music, I can't help but pick up undertones of The National and Bon Iver. Who would you say were your musical influences?

I'm very flattered that you hear the above influences, they've definitely inspired me. There's lots of other stuff too. It's hard to know where to begin!

Your debut single, Magpie, is fantastic and I'm not ashamed to say that I've been singing it as I walk around my house for a couple of weeks now. What is the song about, and was it inspired by a personal experience?

Someone wrote a nice thing in a review recently about how the song meant lots of different things to them, and I think it's good to leave it like that rather than try to pin it down to one meaning beyond what is already there in the lyrics, but yes, it was definitely inspired by personal experience

What inspires you to write music? Is it always personal experience or can it be something else entirely?

Sometimes it's personal experience. You might feel low and feel that you need to write your way out of a hole. At other times, it might just be the fact that you're craving to hear a certain sound or create a certain feeling that drives you.

There seems to be no real consensus over which of your tracks is the strongest but do you feel that this is a good thing? Which would you say is your favourite?

That's definitely a good thing – I don't have a favourite, but recently I've had a bit of a soft spot for 'When You Start'.

What's next for KHUSHI? Any big plans, or simply taking it as it comes?

Next up is the release of the second single which will be called 'Phantoms,' produced by the wonderful Charlie Andrew. The same team that made the 'Magpie' video are on board too so I'm excited for it.

I'm definitely looking forward to that! If all of your dreams for your music career came true, what would have happened?

Well, if all the dreams I'd had when I was 14 had come true, I'd be playing in a super-group with Jimi Hendrix, Freddie Mercury and Tupac. We'd probably be the world's most incongruous group, and be far less than the sum of our parts.

When did music first start for you? Have you always dreamt of carving out a career in the music industry?

It all started when I was forced into guitar lessons at the tender age of 12. I never dreamt of carving out a career in the music industry but I did dream of being able to continue writing music for a long time into the future.

BEHIND THE MAN



*So, tell me about Kalim Patel. When you aren't **KHUSHI**, what do you do?*

I work at a university supporting a blind student. I go on YouTube binges. I recover from hangovers. That's mainly it.

If you could collaborate with any person, dead or alive, who would it be and why? I'd like to say we could possibly make it happen, but I'd not be telling the truth.

I'd like to write a track that Kendrick Lamar did a verse for. My head would explode and I'd die of happiness overdose.

What is the first record that you ever bought? Don't worry if it's embarrassing - we've had some cracking answers to this already.

Cracking is a good word. Haven't heard it since Wallace and Gromit. I bought 'The Cream of Clapton' I think. Looking back, it's not very strong for a greatest hits album but it's got a few bangers on there. 'White Room' and 'Strange Brew', for example, and 'Layla' is alright too if you cut off the four minutes of soppy dross they tagged onto the end.

What are you listening to at the moment?

Last two albums I've been listening to are The

National's 'Trouble Will Find Me' and Pusha T's 'My Name Is My Name'

What has been your favourite TV series in the past few years?

The Wire, probably. Not the most unique answer but I haven't seen many series, and between that and *Breaking Bad*, I think *The Wire* just pips it. In my dreams I'm Stringer Bell.

I know that everyone hates this question, and rightly so, but if you had to pick a favourite album, what would it be?

There'd have to be a gun to my head to make me pick just one.

If you could time travel to any period of history, and to any place, when and where would you go?

Well, I always think that, in many ways, we lucked out by being born where and when we were. I can multi-track almost to an unlimited extent on my laptop, I can spray hot water on myself in my bathroom, and I can go to the shops and buy fruit smoothies pretty much whenever I want. I wouldn't readily trade in any of those privileges.

Amen.

UP & COMING

I will leave you with K H U S H I's first single 'Magpie,' and also a cheeky little link to his B-Side, just so long as you promise to keep up with him on his Soundcloud as well as through all good social media sites.

'Magpie' -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=undoSJOhg0>

'Never Never' -

https://soundcloud.com/khushimusic/never_never-1

Soundcloud -

<https://soundcloud.com/khushimusic>

CHECK HIM OUT

Take a look at Miro Mag's tune of the summer, Vance's song 'Riptide'

LISTEN HERE

K H U S H I

UP &
COMING





NATASCHA VANNEKER

AUTUMN COMPETITION WINNER 2013



NATASCHA VAN NIEKERK

A U T U M N C O M P E T I T I O N W I N N E R 2 0 1 3





ON STAGE WITH

Ashleigh Baker

- By Josh Brown -

It's December and that can only mean one thing, we can officially welcome the return of the great British Pantomime. Over the last few years, the pantomime has developed rather like marmite - you either love it or you hate it - but for me, there is nothing better than a good bit of cheesy Panto comedy over the Christmas period. You're guaranteed a few cheap laughs at the very least and whilst some do exhibit the odd bit of overacting, most Panto's offer a great opportunity for festive family fun. But is it all fun and games? How much work actually goes into creating a successful show?

This month Miro Magazine is on stage with Ashleigh Baker, a 22 year old actress from Surrey who is currently on tour with M&M Theatrical Productions in their show, *Dick Whittington the Pantomime*. Earlier this month I caught up with Ashleigh to hear her thoughts on pantomime and all things performance.



So do you want to just tell us a bit about yourself and where you call home?

“Well I would usually call the glorious county of Surrey my home however, for the past 11 weeks I have been living out of a suitcase and something you may, or may not, know about me is I have an Incredible love for Christmas! So I am extremely excited to be featured in the Christmas edition of Miro Magazine!”

Well we’re very glad to have you. How long have you been interested in performance and, by extension, acting?

“I’ve been interested in performance since I was very little; going to ballet classes and aspiring to be a Spice Girl was a big dream. However it wasn’t until I was 13 and my mother encouraged me to take part in my College’s production of ‘Joseph’ that I began to seriously consider acting as a career choice - what can I say? I caught the bug.”

I know you also do screen acting as well as obviously being on the stage so which do you prefer? Is it the buzz of a live performance or the delicacies involved in film?

“I get asked this question a lot - and honestly, I can’t say! You’re right, acting for screen focuses on intricate detail and I tend to find performances feel very intimate. On the other hand, nothing can compare to an audience’s energy and the impact it can have on a performance, I also find I get a certain excitement from the possibility of something going wrong live onstage and attempting to cover it as seamlessly as possible - which certainly makes the show much more interesting for me!”

What is the most memorable performance of your career to date and why?

“My most memorable performance to date would be the role I played in a devised piece

The Butterfly Boat and Other Stories where I puppeteered the main character, Todd, a handmade Rod/Bunraku puppet hybrid. For me, this performance was the most memorable because creating Todd was a complete labour of love and as a result, I find Todd a character I can completely lose myself within.”

Haha! Okay, following on from that, what was your worst?

“My least favourite performance? Believe it or not, not a single one springs to mind - this could however mean I have an absolute shocker in store for me at some point in the future...”

Well you’re currently touring in M&M theatre’s production of Dick Whittington so hopefully that’s all going well for you too, but could you tell us a bit about the show and is there any sneaky production inside gossip we can offer as an exclusive?

“Yes, I am currently playing Alice Fitzwarren and for those who aren’t familiar with the story, Dick Whittington is a tale of a boy who travels to London with his cat in search of riches as he has been told the streets of London are paved with gold. But he soon discovers otherwise and so his adventures begin! My character is the love interest of Dick, she veers away from the traditional characteristics of principle pantomime girls and shows us a much more feisty and jocular side which makes her extremely enjoyable to play.”

As this is a touring production you’re obviously on the road constantly, which has not only made this interview very difficult, but it must have an effect on you as a performer- are you not shattered after every performance? How do you cope with the intensity?

“We tour the country performing in theatres, schools and community venues; performing two, sometimes three shows daily - entering a venue, constructing the set in 45 minutes before an hour long performance, packing



Dick Whittington The Pantomime M&M Productions

everything away and moving onto the next venue. This production has really increased my performance stamina; of course by the end of the day I am tired, but it gets easier each time. Being on tour with the same people, working with them and living with them can be extremely hard and yes, sometimes quite intense but we're all professional and we get along like a house on fire... Which definitely helps!"

How did you hear about the opportunity to audition?

I spotted the company on the wonderful world wide web whilst searching for a post-graduate job and after a bit of research into M&M, I decided they were the perfect company for me. I then pestered the company until they gave me an audition date - I am known to be keen!

What are Ashleigh Baker's top auditioning tips?

I would advise anyone to just be themselves; many people go into auditions putting on a false persona in an attempt to stand out, however the auditions I felt were the most successful were the ones where I was simply 'Ashleigh'.

Good advice. So then what is the best thing about being in a pantomime?

The children, without a shadow of a doubt; some of the things that get shouted out are magnificent and you can't help but use it on stage so they make every performance completely different, and keep it interesting!

Who is your inspiration and idol?

This is going to sound odd, but I love Jim Carrey. His physicality in his roles is amazing and he has never ceased to amaze me.

What is your dream role? This obviously excludes the rear end of a pantomime horse.

Well Josh, you'll be pleased to hear if my dream role was to be a pantomime horse, I have achieved that already; before I appear as Alice I am for the briefest of periods, the back end of a pantomime cow! Although in all seriousness my dream role would be to appear as Eponine in Les Misérables.

Haha! Is there a particular role that got away? One you auditioned for but didn't get?

Not particularly - I have auditioned for roles and not been cast, but obviously none of the experiences were particularly devastating as they haven't stayed with me!

Miro encourages people to follow their dreams and asks them to live to wonder but has anyone ever discouraged you in following a career in acting?

Obviously when I first decided that I wanted to be an actress there was doubt as to whether it would be a 'sensible' career choice as it is an extremely competitive industry. With that said, my whole family has been beyond supportive and I can't thank them enough.

Obviously you are still trying to establish yourself as an actress but what advice would you give to those who in a similar position?

The main advice I would give is to stay determined; in this industry you will get knocked back but it all boils down to the age old saying 'if at first you don't succeed, try, try again!'



TWEET HER



FOLLOW ASHLEIGH

OR CHECK OUT HER WEBSITE:
WWW.ASHLEIGHBAKER.CO.UK

Joshua Malik
PHOTOGRAPHER
OF THE MONTH





Joshua Malik

PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE MONTH

- By Tanya Reynolds -

Joshua Malik is a 19 year old conceptual photographer currently living in Santa Barbara, studying English at University. His incredible photographic and processing skills create spell-binding images of surreal other worlds, and he has a rather hefty online fan base too. Josh's spectacular range makes him one of our generation's 'ones to watch' and an inspiration to young photographers the world over. I wanted to find out where such talent comes from in someone so young, and find out a little bit more about the boy with silver paint on his face.

What prompted you to start taking photos?

I have always loved the idea of being able to capture something beautiful, but it wasn't until last spring that I really was intrigued. I was invited to go meet up with a group of conceptual, fine art photographers in the Chicago area and that was the beginning of my exposure to it. I was amazed at how they twisted reality into something they saw, defining their creativity and themselves.

Your processing is incredible. How long does it take you on average to edit a photo?

An average photo takes anywhere from 5-32 hours. The longest photo I have ever edited was 48 straight Photoshop hours, but since then, I have gained an idea of what my photos should look like, and it has developed into an easier editing process.



What or who inspires you?

Joel Robison and his selfless views on life and photography, Brooke Shaden for her kindness and willingness to help anyone who has a drive and love for what they are doing, and Sarah Loretta for her always loving and comforting words. As far as inspiration goes for my images: life in general and the beauty that is held in its disparity.

What equipment do you use? Any favourite brands?

I use a Nikon D800 and flip between the 28-70mm 2.8 and 50mm 1.4. I have always been inclined to use Nikon, as my family consisting of nature photographers have always used that



brand. However, the extent of your equipment doesn't really define an artist, it is just like a painter using higher quality paint; he will end up with a higher quality product, but if he were to use paint which wasn't quite so good, it would still be what he saw in his own mind.

What's the big dream?

My dream is somewhat cliché: to travel the world and see what it has to offer for my personal growth. Being able to meet and teach others is truly what I would love to do; I have always wanted to help those in need, or who want to do something creative.

Your biggest accomplishment that you're most proud of so far?

I would probably say impacting people who view my work. I am creating work to express who I am, and what I see, but it always just makes me so happy to hear it has touched someone in some way. It just shows how art in itself is a way of expression.

Most recent project?

Oh boy, I have been slacking. Honestly I have considered a photography project, not really a project, and not really claiming it as anything specific, but more of a personal thing. It is to shoot everyday (similar to a 365), but only posting the photos in which I feel are good and define me and the style I have.

Any plans to come to the UK? We'd love to have you!

At the time being, I am afraid not! However, I would love to visit sometime and explore all that the UK has to offer! It is beautiful from what I have seen and the culture is amazing. Someday I hope to teach workshops around the world, and that is one area that I would love to travel to.

Any advice for any budding photographers too nervous to publish their work online?

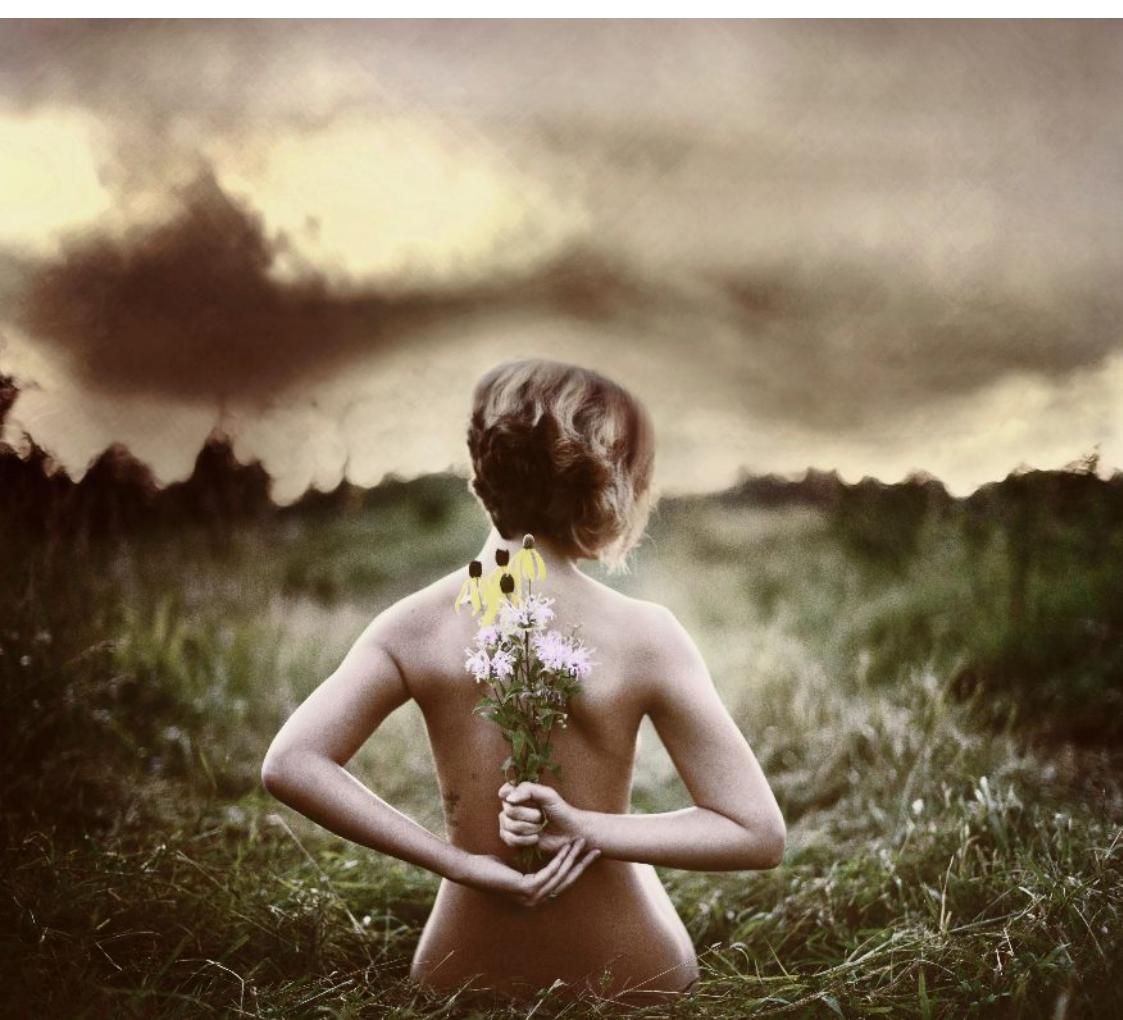
Push past your fear, a fear which is holding you from growing in what you are doing. Regardless of how good you think you are, the work you are producing is just a beginning step into something that will one day be huge and immense. So long as you keep with it and push yourself, it will end in your favour. Also, it gets easier, at first I would sit in my room and cringe after uploading an image if no one saw it, but that's something you have to let go. Regardless of whether people are seeing it, you are doing this for you.

Follow Joshua



*Or you can even purchase some
of his work*

HERE



SPOKEN WORD VS THE Written Word

- By Dasiy Thurston-Gent -

It is not a new thing for writers to share their work aloud; novelists, playwrights and poets are required to do it all the time. However, writers who promote their work through live readings are starkly different from Spoken Word artists – a medium where the words have been created intentionally for audible performance, born out of concept not convenience. There now seems to be a rising friction between whether poetry is an art form that is meant purely for the page, or ought to be created with full intention of spoken recital. When addressing this current divide, it is important to establish the difference between the act of speaking page poetry, and the art of Spoken Word. Indeed, within this struggle it remains increasingly difficult to find a balance that will satisfy both parties.

If we refer briefly to the most recent triumph of Kate Tempest (an artist who may now be referred to as any one of the following: poet/rapper/playwright/novelist), her show '*Brand New Ancients*' won the Ted Hughes Award for innovation in poetry. Although a published script of the text was released, it clearly states in the front the artist's desires for the poem to be spoken. In fact, in the expanding circles of Spoken Word, many poets have found themselves creating the "merchandise" (audio or printed copies of their work) as a secondary resource to accompany their live performance. As a sort of 'token', if you like, a tribute to the poetry itself, which was of course intended to be heard by an audience. Numerous poets now provide CDs or have created online spaces for their poetry in preference to pamphlets and books, with the

intention that even if their work was to be published as printed text the voice of the artist would remain relevant and memorable.

I myself tend to favour the immediacy that powers Spoken Word, and admire the beauty that lies in the live connection between audience and performer; what it is about *this* piece, performed *here*, that is unique. Spoken Word poets often include moments of performance that rely wholly on what the audience sees and hears during the recital. The artist is playing the role of both writer and narrator, both accessible and vulnerable. Furthermore,

**Spoken Word seems to
abolish excessive
readership brooding**

- the message is deliberate and not coated in layers of subtext that may take weeks to decipher. The audience know what they've let themselves in for and it's not sat tucked up in bed with them with its page corner's folder down: it's live and it's direct. Spoken Word is a poetic punch of an experience. The initial impact is clear and unmistakable, but the afterthought is what stays with you. And, though there is little chance to clutch the sacred text, there is a unique opportunity to share a journey with the author in the form of raw storytelling.

In Spoken Word performance the writer is given the space to experiment with timing and the audible rhythms of the piece. There is also



the chance to incorporate gesture, live or recorded music, percussion, multiple voices, or props; there are endless opportunities in which Spoken Word artists are putting their stamp on the art form to establish originality and artistic flare. The Spoken Word poet can choose to experiment with the microphone, with echo, with volume, even choose which words are uttered as asides and which are projected. It is a chance for both audience and artist to realise the potentials of a text and to visualise the craft. However, it is of course still questionable whether the effects of indentation, parenthesis and punctuation are lost in Spoken Word, or simply altered and replaced by elements of performance.

Spoken Word artist Stephen Morrison-Burke has recently addressed this very issue in his poem *'Spoken Word in 2042'*, a piece commissioned as part of the 30th Anniversary celebrations of Apples and Snakes (a national collective that specialise in promoting spoken word and performance poetry). Morrison-Burke successfully approaches the fine line of argument between the Spoken Word artists of

today and the 'traditionalists', as he writes, "purists longing for the past, asking 'whatever happened to paperback books?'".

He then discusses the potential of 'the history of spoken word' being taught and shared through printed books. The tone of the poem offers a hopeful outlook on the many conceivable futures of Spoken Word, which in itself defends the poetic medium against the slander of its opposers. There is no need to remain shackled to traditional poetry in fear of it becoming redundant with the popularisation of Spoken Word. The two are vitally separate. Yet seldom do we find an article that does not approach the debate with negative intentions, either grossly favouring Spoken Word or abhorring it. Perhaps the real debate lies in whether the two should be considered side by side at all, let alone in competition. It is crucial for appreciators of modern poetry to consider the positive elements of writing which is intended for live recital without the need to obliterate the necessary understanding of traditional page craft.

The future of poetry appears to be caught in this delicate friction between spoken word and written word: a debate far complicated than it initially appears. Modern poetry should be something accessible and flexible for upcoming writers. In the UK especially, there is a rise in emerging Creative Writing courses, yet very few of these have strong a focus on spoken word and tend to favour a secure traditional background and the craft of written text. Spoken Word is largely regarded as somewhat of an ‘urban myth’, something that has crept up to give voice to a new generation of poets, who have found their style not through pages of traditionalism but through live storytelling. However, again, this is by no means universal; there are plenty of Spoken Word artists, myself included, who have strengthened their form through experimentation allowed by an understanding of traditional form, and thus how to bend it.

FOLLOW DAISY T-G



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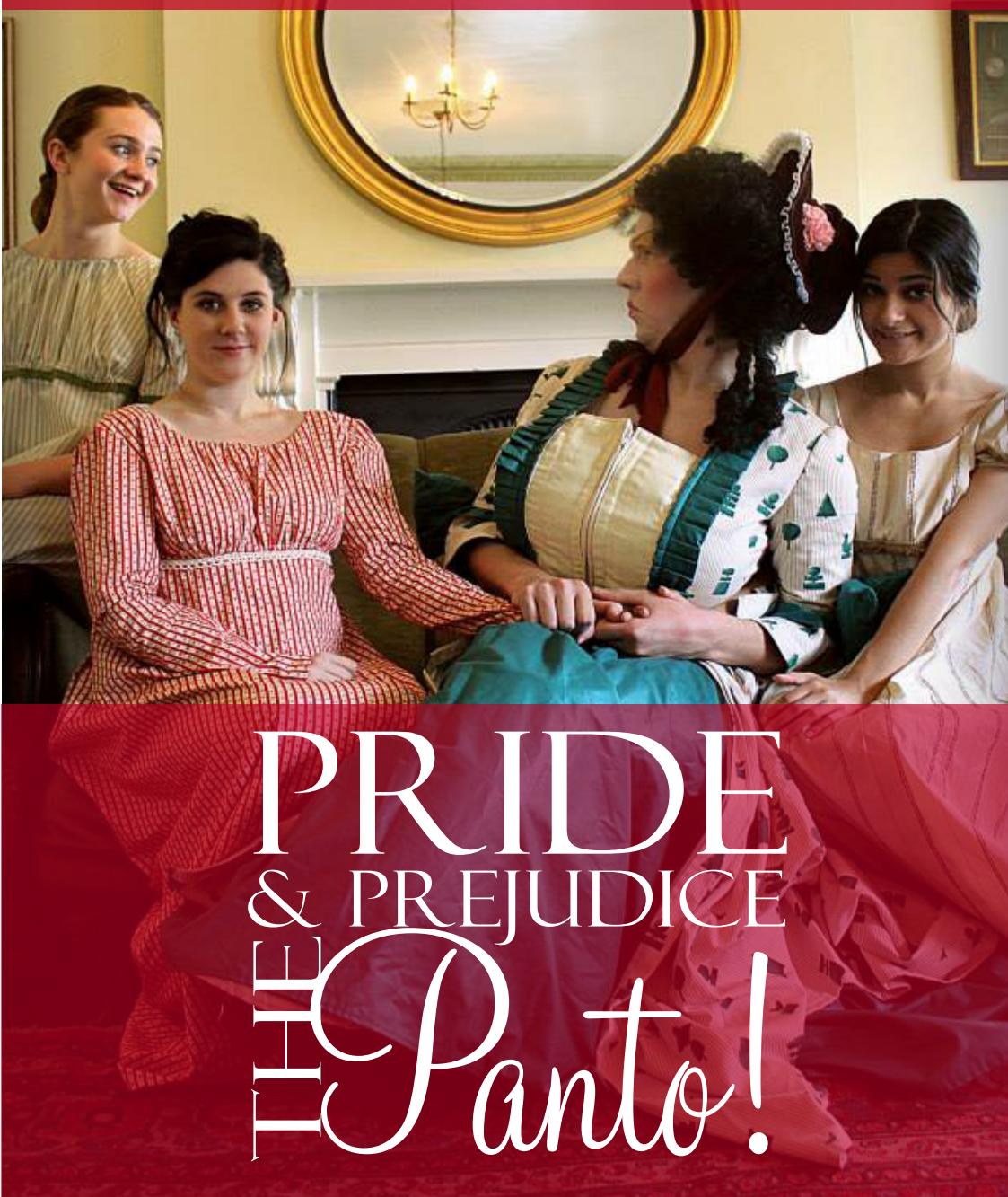
GORDON M BENNETT *Mrs Bennett*

- By Bethan Sullivan -

The Christmas pantomime has been a solid British tradition in the theatre world for years and its sturdy conventions have barely changed since its street performance beginnings. It's now recognised for its familiar plot lines and soap opera cast, which is why the theatre company By Joves's most recent offering is all the more alluring, having spent the past few months working on the ambitious *Pride and Prejudice Panto*. I caught up with director David Bullen, writer/actor James Walker-Black and actor Joe Feeney to discuss their latest production and found out why the themes of their work are deeper than Aladdin's lamp...

EXCLUSIVE

IN REHEARSAL WITH BY JOVE THEATRE



PRIDE
& PREJUDICE
THE Panto!

I sat in on the final hurrah of By Jove's show whilst it was still in its rehearsal stage and witnessed the transformation of a much loved literary classic into a traditional panto knees-up. Simon Slaydon, By Jove's source of pantomime's knowledge helped the company map out the well-recognised two act, ten scene panto structure in which the famous novel written in 1813 would be played out. Complete with dames in wigs, naughty innuendoes and audience participation this adaptation could be mistaken for thoughtless frivolity but David Bullen (Artistic Director) wants to demonstrate to his audience that panto can have a point. Their new show which premiers on the 15th of December manages to combine morals and melodrama by using an interesting twist on the evil villain Mr Wickham who doubles up as the celebrated Charles Dickens and tries to ruin the day.

'Don't get us wrong, we love Dickens, this isn't really about him. But he was a good example as the male face of literature; he showcases the patriarchal system which dominated at the time. At our heart we are a colour blind, gender blind, feminist company'. The good fairy AKA Jane Austen manages to save the day whilst punching home a political message about the equality of women.

This rather straight message in a very silly show wouldn't be possible without some well written comedy to cushion the blow. Talking to James Walker-Black, he explains that for the script to develop it required the cast to have as much input as possible. 'I co-wrote the script with Heather Remington. She was really the filter for all my crazy ideas. I would write pages of garbled jokes, a lot of it only I would find funny and she cut it into something useable, and then when rehearsals started the script was transformed again.' The company seem to have hugely benefited by encouraging an open minded atmosphere as the improvisation proves to be the real key of the show's success. 'It's a very silly show and our company are very loud and energetic. We had improv warm-ups and if we liked something, we'd put it in.'



Meet Mr. Darcy, aka Joe Feeney

FOLLOW BY JOVE THEATRE



CHECK OUT
THEIR
WEBSITE
& BOOK TICKETS

HERE

Walker-Black also stars in the production as the flamboyant Mrs Bennet, the comedy dame whose sole mission is to marry off her daughters whilst cramming in as many laughs as possible. ‘Yes I did envision myself playing her when I wrote the script. I’ve played an Ugly Sister before and loved it. My way of writing was definitely more unconventional but I knew Mrs Bennet. I love her, she’s my Sasha Fierce!’ This certainly came across whilst I watched the cast perfect their ending as Mrs Bennet, complete with huge novelty wig, danced around the stage. Luckily the rest of the cast were just as much on the ball and matched their dame with comic timing and energy. The straight Laced Mr Darcy, this production’s version of the dashing prince, played by Joe Feeney contrasted well with the absurdity, ‘I didn’t want my Darcy to be a copy of others, originally he was from Yorkshire but I pulled it back. It can be difficult retaining composure, corpsing [laughing out of character on stage] is a part of our rehearsal process’.

Any audience watching a pantomime knows when to gasp and laugh which is what By Jove are already working with, but by playing with convention they aim to create a self-aware show that entertains. Embracing the traditions and still sticking firmly to their moral guns the company will have created an uncompromising show, just in time for Christmas.

The big musical finale ends with an unexpected By Jove twist which, like the show itself, is hilarious but carefully offers a point for reflection. If you enjoy the classical story by Austen and the upbeat tones of Panto this show is for you.

15th & 16th December at The Cockpit, London.

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NATASCHA VAN NIEKERK

AUTUMN COMPETITION WINNER 2013





- Ellie Burd -

The Diary of Camera Girl

Winter - WITH - Ellie

- Ellie Burd -

Winter and I have a slight love-hate relationship. I adore the crisp, cold days with clear blue skies. Snow fascinates me, as long as I am wearing enough layers to remain warm. Christmas is a beautiful holiday which I spend with my family, and also includes my birthday in early January.

However, I hate, during term-time, the darkness before I even arrive home. I cannot stand the pitch-black outside when I leave for college in the morning. Most of all, I hate how, right up until we get snow, the weather will be undoubtedly cold, miserable, and rainy, all of which limit my creativity and do not allow me to take Neville, my camera, outdoors. All things considered, you may then find it surprising that twice this year I have battled the weather and ventured outdoors to take photos in the snow.

I would mainly like to tell you the story behind one of my favourite photos of the year, and a shoot which certainly allowed me to pass my Photography GCSE as well as I did.

On Thursday the 17th January it snowed enough for school to be cancelled. Living where I do, snow grinds many things to a halt, and suddenly

my village becomes a ski resort. I distinctly remember the Saturday; having only started my “52 week project” at the start of the New Year, I was still diligent enough to be taking a new photo every Saturday, on the dot. I woke up and spent the morning scouring Flickr for inspiration in snowy weather: I had the perfect scenery outside, but no ideas of what I wanted to photograph. Giving up, I filled a rucksack with almost every piece of camera equipment I owned (Camera, lenses, remote, tripod, batteries...), made a flask of tomato soup, put a dress on, covered it with ski clothes, and then set off.

I had received my remote as a Christmas present and wanted to test it properly with a self-portrait. After much trudging through the snow, I finally reached the destination I had been thinking of. There, I set up my camera, stripped down to my dress, removed my wellies, and spent precisely sixteen minutes taking photos. Still not entirely sure what I was aiming for, I jumped, threw my skirt, walked to and away from the camera, and even took plain portraits (which stopped when a tree decided to release a lot of snow down my back). Ultimately, when my SD card announced it was ‘full’, I realised just how freezing I was. I can still remember how numb my fingers were, and how they refused to get themselves back into my ski gloves, making me so cold I cried. I still have the memory of shivering so violently that I missed my mouth and spilled hot tomato soup down my face instead. I can even remember finally reaching home, knocking on the door because I was too cold to fumble with the key, and throwing everything onto the floor while I tried to warm back up by the fire.

At the end of it, I ended up with a large series of photos which provided me with the majority of my GCSE “Caged” Photography project.



This image is one of my favourite photographs of 2013. A variation of it was also entered into a competition in London, for which it was Highly Commended. So many people have since asked if it was photoshopped; when they do I feel slightly insulted, considering what I went through in order to produce this image.

FOLLOW ELLIE





- With Christie Grattan -

For any band or singer, having a number one hit in the singles chart seems to be the ultimate accolade. It is, in essence, a big fat numerical ‘Well Done!’ thanking you for the vast amounts of blood, sweat and angst that helped to forge the song in the first place. For the moment, at least, it is confirmed in writing that you are the most popular artiste(s) around. However, a band or singer can go one better than that.

To have a hit atop the charts at a certain festive time of year is the biggest reason to be jolly, for the Christmas Number One slot is the gift that keeps on giving. As a result, you are not only forever intertwined with the memories of millions listening to your dulcet tones as they eagerly tuck into their turkeys, but it also acts as a pension fund. Long after your career is past its prime and your skinny jeans are more of challenge than they once were, you can rest assured that, thanks to the royalties from all those Christmas compilation albums and re-run music videos, your health club membership is paid in full, for life.

One would assume that a prize of this calibre is not one easily attained and, as Santa’s Sleigh draws ever nearer, one would expect a contest of gladiatorial proportions to be getting underway. But no, scrap that thought! Toss your metaphor of the Coliseum aside as, according to bookmakers ‘William Hill,’ this year’s contest is instead a simple, if not predictable, four horse race with the favourite being this year’s *X Factor* winner with odds of (11/10). In hot pursuit is Susan Boyle’s duet with Elvis Presley singing the traditional Christmas classic ‘O Come All Ye Faithful’ (7/2), a collection of artists from ITV2’s *The Big Reunion* show covering Wizzard’s contemporary classic ‘I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday’ (5/1) and, finally, Lily Allen with her cover of Keane’s ‘Somewhere Only We Know’ (7/1).

As things stand, however, none of the other three contenders are looking as though they will generate anywhere near enough headway to overcome the surge in sales generated by the reality show giant, which is predicted to explode its festive bomb on the 16th December just as the season hits its peak.





SUSAN BOYLE & ELVIS PRESLEY

(7/2) ODDS ON

The second horse is Susan Boyle, whose single is actually doing remarkably well for someone who stumbled out of yet another reality TV show almost half a decade ago. Perhaps the crafty choice to sing a posthumous duet with the most famous singer that ever lived is partly responsible for keeping her single (and career) afloat. SuBo and the King - now who saw that coming? Credit where credit's due, thank you very much.

The next in the race is arguably the most confusing. The single features several different resurrected late 90's/00's pop groups, each singing sections of Wizard's Christmas staple. That's right, a mishmash blend of aging boy bands and girl bands trying to give their careers a new lease of life by singing a song that is forty years old...eh? The logic that led to this decision is evidently beyond me but, somehow, it seems to be working. Dividing the royalties won't be an easy task though! A confused cover of a Christmas classic, by an even more confusing conglomeration - never going to be a champion now was it.

Hot on their heels is Lily Allen who, credit to her, has gained a lot of ground in the past few weeks as her odds have been slashed from an uncertain high of (16/1) to (7/1)! Slashed as they may be, they are yet to push her forward a few furlongs and into the lead. But compared to the *X-Factor* her current pace now resembles the lumbering bear in the £7 million animated John Lewis advert the track underscores, rather than his speedy counterpart, the hare. Maybe they should have stuck to the original pairing, as at least in the fable of the Tortoise and the Hare somebody won. The moral of this story? Don't fix what isn't broken. It is worth adding that it is arguably not the most uplifting song to choose or sing either... Have a listen to it, minus the woodland creatures, and decide how Christmassy it is for yourself.



LILY ALLEN (& JOHN LEWIS)

(7/1)

It would seem, then, that this year's battle for Christmas Number One is less of a battle and more of a trundle down the track. A rightly timed jolly if you will, with no-one bar the *X-Factor* having their eyes on the prize. However, for a brief tantalising moment, there was a glimmer of hope. A rogue *Facebook* campaign emerged with the express intention of stealing the lead from under Simon Cowell's nose. A group that had gained over 100,000 likes in less than four days. A group that had selected that most festive of songs, 'Highway To Hell' by ACDC as their desired number one. A group spurred on by the success of the 2009 campaign which saw *Rage Against The Machine*'s 1993 single 'Killing In The Name' overtake the *X-Factor*'s Joe McElderry to the stop spot. This year's coup did, at first, seem to be having the same the same impact with 'Highway To Hell's odds dropping from (10/1) to an almost certain (3/1)! Alas, as exciting as it would be for the Aussie rockers to nonchalantly swipe the *X-Factor* asunder in a blaze of hard rock guitar fuelled thunder, the Gods of the odds still believe that Gary, Nicole, Mrs O and Lulu's lucky number is one. The Young Bros will just have to make do with second place this Christmas,

the power of *Facebook* getting them far but not far enough. Despite 200 million albums sold worldwide ACDC are clearly lacking that festive *X-Factor*... That being the case, there is nothing more to say than "come back Cliff, all is forgiven."

Dickens: - INVENTOR OF - *Christmas?*

P

utting the endless, albeit magical, film adaptions of *A Christmas Carol* aside for a moment, does the title -'The man who invented Christmas'- bestowed upon Dickens by London's *Sunday Telegraph*, reside as poignantly in our social consciousness as one might think it should? Perhaps not, if we are to consider that, much unlike today, the festivities of Christmas had almost entirely disappeared in nineteenth century England. Contributors to this decline were, in part, the conservative Reformed Christians whose dedication to biblical instruction directed them to reject the celebratory culture of Christmas; it is likely that this was a reaction to the traditions of drunkenness and hooliganism associated with sixteenth and seventeenth century Christmas celebrations (hence the short-lived Puritan outlawing of Christmas in the seventeenth century). In addition to religious reformations, the industrialisation of Victorian England meant a migration from the village to the city, where traditions often got left behind.

- By Rana Banna -

It was amidst this climate, stricken with the poverty and suffering of big city life that Charles Dickens emerged with a general thesis seeming to radiate from his fiction: that the world is a place of social disorder for any one individual, only to be ordered and improved by a platonic selfless form of love. An idyllic and communal type of love, doubtless born out of Dickens' own personal sympathies with the impoverished classes. These ideas are perfectly illustrated in a novel like *David Copperfield*, which not only reveals in its semi-auto-biographical nature Dickens' own destitute experiences in Victorian London, but more so, demonstrates a world in which mutual inter-societal caring has the ability to rescue each individual from suffering. This extensive familial love often offers the grounds for a utopic social solution and it is on a day like Christmas, in which civilised society comes to a self-reflexive pause, that Dickens believes this ideal can temporarily become a reality.



A Christmas Carol, first published on 19th December 1843, presents the Dickensian Christmas vision as one filled with snow, a piping hot turkey and family cheer. This tableau, however, is critically not the principle focus of Dickens' novel, rather, emphasis is upon the charitable means through which this idealistic Christmas is made possible for the unfortunate Cratchit family. Dickens places his narrative emphasis on the ultimate giver of charity, Ebenezer Scrooge, the tyrannical employer who is a product of the cruel industrial world which has abandoned the neighbourly culture of village life. By dedicating his text to the dramatic transformation of Scrooge, who is legendarily forced by three spirits to witness the horrific social repercussions of his selfishness, Dickens redefines Christmas as a day for all to sample the liberating potentials of idyllic social charity and harmony. It is this profound observation which the novel makes about the bewitching power of festivity, to overcome even the most extreme forms of suffering and cruelty, which still resonates in modern Christmas culture; although many of us may not consciously attribute this to Dickens.

A few years after the publication of *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens crystallises his vision of Christmas, summoning the reader to partake in it:

‘Nearer and closer to our hearts be the Christmas spirit, which is the spirit of active usefulness, perseverance, cheerful discharge of duty, kindness and forbearance!’ (Dickens, *What Christmas is as we Grow Older*, 1851)

Within what Dickens calls ‘the Christmas spirit’ is an empowering faith in something very real: humanity. This, it seems, was the key, shaped by Dickens, to re-accessing the world of Christmas.

Theodore Watts-Dunton walking down Drury Lane in 1870 heard the following cockney barrow-girl’s reaction to the news of Dickens’ death: ‘Dickens dead? Then will Father Christmas die too?’ (Paul Davis in *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge*, 1990, retells Dunton’s anecdote). Although this impression of the author, as an embodiment of ‘the Christmas spirit’ himself, has not quite pervaded into modern culture in this way, his faith in the festive season’s temporary dissolution of social suffering allows the Dickensian Christmas to reside, perhaps not in the social *consciousness*, but now engrained unmindfully within a social *conscience*.



Fa la la la la, la, la, la!

What better time of year to treat yourself and the ones you love to a theatrical experience to remember? And it doesn't have to contain the phrases like "He's behind you!" and "Oh no they didn't!" either. While panto may be the traditional Yuletide viewing, there are plenty of exciting alternatives on offer in London this year.

Slava's Snowshow

Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre
17th December - 6th January

The force of nature that is Slava's Snowshow returns to the Southbank Centre for the third year running, as part of the its Winter Festival. A beautifully poignant mixture of clowns, comedy and...well, snow, the show follows one clown's journey through a dream-like world, populated with bizarre and mischievous characters. For the best Snowshow experience, try and get as close to the stage as your wallet will allow - you won't regret it, come the exhilarating finale. Watch out for the clowns though!

Best For: A white Christmas.

Once a Catholic

Tricycle Theatre
21st November - 18th January

Kathy Burke's riotous revival of Mary O'Malley's 1977 play is set in a girl's convent school in 1957 Willesden, where the holy is the last thing on the girls' minds. While the nuns of Our Lady of Fatima preach chastity, the swinging sixties is just about to take off so, as the tagline would have it, "Bad habits and boys" are what's on the menu. Burke, who is perhaps best known for her creation of Perry from the British comedy film *Kevin and Perry*, attended a convent school herself - so expect shrewd insights and big laughs.

Best For: Sex, nuns and rock and roll.

Let The Right One In

The Royal Court

29th November - 21st December

Following a critically acclaimed run in Scotland, writer Jack Thorne and director John Tiffany's adaptation of John Ajvide Lindqvist's novel makes its way south. If you like your vampires bloody rather than Twilight-twinkly, this may well be the show for you. This taut adaptation of the Scandinavian romantic horror story charts the relationship between lonely, bullied Oskar and ageless vampire teen, Eli. Christine Jones's silver birch forest set certainly evokes wintertime, but don't expect any happy holiday cheer; something sinister is lurking in those woods.

Best For: Those who prefer their Christmases creepy.

Fuerzabruta

The Roundhouse

23rd December - 2nd March

Literally translated as "brute force", this carnival come club night returns to the Roundhouse after a sell-out run earlier in the year. Shake off the post-celebratory lethargy with this standing show, which promises stunning visuals and an all-consuming theatrical experience. Think swimming pools suspended inches above your head, think giant cellophane bubbles that engulf the audience, think aerialists and treadmills. Above all, think incredible amounts of fun.

Best For: A post-holiday pick me up.

Emil and the Detectives

Olivier Theatre, National Theatre

16th November - 18th March

Take a trip to 1920s Berlin and meet Emil, a brave young lad on his way to visit his grandmother when all his money is stolen by a sinister stranger on a train. When the grown-ups won't help, Emil joins forces with the Detectives, a band of kids who help him take on the thief and retrieve his money. Three casts of fifty children take over the stage in Bijan Sheibani's production, which would make a perfect family outing or a nostalgic evening for those who want to relive the brave days of childhood.

Best For: Festive family fun - or perhaps just a little nostalgia.

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An Extract from

The Ruler of the World

Chapter 1

By Josh King

And so it goes like this. The world goes by day by day, and most of those days I do little more than watch it. Or I sleep whilst it does. Either way, I seem to waste a lot of time thinking of what I could be doing that's better. It's not a tough life, I don't think that's what I'm saying, it's just that there are things that make it tougher than I would like. I think that's fair to say.

I should begin by saying that I am a former student. That's all I am. And I don't know where to go from here. I have a flat to live in, a flatmate to share it with, a novel to write and the town of London to be a part of. So life is simple. Much more simple than it should have been. Not that simplicity can't be good, but more that simplicity quite quickly becomes boring. I was going to be big. And I mean big. We would all be sat there at the pub or in a seminar or a lecture or at home and I would look around me at everyone and think about how they are all lucky to know me, how I'm going to be their way into the business some day. But, of course, this did not happen. I didn't ever really think it would, but, hey, a man has to dream.

I'm now, like I said, a former student and I have a problem. I'm so tired. I am tired all of the time. I do sleep, that's not the problem, in fact I sleep soundly every night. I think that's my problem. Sleep always feels like a terrible idea. We turn ourselves off from the world for such a long time, and stuff just keeps on happening behind our backs. And, I always find I wake up in a much worse state than I went to bed in. I'm tired of sleep and I'm tired of the city. Sure, there's hunger in the world, and poverty, but what do you do when you're clock just won't stop ticking? Anyway, it goes like this.

A soft bump of my head on glass brought me round from sleeping, and I found myself sat in an almost empty carriage somewhere along the Northern Line. John, my flatmate, had gone. It did not immediately occur to me that he had gone somewhere, only that he was no longer next to me. The flashing screen told me I was heading for Highgate, three stops beyond home, but the train had stopped moving within a tunnel and the half-light was now nearer to complete darkness.

“Where are you headed?” A voice next to me whispered, and I realised that John had not just gone, but had been replaced. I don't talk to strangers, so I didn't talk to him.

“Where are you headed?”

I pretended to not have heard him. He asked again and I wondered how long I could pretend.

“Hello? Where you headed?”

“I've missed my stop,” I told him. I didn't look at him though. He couldn't make me look at him.

“Missed it?”

“Yes, I've missed it. I was sleeping. I fell asleep.”

“Shouldn't do that.”

“Well. No. I shouldn't. I've missed my stop now.”

Looking into his eyes briefly, as much as my fear, which had crept up on me quite suddenly, would allow, I saw them both lying within concentric rings of darkening grey and sagging skin, which hung down into his eyes as far as it did down from them. His face, thick with folds, had all the appearance of a melting wax figurine. I expected, at any moment, the

clumped jowls to drop from his skull and a perfect, clean white Adonis to appear from underneath like a blooming butterfly from a dusty old cocoon. But it did not. His hands, wrapped in gloves or dirt or bruises or a mixture of all three, toyed faintly with the air in front of him whilst he was speaking. He seemed to knead the chilly atmosphere of the carriage as his fingers furled and unfurled, tasting his surroundings like eight snakes' tongues darting out at random from the woollen mouth. I thought about how I shouldn't have looked.

The half-light disappeared and I could not see a thing, which was an odd relief. I was blind but at least I didn't have to look at him.

I could hear him next to me - my temporary blindness must have heightened my other senses, or listening was probably just all I had to do at the time - and he was breathing loud, heavy breaths and slurping up thick strings of saliva which had pooled in his arching bottom lip. The train pulled away again, and we rattled around the corner.

The lights flicked back on, but I didn't look. He touched my arm, so I pushed it away.

"Where you getting off?"

"Here," I said, with remarkable timing as we pulled into Highgate station, and, with one fluid movement, as if I had been dragged to the doors by providence, I found myself on the platform. The lights of the carriage clicked off once again behind me and the old man disappeared. I wandered through the underground towards the surface.

I don't like to say this kind of thing is regular on my ways home, but it happens enough. Although, I suppose we would say all bad things happen enough.

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On the surface I began my search for John. My plan was to begin the search at home, and so rather than actually searching I simply began to walk there. My experience on the tube had convinced me that a walk was what I needed and to my surprise the idea of some cold air on my face felt quite appealing. It may have been the old man on the train, or some lapse of character, but I began to walk. The light which came from street-lamps, car headlights and shop windows illuminated the clouds of rain, which hung in the air like a swarm of insects or an escaped virus. The orange glow made it look as if flames were falling. The search took me as far as Kentish Town, only a minute or so from our home, before I came across any notable signs of life that was not tramps or those people that are everywhere. The area was empty but for a couple of figures about one hundred feet away who stood in a gap between two buildings. I see him take a punch, I see him give one, and I see him take another. His tiny body falling to the floor in the distance. I was squinting because the rain was everywhere and I couldn't help but blink it in. I walked closer.

"Whadya say?" He said. "Did ya say you wan' another?" And he gets another, right in the jaw. As I walked closer, the door of my flat a short distance away, I watched as the small silhouette of John hit the floor again with all the comfort of someone throwing themselves backwards onto their bed. Springing back up, his legs doing all the lifting and his hands curiously raised into ready spring-loaded kangaroo fists, John was once again facing his attacker. The guy landed another hit on John, his big fist falling right on top of his head. The sound it made was unexpected, and not least to the guy who did it, because he stood back for a second, unsure

c of what he'd done as the cracking noise - which was something between a splitting coconut and a plastic bottle crumpling under pressure - snapped against the surrounding brickwork. I was only a few metres away by this point, but neither men seemed to notice me. Me and the ape that was beating John both stood still and watched him tremble in the aftermath of this hit. His knees met in the middle and his body seemed to melt into the floor, disappearing to the same place snowmen go, and he lay on the ground for a third time. Blood was dribbling out of his skull like coconut water.

The ape and I looked at each other and I recognised threat in his eyes, which were small and black like a toy bear's, before he began to walk away. I could think of no reason to call him back, so I let him go. I could feel my socks getting damp inside my shoes, because it was the type of rain that can get into anywhere, and it was the horrible kind of dampness that makes you think of mould, because it makes you think of stickiness and sweatiness and bad smells. John, the black blue red mass, made me jump when he suddenly started spinning his body around on the floor, flicking his legs about trying to catch some grip on the ground to pull himself up with, like a spider does after you have pulled a few legs off. His dark hands, bruised to blueness, managed to flatten against the ground and, despite filling his cut palm with specks of stone and cigarette ends, he propped himself up onto his knees and got to his feet.

"What -" he began, but then composed himself by leaning his shoulder against a wall and wiping his chin with the sleeve of his coat. "What were - why didn't you help me?"
I told him that I didn't want to get hit.

"Where'd he go?" And he squinted through his wet fringe, which flicked back and forth in front of his face.

"He ran off."

"Was he bleeding?"

"Crying too."

I let him lean on me as we walked away and his cut hand had to rest on my shoulder. He wasn't a big guy, but he was heavy. He was about average size, but I am about average size, so it was enough for me.

"I think my shoes are ruined. They feel ruined."

"If you leave here, then I'll have no one. I can't remember how to get home. If you go, then I'd have to just sit on the street until morning. I'll die. That doesn't seem fair."
I could feel the soft squelch of rain with each step I took.

"I don't want to die."

I only had the one pair of shoes, and I had the same kind of feeling towards them as I imagine people have towards their first car, or that armchair that's always been there, or the mug they always drink from because it just feels the cleanest, or an old mobile phone. They are just mine, and I like them because they've been mine for a while.

"My eye is hurting. Is my head bleeding? What do you do if your head is bleeding?"

I suppose I like familiarity. Familiarity is safety. Or at least it feels like safety, because if what's normal to you hasn't killed you yet, then it probably never will.

I watched the few people casually walking towards us and then spinning on their heels as they saw me and my monster looking back at them. All of their shoes shining in the orange light.

“You just have no -” was the last thing I heard before John’s head sunk forward into his chest. We were a few steps from our doorway, and so with little trouble I dragged him inside and threw him onto the carpet. He landed with a dull thud and his body spread out like one of those chalk outlines at a crime scene. His body rose and fell very slightly to let me know that he was at least breathing.

I rarely bothered to turn on the lights, as the lamplights shone brightly in through the window, so I began to get ready for bed in the half-light. My horrible wet shoes held fast like barnacles on the damp, mouldy shipwreck that were my feet. I prised them free and threw them aside, already feeling like I had lost them completely, and after peeling my socks inside-out and off, I undressed completely. After being in wet clothes there’s an amazing, unsettling dryness when you are naked, like you are too dry, or like your body should be wetter. I stood airing myself in our one room flat, only seeing John’s body in my peripheral vision. He lay there so bruised and useless that I felt guilty when I looked at him, so I just didn’t look. Not directly anyway.

When I was dry, or when I was done taking the chance to be naked and to dominate the flat with my nudity, I climbed the steps which ran up the side wall towards the bed. Our bed - our mattress - rested on a platform that stuck out over our one room, and this platform could only be accessed by the short, wooden stumps, coated with a cover similar to the outer-sole of a trainer, that were attached to the wall. My feet gripped the soles of the steps and I climbed into bed. Looking out over the side I saw John, lying like he had fallen from the platform and hit the ground face first. The bed was double the size, so I stretched out and went to sleep. I slept soundly whilst flames continued to beat against the window.

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