

There are a lot of little things that I keep meaning to mention, so today I will try to catch up. First off, however, I need to comment on *Havana Rakatan*, the dance programme presented by *Sadler's Wells* tonight at the Peacock Theatre. Ooh La La!

I have learnt that *Sadler's Wells* do not disappoint, and tonight was no exception. Last year I saw *Insane in the Brain* and *Tango Por Dos*, and both were exceptional. Now, when I see an advert for a *Sadler's Wells* production I just add it to my list and don't worry myself about whether it will be a worthy investment.

So, tonight's performance, ending Saturday, features the top Cuban *Son* band *Turquino*, and a crew of about 20 dancers representing the cream of the crop in Cuban dance. Every style of Cuban dance is represented in this show: Salsa, Mambo, Rumba, Flamenco, classic folkloric, Bolero, Cha-Cha-Cha, etc.

A crowd favourite was when, following a bracing ensemble number, just the men are left on stage wearing an assortment of tops and tie-up trousers. They all face the audience and strip off their tops. The women in the audience went *nuts* and we all cheered. Then they started to loosen the ties on their trousers, the whole audience gasped, and many started a deafening cheer.

Just then a female Flamenco dancer started in from stage right, all taught angles, quivering curves, a costume as red as if a vat of lip gloss had been dumped on her (and as figure hugging, too) and a severe glint in her eye. As she moved across the stage in that staccato fashion unique to Flamenco, the men preened, then shrugged and then, resigned, simply picked up their kit and slunk off the stage.

The moment was precious, and the audience was but putty in their hands after that.

The show nearly broke my heart when the band started into *Guantanamera*, that most Cuban of all songs. I cannot help myself, whenever I hear this song I am transported to a little Mexican restaurant I visited many, many years ago with X and her mum N. N loved Cuba, and when the mariachi's band came by X asked if they could play it. They launched into a serviceable rendition, and N started to cry for her love of Cuba. It was a touching, and to me eternally precious, moment, and now whenever I hear that song I start to tear up at my love for N and for her love of Cuba. Oh what a tangled web...

The show ended with the entire audience brought to their feet and trying to dance along with the crew on stage. My seat mate, Carolina, (a Polish immigrant, by way of Australia) a salsa dancer, put me to shame as I just did the white-guy-shuffle and tried to keep in time.

So, the other news... I have already reported twice on the little constitutional crisis brewing over here. Well, it would be one if the Brits really had a constitution like the US does. At the root of the current mess are two separate scandals, which are coming to fruition simultaneously. The first is the peerage "laws for pay" scandal. This actually dates back to my last visit here, in early spring of 2008. In this one, members of the House of Lords, the upper chamber of parliament (think Senate) were found to be dispensing favours for money - aka taking bribes. Two peers have been found guilty, finally, and have had their privileges suspended pending further action. This is remarkable in that it hasn't happened in over 300 years, dating back to the era of Britain's civil war (yes, they had one too).

The second is the continuing Exes scandal, in which members of the House of Commons (MPs) have been exposed as having exploited rules which allow them to recoup various expenses associated with maintaining multiple households so as to attend parliament. This has now claimed several members of all the major parties, including senior aides and ministers, and has led to calls for wholesale reform of the entire electoral system. Yesterday it took its biggest toll, the resignation of the Speaker of the House of Commons. Though widely expected, and called for, this act, again for the first time in more than 300 years, has set the entire government, majority and opposition alike, on their arse and made them think about just how quickly they are racing towards the abyss of writing themselves out of governance and into history.

There is a lot of talking about cooler heads prevailing and the like, but coming down the tracks like a dual locomotive are the 4 June county and EU elections. The electorate are fuming and they are ready to elect *anyone* who is not currently in power. This could potentially send a bunch of fascistic "England for the English" folk, like the British National Party (we'll pay you to just move back home and leave us alone) into Whitehall. No one bargained for this.

Meanwhile the Germans and French, in the person of Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, have already issued warnings that if the Conservatives (Tories) or isolationists are elected they may need to restrict England from having a say on EU policy going forward.

This is, as my dad used to say, a right bloody mess.

On a lighter note. I noticed something in Mayfair the other day. You know those ridiculously gorgeous models in the Abercrombie and Fitch catalogues? If you go to the Mayfair outlet of A&F those very same models are there in person, wearing virtually nothing, and ready to greet you at the door and hand you a shopping basket. I kid you not.

Marks and Spenser, known affectionately around here as either M&S or Marks & Sparks, celebrate their 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, and so for three days, starting today, put 30 items on sale for a penny a piece, in recognition of their start as a penny shop ("Don't ask the price, it's a pence" was an early slogan). People started to line up at the flagship Oxford Street, Marble Arch location at 5 this morning and M&S handed out tea and coffee to those in line, along with cards listing the available products and little pencils so they could check up to five that they wanted.

Twiggy was there as Mistress of Ceremonies and has been all over the telly promoting it for the past week or so. At least we get to see a lot of Twiggy, whom fate and time have treated quite well indeed.

Bank Holiday, again! When **Pawn** first got here, nearly three weeks ago, England launched into a three day weekend, triggered by a bank holiday. In the US such a term evokes memories of the Great Depression, when "Bank Holiday" was a euphemism for a bank failure, wherein the government would shutter a bank for a few days while they sorted the books and then reopened the bank under national control. We have seen this happen with alarming regularity in the past year or so, but the FDIC, who handle such things, have gotten quite good at doing the whole thing over a weekend, so no one's any the wiser.

Anyway, Bank Holiday weekends mean a few things. First off, sales, lots of sales. Two, everyone tries to leave London for the hinterlands, beaches of Brighton, etc. Third, half the underground goes under repair at once, and you cannot get anywhere you want. Fourth, the weather sucks. The forecasts are always rosy, but the actual weather always seems to suck. We'll see if this time is any different.

The next item on today's gazette, STRIKE! The RMT union have struck the Victoria line for a 24 hour stoppage from tonight at 9:00 pm. This is due to a little incident a couple of months ago wherein a train operator mistakenly opened the doors on the wrong side of the coaches of a Victoria Line train. The union pointed out that this line lacks the safety devices which prevent such a mistake on the other lines, but Transport for London (TfL) sacked the driver nonetheless. Thus the strike.

For me this means I may not get to see Cirxus up at Arcola Theatre's new experimental Studio K space. Arcola are up in Dalston, in Hackney, and the only good way to get there from here is via the Victoria. I meant to go there tonight, but couldn't risk being stranded with no way home. Thus my choice to attend Sadler's Wells show. Tomorrow may work, but if the strike does continue for the full 24 hours it will be a no-go to get to Hackney. Bank Holiday means massive trains works, so that means the whole weekend is bullocks. >Sigh< In other news of the day, I treked east to Bethnel Green again today, hoping to check out some more galleries there. Oops! Must learn to check the fine print more carefully. Most of these galleries are only open *by appointment* or on Friday and Saturday. Okay, add that to

the list for the weekend.

Tomorrow L shows up from Wisconsin to visit her brother. We'll hang out some, too. So look forward to more reports of someone getting annoyed at me for walking fast or refusing to hail cabs or other such indignities. I am hard to cope with, which just adds to your reading delight.

Two final notes: I pinched an office chair from a rubbish skip the other day, an office block across the street is under rehab and they had a half dozen chairs out to the curb.

My favourite Gay-Bollywood-After-School-Special, *Nina's Heavenly Delights* is on BBC One right now. Ah, joy!

Ta!