

IT'S ASTOUNDING!

REVIEW

LA CLIQUE
LEICESTER SQUARE HIPPODROME
MONDAY, JANUARY 12



SEXY SONG-SMITH: Irish singer-storyteller Camille adds a touch of glamour and fun

I CAN'T believe I was a doubter. A burlesque/cabaret overload during the last few years had left me numb to the lure of La Clique, when it opened in October last year.

Within minutes of the show, I felt like apologising to each of the performers, my friends, family and audience for having lumped these extraordinary entertainers in with some of the half-boiled stuff

that's been going around town.

Housed in Leicester Square's Hippodrome, which looks nothing like the sweaty flesh-pit I last visited 10 years ago, the run has thankfully been extended until April.

For the couple sitting next to me it was their fourth time and they were no less excited. The atmosphere was more like an extraordinary house party, La Clique taking such a personal approach to

performance that you felt a temporary togetherness with your fellow man.

If that sounds a bit much, it's only because it was. By the end of the first half (which exploded through acts by the Irish singer-storyteller Camille; Australian acrobat duo The English Gentlemen; Spanish-English Ursula Martinez; Norse contortionist Captain Frodo; Freddie Mercury wannabe Mario and more) my face was tingling from hyperventilating – I'd gasped and laughed so much.

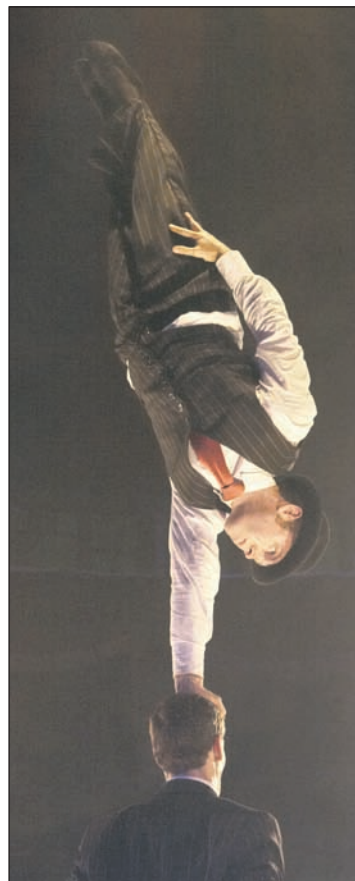
Unlike polished spectacles such as Cirque De Soleil, La Clique's antics go beyond the acrobatics and into a realm of spontaneity and danger that is perfectly punctured by their immaculate comic timing.

I'll have to spare more of the details to safeguard the surprise.

But buy right and you can end up in the front row for £10, so please, please don't make the same mistake I did and forget about La Clique.

● La Clique is at The Hippodrome, Leicester Square, until April 19. £10-45. 8pm, 10.30 late night on Fri and Sat. Contains nudity. Call 020 7907 7097. See www.lacliquelondon.com

Christian McLaughlin



ANOTHER REALM: The English Gents' jaw-dropping routine Pictures submitted

TO THOSE WHO'VE SQUEEZED THEIR WAY TO THE BAR, OR BRUISED THEIR RIBS ON THE FRONT BARRIER, IT WAS A DAY THEY HOPED WOULD NEVER COME. BUT AS THE ASTORIA THIS WEEK BECAME THE LATEST VICTIM OF THE OLYMPIC BULLDOZER, HELEN CLARKE BIDS A FOND FAREWELL TO THE LEGENDARY WEST END VENUE



ON WEDNESDAY NIGHT, the Astoria held its last ever gig, before making way for the new Crossrail terminal at Tottenham Court Road, prematurely closing the door on a building with a colourful past.

Built on the site of a former pickle factory, the Astoria opened as a cinema, in Charing Cross Road, in 1927. A huge building, it seated more than 2,000 but underwent an unusual make-over in the 70s.

At a time when theatres all over the country were closing down, or being converted into cinemas and bingo halls, the Astoria was transformed into a theatre for live productions.

It re-opened its doors, with a production of *Elvis the Musical*, in 1976, but never really took off as a theatre, and management started putting on more and more bands to fill gaps in its takings.

By the late 80s the stall seats

had been ripped up, a dancefloor laid and more bars dotted around the edges of the building.

One of the few major West End venues, it became the home of infamous nightclub G-A-Y – also taking in the Astoria 2 next door.

But it was the music that will be the Astoria's legacy, with key figures of the past two decades gracing its stage.

From Radiohead to Nirvana, David Bowie to Arctic Monkeys and U2 to Amy Winehouse – its alumni reads like a who's who of rock, so it seems appropriate that its last night, by Ibiza superclub Manumission, was axed, leaving the stage clear for the likes of The Automatic and Get Cape Wear Cape Fly to give the venue a raucous send-off.

Music manager Anna Goss, of London-based Fear and Records, has fond memories of the Astoria.

"A booking agent once told me it

always felt like an achievement when a band 'made it' to the level of the Astoria – it's a real benchmark – so although they weren't headlining, it was brilliant to see Johnny Foreigner who we manage, supporting The Futureheads there late last year," she said.

"As expected from the dinginess of the place, the dressing rooms were tiny and the backstage freezing cold – but the lighting there makes every band look iconic and it was a fantastic show.

"It's a sad loss to London's musical heritage – not only was the Astoria one of the last big London venues without branding all over it, there are now no more larger West End music venues."

Manager Ivor Wilkins joined Goss in mourning its loss: "Its history of live music will remain in our hearts," he said.

"Beer-soaked and memory-stained, it's the end of an era."

THIS WEEK'S BEST

with Christian McLaughlin



UBER-SEXUAL: Frenchman Sebastien Teller is set to synth-up the Shepherd's Bush Empire on January 24 Picture submitted

THERE are few reasons I'd want to spend the night with a hairy, uber-sexual Frenchman, yet Sebastien Teller's song *La Ritournelle* would be enough to make me pay for the pleasure.

The Parisian pop-pervert who's latest album, *Sexuality*, was produced by Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo of Daft Punk, is about to synth-up the Shepherd's Bush Empire. Sounds all wrong, but will be oh so right.

● Sebastien Teller plays the Shepherd's Bush Empire, Shepherd's Bush Green, on Saturday, January 24. £12. 7pm. Call 020 8354 3300. See www.shepherds-bush-empire.co.uk



THE light of west London cinema, South Kensington's Cine Lumiere, is back in full swing after a six month spruce-up. Reopened by its original 1998 patron Catherine Deneuve (above), the eternal belle du jour took to the red carpet to launch her new film *A Christmas Tale*. Running until January 25, keep your eyes peeled to the programme as plenty more treats will be in store.

● Cine Lumiere is at 17 Queensberry Place, South Kensington. Call 020 7073 1350. See www.institut-francais.org.uk

Christian McLaughlin