

# MUSIC

with Helen Clarke



**Kate Nash**  
Pumpkin Soup  
Single  
(EMI)  
Out December 17  
★★★★☆

THE FINAL single of the year from Ms Nash firmly sticks a finger in the face of the indie snobs who've dared to slag her off.

An unadulterated pop record, she makes no apologies for the teenage whinings behind it with the sing-along chorus of "I just want your kiss boy".

The Topshop brigade will adore it – it's sassy, with bags of attitude. The only disappointment is that it wasn't remixed to the electric-heights of the Scissor Sisters-injected rendition she played on her recent tour.

An odd choice of single, debut album *Made of Bricks* has far more obvious tracks like *Mariella* and *Merry Happy*, but Nash's knack for writing memorable, quirky songs is notable, even at this early stage of her career.

2007 saw her elevated from playing tiny gigs in her home town of Harrow to selling out a 22-date UK tour and topping the album chart – 2008 will be a very interesting year for her.



**Jeffrey Lewis**  
End Result  
Download Single  
(Rough Trade)  
Out December 17  
★★★★☆

HOT on the heels of his album of covers of songs by legendary punk band Crass, Jeffrey Lewis releases this predictably kooky version of the band's *End Result*.

He sticks comfortably within his limits. The result is a lo-fi Moldy Peaches-esque ditty – while the angst and confusion are still there, the aggression of the original is well gone.

Lewis's voice gives weight to the sparse, anti-folk sound, which consists mostly of background, jingly piano.

He combines Lou Reed's laid back, stripped down style with They Might Be Giants singer John Flansburgh's glossy, college-boy all American vocal.

While the political charge may be lost, Lewis's version brings to light a new edge to the song – a neurotic, philosophical side which marks out the track as his own.



**Super Furry Animals**  
The Gift That Keeps  
On Giving  
Download Single  
(Rough Trade)  
December 15  
★★★★☆

SUPER Furry Animals get in the festive spirit by jumping aboard the free download bandwagon and releasing this single at [superfurry.com](http://superfurry.com) on Christmas day.

But no one could accuse them of following the crowd. Over the last decade they've tried their hand at countless projects and sounds but it seems that, at long last, they're beginning to mellow.

Last single *Run Away* was a Spector-inflected 1960s-style ballad and this latest effort from album *Hey, Venus!* is a stripped back, dreamy psychedelic soundtrack to long-gone days in the sun.

Singer Gruff Rhys's vocals stretch to their near-falsetto peak, exposing a fresh side to the band who are easing into their middle-age very comfortably.

From censor-dodging lyrics to entire albums in their native tongue and now slushy sing-alongs – it seems the Welsh odd-balls can do no wrong.

# Playing politics



STAGE COACH: Nicolas Kent artistic director at the Tricycle Theatre

## Theatre impresario Nicolas Kent has pulled off another coup, writes CHRISTIAN McLAUGHLIN

**THEATRE has a history of cropping up in unexpected places. In recent years we've seen plays performed in lifts, in cars, even entirely underwater. But could anyone have foreseen politically subversive plays staged in both the Houses of Parliament and the US Congress on Capitol Hill in Washington?**

"I certainly didn't," says St John's Wood's Nicolas Kent, the theatre impresario who achieved this very feat.

"I first joined an amateur drama group at university on a whim," says Kent. Cutting through the modesty, the 63-year-old's track record tells a very different story.

Since those early days at Cambridge, Kent has launched one of the most respected fringe theatres in Britain – Kilburn's Tricycle Theatre

– and pounded out politically ground-breaking plays for nearly 25 years.

"We suddenly found ourselves on a plane and on our way to Washington," Kent says about taking his 2004 play,

*Guantanamo*, for a one-off performance in the Committee Room at the heart of the US Congress. With true campaigner's spirit, Kent managed to gather enough support from within the US Government for this unimaginable scheme by championing the rights to freedom of speech which are enshrined in the US Constitution.

It may seem the achievement of a lifetime, yet only a year previously he pulled off a similar coup with *Justifying War* which was staged at the Houses of Parliament. The play was based on the Hutton Report's investigation into the death of weapons expert Dr David Kelly, a civil servant who had been thrown into the media spotlight over the Iraq 'weapons of mass destruction' row.

Thinking about his career he says: "It's been fun all the way." But the attention generated by plays such as *Guantanamo*, *Justifying War* or *The Colour of Justice* – the 1999 play based on the inquiry into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in which the police were criticised – is nothing he takes lightly.

Born to a German Jewish refugee who came to Britain in 1936, Kent says he sees injustice as something terrible. "Human rights in this country are fantastic, but you have to keep curbing the power of that state," says the theatre director.

Thirty-six plays down the line and he's taken on everything from local issues of Irish and black rights to apartheid in South Africa. How such heavy topics could make for light entertainment is hard to imagine.

"One would fail completely if it wasn't entertaining, but entertainment means different things to different people," says Kent. He believes good theatre "provokes a discussion about what you have just seen," a challenge which he hopes to achieve with his latest Tricycle production, *Doubt: A Parable*, by making the audience engage, think and laugh. Dealing with issues such as child molestation and racism,

laughter may sound like an unlikely outcome. But therein lies the skill of carefully crafted theatre, to engage and consider horrific issues from the safety of your seat. By refusing to spoon-feed audiences, Kent leaves plenty room for debate which is the key to the strength of *Doubt*, refusing to lay guilt on any of the parties involved. Having already won a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony Award during its box office-breaking run in New York – as well as being in the Hollywood pipeline with Meryl Streep as leading lady – the play's transfer to the West End seems assured. And if does take place, Kent has the rights.

"After endlessly ringing agents for three or four years, they just gave in," he says. His persistence astounds and he shows no signs of slowing down. Describing some of the nine projects he's currently evaluating, one wonders what he's got left to prove. "I don't think I'll ever give up. My ambition is to do things which change things, even if it's just a little."

● *Doubt: A Parable* runs at the Tricycle Theatre, 269 Kilburn High Road until January 12. £8.50-£18. Mon-Sat, 8pm. Sat matinee 4pm. Call: 020 7328 1000. Visit: [www.tricycle.co.uk](http://www.tricycle.co.uk)

'BY REFUSING TO SPOON-FEED AUDIENCES, KENT LEAVES PLENTY ROOM FOR DEBATE'



Marcella Plunkett as Sister James (left) and Dearbhla Molloy as Sister Aloysius in *Doubt*