

MUSIC

with Helen Clarke



Billy Bragg
Mr Love & Justice
Album
(Universal)
March 3
★★★★☆

LONG before Jarvis Cocker began his sneering take on social commentary, and even longer before the Arctic Monkeys picked up their first Fisher Price guitar, Billy Bragg was charming the world with his one-man socio-political crusade.

The new album, *Mr Love & Justice*, continues his usual themes – politics come in the form of *O Freedom*, while *Almost Killed You* shows him at his catchy, bloke-down-the-pub, singalong best.

It's more of the same, but the best version of it he's released for a while.

The second disc is where the real gems lie – the same album minus backing band The Blokes. Bragg is an acoustic, solo artist at heart, and this emphasises it more than ever.



Duffy
Rockferry
Album
(Rough Trade)
Out March 3
★★★★☆

CYNICS could accuse record bosses of cashing in on the girl/retro/singer combination that's whipped the country into a frenzy of late. But Duffy (who's the new Adele, who's the new Amy Winehouse) has been a long time in the making.

An impressive production team was drafted in to work with Aimee Ann Duffy, including 60s-obsessed former Suede guitarist Bernard Butler, who's carved himself a reputation as king hit maker over the past couple of years. And it shows – beyond the Kohl eyes and husky voice is a well-polished slice of pop noir.

But her number one single *Mercy* wipes the floor with the rest of the album, which falls short of its Supremes-esque soul ambitions.

Tracks such as *Warwick Avenue* and *Rockferry* bring out the best in her voice and it's consistently solid throughout, but she lacks the heartbreaking honesty of Winehouse.

Rockferry feels like a covers album, full of songs she's not lived. But the whole package makes it a sure-fire hit, destined to grace coffee tables across the country.



MIA
Paper Planes
Single
(XL Recordings)
March 3
★★★★☆

DANCEHALL princess MIA has tapped into the Clash's ethics and dragged them kicking and screaming into the 21st century.

The band's *Straight To Hell* is the backing track for her critique of capitalism and the treatment of immigrants.

She throws in thudding gunshots and the ringing of cash registers in the place of bass – a great update of the reggae crossover that became a trademark of the Clash.

Bizarrely, given its complex subject matter and influences, it's her most accessible single to date.

The vinyl includes five remixes – including a stripped-back, chilled-out version by James Murphy of DFA/LCD Soundsystem fame – cementing her position as one of the most interesting, genre-hopping artists of the moment.

informer review

WAR! WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR? THEATRE!



TAKE YOUR GUARD: Gerard Murphy (above) tests his swordsmanship in rehearsals for *I'll Be The Devil*, while (below, right) laughing redcoat JD Kelleher takes sadistic pleasure in brutality during the show this week

INSPIRED BY THE BARD, TWO NEW PLAYS LOOK AFRESH AT CONFLICT. CHRISTIAN McLAUGHLIN SENDS A DISPATCH FROM THE FRONT LINE

WAR! WHAT is it good for? Edwin Starr posed the question in his 1970 song. The reply? Absolutely nothing! Except, perhaps, creating an excellent premise for theatre.

Two of the Royal Shakespeare Company's plays, Leo Butler's *I'll Be The Devil* and Roy Williams's *Days of Significance*, have themes entrenched in conflict. Loosely based on Shakespeare classics, the plays were commissioned for the RSC's Complete Works festival in 2006.

The condensed results are now running back-to-back at the Tricycle Theatre, Kilburn; with two of west London's finest actors doing battle in *I'll Be The Devil*.

With recent war-related plays such as Hassan Abdulrazzak's *Baghdad Wedding* and David Hare's *The Vertical Hour* grabbing the headlines, Iraq inevitably springs to mind.

"*I'll Be The Devil* certainly had no political intention," says Leo, 33, who wrote his play in reaction to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Based around the violence of British troops in 18th Century Ireland, Leo says the idea for the play came to him in a writer's cottage in Stratford, where he had a vision of a man in a red coat standing

over a woman in rags in the middle of storm. "The principal themes are occupation and colonialism, but you could compare it to Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Palestine or Iraq. It is a reflection on the consequences of human nature, and the associations you make are personal."

This open-ended approach is not shared by Roy Williams, author of *Days of Significance*. Reacting to Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, he says: "At the time I wanted to write about Iraq and about binge drinking. I don't especially like *Much Ado*, but its opening, with bantering soldiers returning to their towns from war, married the two preoccupations well."

Roy, 40, says he was fed up hearing about Iraq from the perspective of those in power. Influenced by British writers from the 1970s such as Barry Keefe, his intention was to follow that type of realism, depicting war's effects on young working class men.

"I aim to raise discussion," he says. "Iraq and binge drinking depress me, but it's not about 'for or against', it's just about looking at how people are living."

● *I'll Be The Devil* by Leo Butler runs until March 8. *Days of Significance* by Roy Williams runs from March 12-29. £10-18. Both are at the Tricycle Theatre, 269 Kilburn High Road, NW6. Call 020 7328 1000.

Visit www.tricycle.co.uk or www.rsc.org.uk/london

SIGNIFICANT WRITER: Roy Williams

A STUTTERING START

GERARD MURPHY was born in Northern Ireland and lives in Shepherd's Bush. He plays Sgt Brown and is an RSC associate director, having performed with the company for more than 25 years.

"I didn't dare dream of becoming an actor when I was young. I was very, very shy and had a terrible stutter. I remember breaking into sweats and blushing all the time. It was only thanks to some really inspirational teachers when I was growing up in Newry, Co Down, around the age of eight that I joined a debating team.

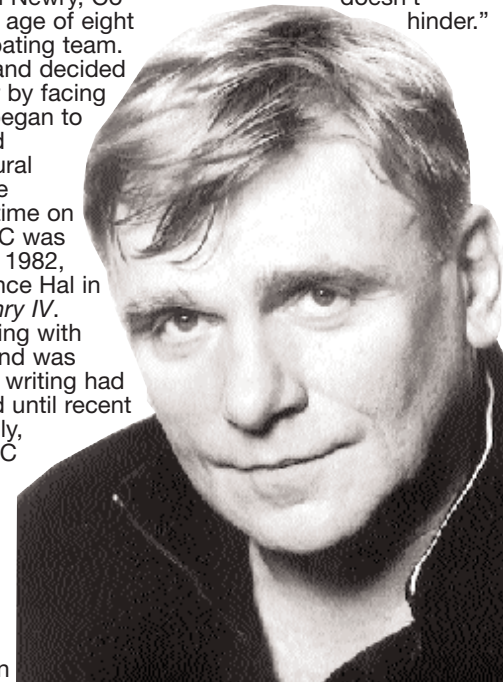
"I loved words and decided to beat the stutter by facing my fears. I soon began to find my voice, and theatre was a natural continuation of the process. My first time on stage with the RSC was at the Barbican in 1982, when I played Prince Hal in Trevor Nunn's *Henry IV*.

"I've been working with them ever since and was disappointed new writing had gone by the board until recent seasons. Thankfully, Michael Boyd, RSC artistic director since 2003, has been responsible for bringing it back.

"Leo Butler is an important young playwright and few other than

the RSC could afford to give him a budget for a production like *I'll Be The Devil*. It's a big play, it's very physical, and is exactly what RSC should be doing. It's set in 18th Century Limerick, where to be Catholic meant you were dead.

"The soldiers' behaviour is horrible, one thing leading to another, and it can get pretty grim. Detaching from the darkness of my character is not hard, but the occasional pint after work certainly doesn't hinder."



I LOVE A SWORDFIGHT

JD KELLEHER was born in Ireland and now lives in Baker Street. He plays Captain Skelton in his first performance for the RSC.

"I discovered theatre at college when I was 17. I was new to Cork, I'd grown up in a small town 40 miles away, and I thought a play would be a good way to meet people. Not really knowing what I was doing, I auditioned for Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

"I was so unselfconscious, I just took it in my stride and landed the lead role. It's been 20 years and I'm very proud.

Every actor in Britain would love to have RSC on their CV; it's a centre of excellence.

"Working with Gerard is also a pleasure; he takes care of us all and is the revered elder of the company. In the play Gerard and I are a couple of young soldiers who torment other men.

"We spur

each other on, and I like to stir the pot, step back, and to watch the consequences for my own entertainment.

"And there's plenty of swordfighting, which is always good fun. I've done TV, photography and commercial work, but nothing quite matches up to theatre. There's no safety net, and that feeling of being on a tightrope is the key to the adrenaline."

