

MUSIC

with Helen Clarke



Animal Alpha
You Pay For The Whole Seat But You'll Only Need The Edge
Album
Racing Junior Records
May 19
★★★★☆

NORWEGIAN metallers Animal Alpha release their debut UK album. A typically European rock record, it's stuck somewhere between Black Sabbath and The Disturbed, and fronted by a woman bearing an uncanny likeness to Annie Lennox.

But put all that aside and it's not all bad. Rolling guitars are broken up by Agnete Kjølsrud's vocals. At her best she sounds like be your own PET's Jemima Pearl Abegg – she could curdle blood and reaches notes that you wouldn't have thought possible. Highlights are *Breed Again* and *Tricky Threesome* – both tracks that showcase her vocal range and are less reliant on tired metal-by-numbers guitar crunching. But by far the most entertaining thing about the album is the amusing song titles. Clearly lost in translation, we're treated to *Fire! Fire!* and *Marilyn Love Doll*.



Ministry of Sound
Chilled 1991-2008
Album
Ministry of Sound
May 19
★★★★☆

AS SUMMER looms, so too does the onslaught of chill-out compilations. Pipping the others to the post is the Ministry of Sound's latest collection.

It spans the history of the legendary club from The Orb and Everything But The Girl to more recent hits from Peter, Bjorn and John and Basement Jaxx.

Its three discs plough through the depths of their DJs record boxes, digging out gems including Mylo's *In My Arms*, Jose González's *Heartbeats*, Underworld's *Second Hand* and Lemon Jelly's *His Majesty King Raam*.

It also drags out tracks by Badly Drawn Boy and Radiohead. Perfect for summer parties and long, lazy days when you can't quite decide what to put on.



The Futureheads
Radioheart
Single
Nul Records
May 19
★★★★☆

SUNDERLAND punk-pops The Futureheads bounce back from a record company fall out with a self-released record that marks a return to form.

As bouncy and anthemic as 2004's self-titled debut, it sets the tone for their third album, *This Is Not The World*, which is released next week.

Clean drums, simple riffs and a light-hearted sneer, it's everything fans have been waiting for.

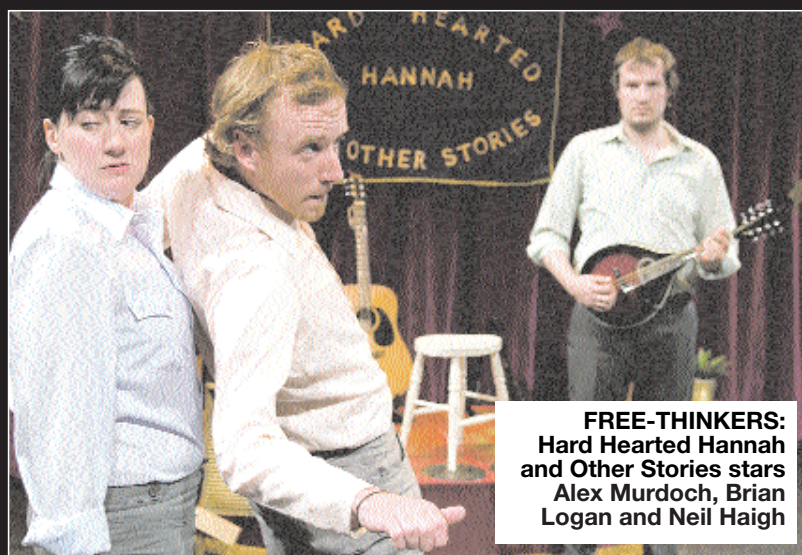
As with last their last single, *The Beginning Of The Twist*, the volume's turned up a notch, the choruses are catchier – there's a zest for life that seems to go hand in hand with their new found DIY punk ethos.

It feels like a record they've been desperate to make.

informer review

WELCOME TO 'SCRIPTS-BARRED' THEATRE

OFF THE CUFF



FREE-THINKERS:
Hard Hearted Hannah and Other Stories stars Alex Murdoch, Brian Logan and Neil Haigh

THEATRE, without a script? Two tantalising shows are about to prove that anything's possible. Improvisation is the name of the game, and no longer is it confined to the farthest reaches of the comedy circuit.

"Audiences find it hard to believe, but we have no structure, no patterns and no plans – we would be bored if we did!" says Brian Logan, one of the three actors who make up theatre *Cartoon de Salvo* – about to hit Hammersmith's Lyric Theatre for a run of shows.

Founded in 1997 with friend Alex Murdoch, Brian says they began devising theatre (creating a play by working around a loose structure and improvised elements), but over the years the space for surprise in their plays kept on growing.

The fruit of their labour is *Hard Hearted Hannah and Other Stories*, a unique show every night which has been touring the country since February.

"You could fall flat on your arse," Brian says, "but I find it less nerve-wracking because there's nothing to forget."

"How can you screw up a line in a play that doesn't exist?"

For the premise to work, all the the audience has to do is shout out a title for the night's show (*Who Beat Up Jimmy Jazz?* was a favourite so

far), and choose three songs from a list of 20.

Armed with instruments from banjos to cider jugs, Brian, Alex and friend of five years Neil Haigh then have all they need to embark on a theatrical mystery that lasts anywhere between one and two hours.

"There are lots of laughs, but this is definitely theatre rather than comedy and tenderness; pathos; intimacy and drama are vital to every performance," Brian says.

But how does one rehearse for a play that doesn't exist? *Cartoon de Salvo* had to head as far as San Francisco

for extensive off-the-cuff theatre training.

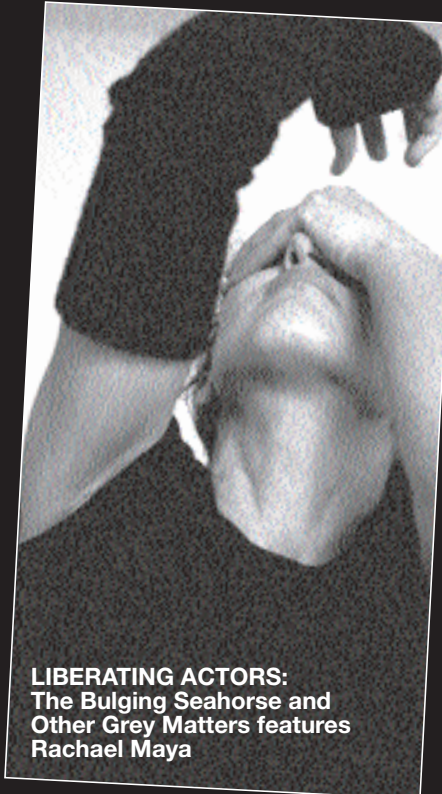
"Sadly there's a cultural prejudice against improvised theatre in the UK," Brian explains. We come from literary culture that puts the writer on a pedestal."

In Canada and the US especially, 'long-form improv' – as opposed to 'short-form improv' which is used for sketches in TV shows such as *Whose Line is it Anyway* – is widely practiced in schools and theatres.

Brian says: "Rehearsals are more focused on staging techniques, but cultivating a shared imagination is also important."

Research, for

ROOT EXPERIENCE:
Simon Magnus



LIBERATING ACTORS:
The Bulging Seahorse and Other Grey Matters features Rachael Maya

example, will involve reading the same books and watching the same films together so that cultural reference points can bounce off each other when on stage.

"Singing from the same hymn sheet, underpinned by a good friendship" it's the cornerstone of improv theatre that both Brian and Simon Magnus, 27, hope will help their shows overturn expectations.

Simon's show, *The Bulging Seahorse and Other Grey Matters*, which opens on May 27 at the Barons Court Theatre, has similar ambitions of liberating its actors from a static text.

Created over the past eight months with a team of four actors that make up Root Experience, the play also intends to share the responsibility of its success with the audience.

"No one is singled out or anything like that, but audiences help create the atmosphere," Simon explains.

"It's important not to close your eyes to new expressions of art. "Life in London has become reliant on interactivity and art forms such as film, TV and theatre are bound to reflect these changes."

Four parts devised, one part improv, *The Bulging Seahorse* also promises a different show every night.

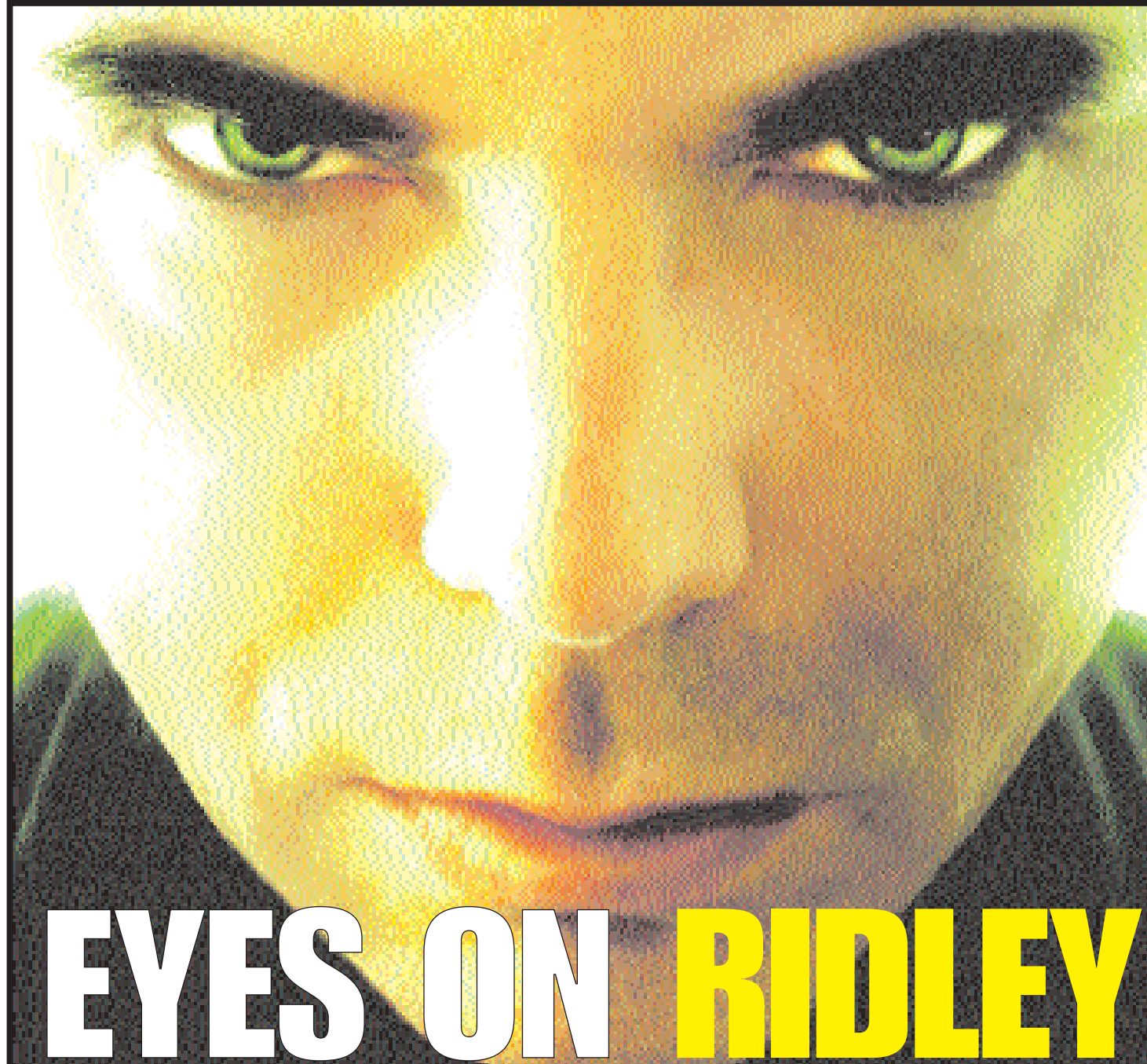
The plot revolves around four different mad scientists who have been abandoned by their master. The audience must choose which of the actors will venture out from the lair and help guide his decisions along the way.

"The concept is based on the malleability of memory and how our decisions are manipulated by others," Simon says.

"It's good fun, but its subject matter, examining how the brain works, is also deep. The goal is to have it all – cerebral, emotional and experiential theatre."

● *Hard Hearted Hannah and Other Stories*, by *Cartoon Da Salvo*, is at the Lyric Hammersmith Studio, Lyric Square, King Street, W6, until June 7. Mon-Sat, 8pm. £12/9 concs. Call 0871 2211 729. See www.lyric.co.uk and www.cartoondesalvo.com

● *The Bulging Seahorse and Other Grey Matters*, by Root Experience, is at the Barons Court Theatre, 28a Comeragh Road, W14, from May 27. Tues-Sat, 8pm, Sun 7pm. £12 /9 concs. Call 020 8932 4747 or see www.rootexperience.co.uk
Christian McLaughlin



EYES ON RIDLEY

ARE YOU afraid of heights? *Piranha Heights*, that is. It's the title of Philip Ridley's latest play and it's about to start a storm at the Soho Theatre.

Ridley's fearsome writing has proved too much for some audiences in the past, but to others he is one of Britain's most eagerly-awaited playwrights.

Lisa Goldman, artistic director of Soho Theatre and director of *Piranha Heights*, says: "There is a visceral thrill to Philip's writing. He's extraordinarily poetic yet the words he uses are those of the street."

CHRISTIAN MCLAUGHLIN:
What's the point of your art?

PHILIP RIDLEY:
To throw us back into the world with more feeling. One of today's great tragedies is our lack of sensitivity. You see kids showing each other video clips of beheadings on their mobiles phones. To cut through that with art, the stakes get raised higher and higher. That's why my work can be dark and shocking, but that doesn't make it negative or nihilistic. On

CHRISTIAN MCLAUGHLIN TALKS TO DEVILISH DRAMATIST PHILIP RIDLEY ABOUT HIS LATEST PRODUCTION, OPENING AT SOHO THEATRE

the contrary, all good art, separate from subject matter, is life-affirming. It should resensitise and make you see the world afresh. Like looking at a painting by Francis Bacon, it can help you put into feelings what had previously remained unexpressable.

CM: You trained as a performance artist, painter and photographer at Central St Martins; you've written poetry and children's books; you're an established film-maker – why is theatre still your favourite medium?

PR: Theatre will shut you in a room and lock the door – no other art form can do that.

CM: And the politics?
PR: It all relates back to the 'Great Deceiver', Tony Blair. I believe for the next 100 years we will be relating history back to the way he deliberately manipulated and lied to the British public.

In TV and film the viewer moves from scene to scene, but a play can unfold in real time, with real people, living real emotions right before your eyes. We forget how exhilarating that is, but the experience of watching flesh and blood go through intense emotions is second to none.

CM: What do you base your plays on?

PR: The personal and the political aspects are always deeply entangled. My last play, *Leaves of Grass*, was, on the surface, a domestic drama based on the destructive force of lies. *Piranha Heights* also looks at the state we are in. It's a debate about memory and creativity, history and delusion, and trying too find meaning in a world which has ceased to have meaning. I write a lot to try and connect with young people. Witnessing a disinterested youth upsets me, there's so much thwarted creativity.

CM: Audiences have been known to walk out of your plays, even your publisher once refused a text because it was too offensive – are you worried about criticism?

PR: It's not that I don't care, it's just that you can never guess what outrages people. Writing is a lot like dreaming. I have to be true to my mind's creativity. I just hope that people can take something from coming on the journey with me.

We're only beginning to feel the payback from the war in Iraq – it's like a punch, and our nerve endings are only just registering the blow.

CM: So what happens in *Piranha Heights*?

PR: The play is set in the top-floor flat of a tower block in east London. There are five characters – two middle-aged brothers and three younger characters which burst in later. They are all people who are clutching and grasping at ideas by which their lives can mean something. There's no interval, and the stage encircles the catastrophic cocktail that comes together.

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● *Piranha Heights*, by Philip Ridley, is at Soho Theatre, 21 Dean Street, W1D, until June 14. Mon-Sat 7.30pm, Sat mats 3.30pm. £10 until May 21, £17.50/15 concs until May 31, £22.50/20 concs until June 14. Call 08704 296 883 or see www.sohothetare.com

DIRECTOR: Lisa Goldman