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New play by Roland Lloyd-Parry.

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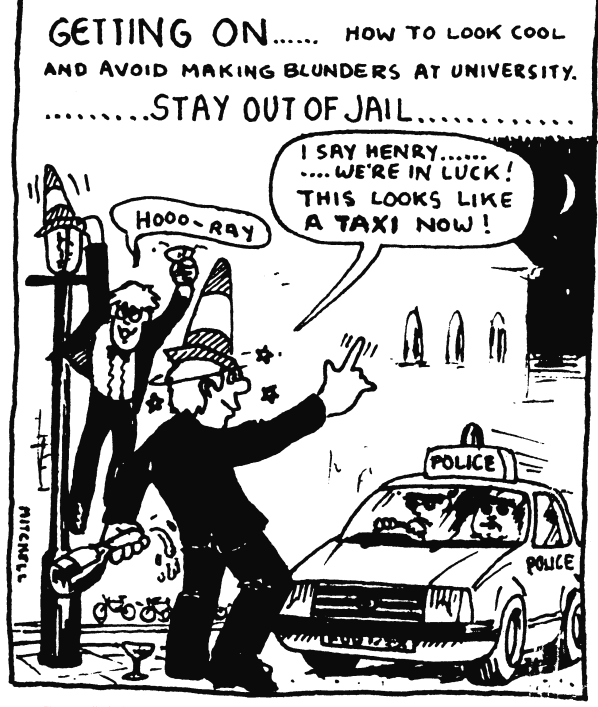
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MEETINGS

Thursday 19th October
SAXOPHONE WORKSHOP. Tim Whitehead / Lake Street Community Centre / 4.30pm / £10 / 245537
BOOK SIGNING / Michel Roux - Life is a Menu. / Blackwells, 50 Broad Street / 333694 / 7.30pm
THE IMPACT OF THE HUMAN GENOME ON SOCIETY / Gene Therapy - Promises or Problems? / Bernard Sunley Lecture Theatre, St Catherine's College / 5pm
DAVID STARKEY discusses Elizabeth / 6.30pm / Borders, Magdalen Street / 203902

LOST AND FOUND

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THEATRE REVIEW

Paris mon Moineau, three one-act French plays.
Burton Taylor Theatre until Saturday 21st

Paris mon moineau is a triple decker of French plays celebrating Paris, performed by native Parisians. The plan is to delve into different aspects of the French capital (the class system, bureaucracy and being in love) to examine various perspectives. With Piaf playing in the background, the dialogue is elegant and intelligent; all that is missing is the black coffee. The one act plays run as follows.
To make an audience laugh is tough. To make an English speaking audience laugh using the medium of a nineteenth century French play, *Un Jeune Homme Presse*, is a bit of an assault course. *Mad Frags and Englishmen* achieve this by using vaudeville physical theatre (with touches of Benny Hill) that is crisp and sharp. The structure of Eugene Labiche's play is crystal clear, and my non linguist pal managed to giggle at all the right places. The programme is a great help as it summarises the action: a young man is in a hurry, and buys the wrong fiancé with colourful consequences.
Le Bel Indifferent presents the crazy scenario of a bloke choosing to read the *Paris Soir* newspaper over telling his girlfriend, Edith Piaf, how he feels. Dora-Gabriela Ciausu excels as Piaf, delivering a stylish

monologue that takes us into the inner depths of her feelings. You get the impression that the unaffected boyfriend has heard it all before; but for me, the piece shows how beautiful female emotions are, especially when baklit in blue and spoken in French. There is a tension brooding in the air throughout Cocteau's play, and this keeps the audience unsure as to how it will end. Cocteau spout intimately with Piaf many times and these conversations form the basis of the script.
Arguably *Mad Frags* leave the best till last: *Le Guichet* by Tardieu is for anyone who feels despair when at the mercy of a person at a help desk. Perhaps the help desk personnel are ultimately in charge of our destiny? You decide. The piece is set in the 80s. With pink nail varnish and spiky hair Carina Morch (Director/Producer/Actor) explodes into action as the counter clerk and for my money creates a personality that could slide into *The Fast Show* any day.
The lighting is bold, creative and original. If you need to take a break from the "metro, boulot, dodo" treadmill of life, this show is for you.

Lita Doolan, 17 / 10 / 00

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THEATRE REVIEW

Vincent and Ginger, by Roland Lloyd Parry
Burton Taylor Theatre until Saturday 21st

In the wake of Ronnie Kray's death and the British public's continued fascination with gangster movies, *Vincent and Ginger* has chosen an apposite time to burst into the Burton Taylor. Roland Lloyd Parry's script stylishly dissects our fascination with the criminal underworld, cleverly juxtaposing the fundamentally normal relationship of Vincent and Ginger against the caricatured world of Ronny Lloyd and his porn racket. Increasingly seduced by the violence that Lloyd elicits from his innocent protégé, Vince begins to lose his true identity in the quagmire of gangster clichés.
Matt Board is well-cast as Vince - his natural delivery and nervous demeanour making his desire for his own 'gangster empire' easy to comprehend. Danni Mason gives us a rounded and realistic performance - her sexy comic scepticism, ultimately unable to pierce her boyfriend's new facade, giving way to a moving sense of disbelief and fear at what Vincent has become. The cleverly orchestrated dual-set accentuates the sense of contrast - the lovers' studenty flat merging with the office of 'Mad Ronny' (played with panache by Rich Hough) in a way that shows how easily the gap between normality and criminal power-games can be bridged. Tom Green is excellent as the cockney mobster Billy Braithwaite, and Gwyneth Glyn Evans is superb as his frustrated moll - her beautifully-timed attempted seduction of Vince is one of the show's highlights. Yet it is testament to the skill of Lloyd Parry's writing that the characters themselves recognise the stereotypes they fulfil - in fact, they are forced to cling to them because they now represent the only sense of identity available to them. This gives the piece a level of sophistication that moves it above the majority of the appalling Brit-flicks we see clogging up the cinemas.

Some of the scenes could do with a bit of cutting, and the dreadful fake blood should really be sorted out, but the use of space is effective, and Jim Roebuck's direction pacy and original. All in all, with a pumping and nicely-chosen soundtrack, *Vincent and Ginger* is well-worth seeing. You f**ing got that?
Rob Crumpton, 17 / 10 / 00

GIGS + NIGHTLIFE

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OPERA REVIEW

The Queen of Spades, Tchaikovsky
Welsh National Opera at the Apollo Theatre, 17th & 20th October

This was, in every aspect, a most dazzling performance. Both the audience and the company seemed uplifted by the brilliance of Tchaikovsky's music, and of Richard Jones's production. The WNO's *Queen of Spades* is exhilarating, and breathes new life into Tchaikovsky's seldom performed opera.
The Queen of Spades is a story of obsession and of a descent into madness. Herman, described by the conductor Vladimir Jurowski as "a romantic Nietzschean anti-hero" begins the opera obsessed by a young Petersburg woman, and indulges in the romantic posturing of an unrequited lover. However, his attention shifts from Liza to her ageing guardian, the Countess, when he hears a rumour that she knows a secret formula for winning at cards, imparted to her by the Count St-Germain in her youth. The obsession to learn this secret and to become a rich man at cards without ever having to take a risk becomes all-consuming, and Herman begins to lose his reason.
The curtain rises to reveal a huge image of a young woman's face. A second image of the same face, but as an old woman, is then lowered in front of the first; both then rise to reveal the setting for the beginning of the libretto. This enigmatic opening introduced the weighty presence of the Countess (the "Queen of Spades") to the production from the very beginning, with a bold imagination combined with a subtle suggestion that characterised the whole of the performance.
The set design was an integral part of this production, creating a real sense of place and atmosphere. It was technically very impressive, managing to draw the audience into intimate scenes in Liza's or the Countess's bedrooms, and to distance them from the crowd scenes outside, and, most stunningly, from the scene of Herman's madness, in which he sees the ghost of the dead Countess. When the curtain rises for Act 3 scene 1, the audience finds itself looking down from above on the distracted Herman in bed - a stroke of genius by John MacFarlane that alienates the madman from our sympathies, and his mental state from the realm of our experience.
The use of colour in the production was stylish and powerful. The chorus was for the most part dressed in dark greys, giving a sense of uniformity and oppression. The crowd gave an impression of the city which is the setting for *The Queen of Spades* - the Northern city of stone, St Petersburg; a setting for many tales of madness in Russian Literature. The horror of the lone individual unaccompanied by the city was powerfully suggested by Liza, in pink, waiting and watching for Herman on the riverbank, desperately searching for his familiar face among the grey figures relentlessly sweeping past.
Above all the music was stunning. Not having heard the opera before, I was not expecting such drama and emotional intensity. Herman (Vitali Tarschenko, Bolshoi Opera, Moscow) and Liza (Susan Chilcott) gave star performances, supported by a really strong chorus. WNO perform *The Queen of Spades* once more at the Apollo, on Friday; it cannot be recommended enough.
Emily Hardiment, 17 / 10 / 00

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