

Pop

Festival No 6

Portmeirion, Gwynedd

★★★★☆

If spending a weekend roaming around a Welsh model village built to resemble the Italian Riviera were not weird enough, watching the former snooker world champion Steve Davis discuss his love of psychedelic rock in a grand piazza tipped the experience into the surreal.

For six years Festival No 6 has had bills as bizarre and inventive as its location, Portmeirion, best known as the set for the 1960s TV series *The Prisoner*. Acclaim and awards were quick to come, but flooding last year and complaints about overcrowding forced an overhaul. The good news was that a cut in capacity from 15,000 to 12,000 resulted in free flow through the village, while tonnes of wood chip in the fields prevented mud becoming a problem, despite the downpours on Saturday. Festival No 6 was back to its bonkers best.

Davis DJ'ed on Friday evening. In truth, he twiddled a few knobs while a sidekick did the real work. Elsewhere, serious men made serious music — among them an emotionally charged Steve Mason and the headliners Mogwai — but it was Charlotte Church, in a leotard and a floral headdress, who got the party started with a raucous set of singalong karaoke covers that for many remained the weekend's highlight.

The biggest crowds after dark were back in the piazza for the 60-strong Brythoniaid Male Voice Choir, whose sumptuous covers included Elbow's *One Day Like This* and Rag'n'Bone Man's *Skin* and whose conductor, John Eifion Jones, could have doubled as a stand-up act. He was certainly more entertaining than the pretentious poets who were mostly ignored during the day. Ditto some of the street entertainers, although a torch parade and human log flume were fun.

On Saturday we saw Manchester's Cabbage cause pogoing chaos and the 20-year-old Ten Tonnes coax out the sun with a superb set that suggested he could follow in the footsteps of his famous big brother, George Ezra. Yet nothing was as bewitching as watching two men in a tent at lunchtime play the soundtrack to a 45-minute-long Moomins film live. Armed with whistles, keyboards, a mini accordion and an iPad-turned-theremin, they beautifully captured the maverick spirit of a festival that desperately deserves better weather.

Lisa Verrico

Visual art

Charles March: Seascape

Hamilton's Gallery, W1

★★★★☆

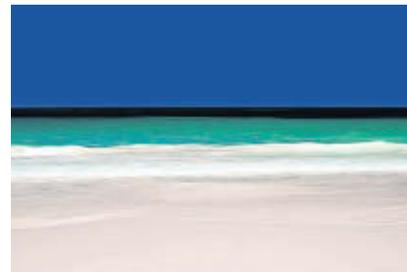
I have never been to the Bahamas — I don't have that kind of bank balance — so the sheer eye-popping vivid insanity of the colours of the sea and sky captured by Charles March's large-scale photographs are, frankly, slightly unbelievable. Pinks in the sand? Turquoise skies? Yet they're not, apparently, mucked about with at all.

In this series of seascapes, taken over a period of four years on one short stretch of the Atlantic coast off the Bahamian island of Eleuthera, March attempts to capture not just the sea, but also the experience of seeing it. The sea is always moving, changing colour, darkening and lightening the sand as it shifts up and down it.

March has been interested in photography since the age of 12. He was an apprentice to Stanley Kubrick then worked for 20 years photographing advertising campaigns for companies such as Benson & Hedges and Levi's.

His recent work has focused on landscapes — noirish, blurry images of trees that you might fancy you were seeing through the window of a moving car. He uses the same technique here, extending the exposure to a few seconds and moving the camera with a short, fluid sweep to soften the picture and heighten the sense of movement.

I found echoes of abstract expressionism almost as much as the



Charles March's 2015-03-31 14:20:04

work of the impressionists that March claims are his inspiration for these photographs, but also (and this may be my age) I couldn't help, in the face of some of the sunnier scenes, but be reminded of what my brain dimly tells me are 1980s Martini adverts.

artsfirst night

Pop

Dave Stewart and Friends

O₂ Empire, W12

★★★★☆

Given the who's who of luminaries with whom the Eurythmics maestro Dave Stewart has collaborated, a 65th birthday gig promising special guests from his four-decade career certainly had compelling potential. Could there be a Jagger, a Petty, a Nicks, surely a Lennox in the lineup? Ah, well, all too much to ask, but this rock'n'roll circus of an evening wasn't without its surprises and classy cameos.

Stewart's glittery guitar strap embossed with "Ringmaster" seemed an apt description of this mercurial figure, his first trick simply being to remind everyone that, yes, he does sing. A succession of mid-tempo, warm-up rockers, taken from his recent musical forays in Nashville, were performed with relaxed elan by his band, Stewart nonchalantly showcasing his guitar chops from under his brown trilby.

Yet the undoubted highlights came when his team-mates shared the spotlight. An almighty *Here Comes the Rain Again*, featuring some powerhouse wailing from the backing singer Holly Quin Ankrah, finally got the attention of punters apparently more interested in socialising at the bar, while Candy Dulfer's sultry turn on the 1990 instrumental *Lily Was Here* was a masterclass in sassy sax.

A more audible raconteur than Stewart was Bob Geldof, who explained why he is dubbed "Raymond Doom" to Stewart's "Dick Doom" between their minor 1986 hit *This is the World Calling* ("a No 1 in Denmark!" Geldof quipped) and a transcendent *Don't Come Around Here No More* (co-written by Stewart for Tom Petty). Diane Birch and the London Community Gospel Choir helped the heavenly chorus of *There Must Be an Angel* to soar, reminding us of the sheer quality of Stewart's songwriting at its best, while *Missionary Man*, sung by the steel-lunged Australian Jon Stevens, was offered further might by the Blondie drummer Clem Burke.

But no Annie Lennox for the *Sweet Dreams* encore? If that felt like a birthday cake missing some crucial icing, the audience didn't seem to mind as the talent crowded on stage led a rousing singalong of the immortal hit. Which only leaves room to say one thing: happy birthday, Mr Stewart.

James Jackson



Nick Devlin as Vladimir, Patrick O'Donnell as Estragon and Paul Kealyn as Pozzo acquit themselves well

A masterpiece no more

This landmark drama by Samuel Beckett doesn't stand the test of time, says Dominic Maxwell

Theatre

Waiting for Godot

Arts Theatre, WC2

★★★★☆

Tate Britain celebrates the sculptor Rachel Whiteread

First Night, main paper

When you go to the theatre, it's possible to get a double dose of having a bad time. First you find yourself

thoroughly uninterested in what you've paid good money to see. Second you feel that you have failed in some way by feeling like that about a show that may — like Samuel Beckett's breakthrough play, back at this theatre for the first time since Peter Hall gave it its English-language premiere here in 1955 — be a cornerstone of our culture. "I'm bored and I'm thick," you think, wondering why you didn't stay home and watch *Doctor Foster* on iPlayer instead.

There's nothing wrong with theatre that asks you to do some work, but I've always felt that *Waiting for Godot* is plenty of work for little reward. It's my least favourite masterpiece. And while there is nothing wildly wrong with this revival from the director Peter Reid for the Irish company AC Productions, it's accomplished rather than distinguished. All its parts are in decent working order. Everyone acquits themselves well. Yet only occasionally do its characters spring into enough life that you think of them as, well, characters rather than pawns on Beckett's absurdist chessboard.

Godot is a play in which "nothing happens, twice", as the Irish literary critic Vivian Mercier so unimprovably put it. Our bowler-hatted tramps,

Estragon (Patrick O'Donnell) and Vladimir (Nick Devlin), hover about on a stage filled only with a rock downstage and a hatstand-sized tree upstage. They are waiting for the unseen titular character — God? Death? Insert own interpretation here — who, not-much-of-a-spoiler alert, doesn't arrive. Twice. Along the way they are waylaid by the arrival of Pozzo (a bravura, country squire-ish Paul Kealyn) pulling the albino Lucky (Paul Elliot) on a rope.

It all perks up a little when the emphasis is on the tramps' characters rather than their situation. The second act, in which O'Donnell and Devlin have space to develop a rapport, moves a bit faster than the more crowded first act. And any critique the nonplussed Becketeer may have is parried by the characters' witty comments on the pointlessness of it all. "That passed the time," says Devlin's hale Vladimir. "It would have passed in any case," says O'Donnell's more whimsical Estragon.

Yet all the form-bending in this meditation on meaning has now permeated so deep into the culture that the original is hard to endure. Its modernism has become moribund. Other Becketts (*Happy Days*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Endgame*) retain more allure, while this demolition job on convention has nothing solid left to smash. Or am I just a bit thick? **Box office: 020 7836 8463, to Sept 23**