

LEISURE

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A socially-distanced night of Seventies fun

Abigail's Party Four stars

Brighton Open Air Theatre

Thursday August 20

DANCING around your lounge to Donna Summer and Demis Roussos while eating pineapple and cheese on a cocktail stick was the perfect way to spend a summer evening in the late Seventies.

Experience it in 2020 with the Sarah Mann Company's version of Abigail's Party.

Set in Beverly's garden rather than the usual setting of her lounge, this production shines a light on the issues and aspirations of the emerging middle class in Britain in the late 1970s.

Brighton Open Air Theatre has finally opened their doors as one of the first places allowed to show theatrical performances.

Bigger venues are still yet to find appropriate ways to open so it's grassroots places like the open air theatre which need our support in these very trying times... especially as they do not receive government funding.

Though the social distancing could have been better organised within the audience, it proved to be a wonderful backdrop to the adapted Abigail's Party.

Flamboyantly gliding on to stage, Beverly, played by Pip Henderson, immediately grasps everyone's attention and laughter from the crowd ensues.

With a flair for ad-lib reactions to things going wrong, Henderson is quick to style out breaking her shoe, ripping her dress and being interrupted by a noisy plane flying above.

The show's staging is kept minimal and nostalgic, maintaining the play's iconic shelving unit, a beaded curtain, record player and, of course, a stack of records.

By moving the setting of the show



Abigail's Party at the Brighton Open Air Theatre

to Beverly's garden, the audience is immediately a part of the action; toasting the party-goers, sharing a laugh and even having a say in the

music.

Overall, the adaptation of Mike Leigh's classic play is interesting, entertaining and still feels surpris-

ingly relevant to a modern audience.

Most importantly, the play makes for an evening of fun.

So pack a picnic and head to the Brighton Open Air Theatre.

Jodie Allan



Terry Pack's Bonsai Trees Three stars

Brighton Open Air Theatre

Sunday August 16

TERRY Pack is fond of referring to his Trees project as "an unfeasibly large ensemble".

It usually comprises of about 30 musicians. Even in its Bonsai form it can feature about half that number.

On this occasion it was reduced to a rump of four.

When the oppressively hot weather broke, bringing rolling thunder over Brighton Open Air Theatre, most of the band, including the entire rhythm section, packed up and went home.

The audience, however, was not so easily deterred.

Their reward was to enjoy Tarik Mecci on trombone, Charlotte Glasson flute and soprano sax, Andy Pickett on tenor sax and Pack himself on bass calling numbers, trading four-bar solos and improvising around each other in the finest jazz tradition.

Pack kicked things off by funk up the time signature of Herbie Hancock's Cantaloupe Island from 4/4 to 12/8 time, allowing each of the musicians to flex their hard-bop and modal muscles.

Charlotte Glasson called up the next number, Sonny Rollins's Tender Madness, setting up soulful interplay between her alto phrasing and Pickett's fine tenor tone.

The closing number, Pack's own tune entitled Trees, called for the audience to supply the back beat in lieu of the band's drum-

mer... which they did with fine timing.

Earlier Dr Savage and The Fat Tuesday Second Line brought Louisiana to Brighton by way of the nine-piece ensemble's Hastings base.

Dr Savage channelled Howlin' Wolf, Captain Beefheart and Dr John to inject new wave classics such as The Clash's Rock the Casbah. Perfectly Grilled, a number composed by sax player and band leader Rob Lee, entirely evoked crawfish and shrimp smouldering on a summer barbecue.

John Keenan