

rods (A Day In The Life, ITV). This was all frightfully jolly, as Desmond welcomed at the wit and wisdom of the "green men" who greet customers at the door and answer questions about everything under the Knightsbridge sun, admitted the £20 million spending spree which Mr Al Fayed has undertaken in the Egyptian Room, and generally gazed in wide-eyed wonderment at the food hall, the toy department where you can buy a model sports car in British racing green for £20,000, and even at the complex video surveillance system in the basement.

Last week, Desmond did a snow-job on Docklands, and this series is shaping up as his bid to win the Golden Siskin for PR Man of the Year.

There was also a distinct undertone of self-congratulation in World In Action — 30 Years (ITV), as assorted alumni of Granada's investigative institution, from David Flowright to Margaret Beckett, ruminated about the show's finest half-hours. The programme was merely a barrage of clips with bits of talking in between, but glimpses of the Grosvenor Square riots, John Pilger in Vietnam, Andrew Jennings pointing after jogging policeman Tony Laundy who was supposedly unfit for duty, and Matthew Farris trying to survive on the sole in Newcastle left you wondering if we would ever see World In Action's like again in the new age of casino TV.

THEATRE

The Game of Love and Chance
Cottesloe

Michael Billington

LAST time we saw Marivaux's glittering masterpiece, *The Game of Love and Chance*, it was played, somewhat eccentrically, by a Paris-based company in monkey-masks. Mike Alfreds and Neil Bartlett in their new production for Cambridge Theatre Company and Cottesloe, now at the Cottesloe, don't go that far. But, by swathing the play in Marxist high camp, they undercut Marivaux's narrative speed and psychological power.

Written in 1750, it remains a classic comedy about the intersection of sex and class. Silvia, a society lady anxious to get a peek at the husband proposed by her father, swaps places with her maid. What she doesn't know is that her suitor, for exactly the same reason, has changed clothes with his servant, Arlecchino.

Marivaux exploits this fearful symmetry with delicious irony. Both high and low-born fall instantly in love: the irony is that all the partners believe they are attracted by people way below or above their station.

I see it as a delicately subversive play that argues that passion is stronger than reason, love larger than class. But Marivaux's pre-Pirandellian fascination with role-playing is already complex enough. To this, however, the production and Bartlett's translation add yet another layer of theatrical artifice.

Updating is fine, but characters comment on the action, are seen making up at their dressing tables and Silvia's brother is turned into a competentless Coward utters self-referential lines like "Funny how eloquent cheap emotions can be". Not only is the lily needlessly painted; it also becomes difficult to make the transition from high camp to genuine emotional pain.

Oddly enough the servants come off infinitely better than the masters. Marcello Magni, Complicite's resident balding clown, turns Arlecchino into a figure of irresistible

Grouchesque scenery forever studding across the floor on his knees while ordering bouquets of roses. He is ideally partnered by Caroline Quentin's Maid who feverishly manipulates his wedding tackle while firmly protesting her modesty. But fine actors though she is, Maggie Steed as Silvia is left with the almost impossible task of moving from vain posser to distraught emotional victim and Stefan Bedarzynsk as her brother's friend into strutting and dressing-gowned attitudes and strutting sub-Noel ditties on the piano. Private Lives may indeed owe much to this masterly quartet. But Marivaux, I submit, deserves to be treated as something more than a Cowardly romp.

FOLK

Roy Harper
Bloomsbury Theatre
Robin Denslow

ROY Harper had a rotten year and he doesn't care who knows it. His long time career ran off with the punk fiddler Nigel Kennedy, and his latest batch of songs, which deal with this loss, are not too easily available because his record label has just gone bust in a year when Dylan was feted in Madison Square Gardens for his longevity, poor old Roy Harper, who was counted as "the man to watch" as "Dylan" back in the 60s, seemed headed for oblivion yet again.

Those who have observed the Harper phenomenon over the past 25 years should know that it's at moments like these that the ultimate hippy folk survivor is at his best (just as he is likely to self-destruct when things are going well). He may appear to be wildly unfashionable at the moment, but as the 60s ebbs creeps back in, it seems that Harper has retained his cult following, as shown by the scenes at the Bloomsbury Theatre, where he gave two shows at the weekend.

His audience is still the "folky student population" he sang about in the 60s, and as soon as he appeared a devoted follower clambered on stage to offer him the first of many exotic cigarettes. Harper never became a major star, despite the attention of famous friends from Pink Floyd or Led Zeppelin, largely because he always refused to give conventional concerts. He always rambled on and on between songs, and that's still the case, especially on an evening when he starts by announcing "I'm suitably out of it already".

But the quality of his playing and singing — when he eventually gets round to it — has actually improved over the years, and he's still one of the few songwriters we have who dares to be both distinctly English and comic. At the Bloomsbury he embarked on one of the painted and remarkably honest new songs about his personal life. Next To Me, gave up on it in despair, and quickly retreated back to the 60s and You Don't Need Money.

From then on he swapped cheerfully between early favourites and more recent social comment, helped considerably by the arrival of the young Nick Harper, who not only kept up with his dad but added some remarkably inspired and rousing semi-acoustic lead guitar.

By the second half, when there was thankfully far more playing than talking or smoking, they had shaken new life into oldies like Highway Blues, given a noisy imitation of Pink Floyd on the new The Fourth World, and revived the still-charming and lyrical When An Old Cricketer Leaves The Crease. Harper is as unpredictable as ever, but on this showing he actually deserves a new lease of life — thanks mainly to his latest disasters and his highly impressive sidekick.

Billington Game Of Love

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ianharris
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