

NEVER mind the Dome, how about an easy-to-learn world language for the new millennium? British theatre's antic visionary Ken Campbell has translated Shakespeare's *Macbeth* into Pidgin, the simple patois derived by enslaved antipodean island tribesmen from their British captors in the 1860s, in a bid to promote it as a universal lingua franca. The resulting performance is the kind of anarchic, erratically brilliant and downright strange event one expects of Campbell — a hilarious diversion for those who have a working knowledge of *Macbeth*, incomprehensible for those who don't.

Campbell kicks off with an informal discourse on the history and structure of a language that has virtually no grammar, where the phrase "I am here" translates simply as "mi ia". Pidgin is so simple, he says, that eight of his actors — including his voluptuous daughter and co-director Daisy — have memorised the entire text, so we can choose our own "Makbed". That done, (we selected the mad-haired Roddy McDevitt, with Daisy as Lady M), the male actors uncover scrawny white bodies adorned with tribal paintings and genital sheaths, and the cast blunder through most of acts I and II on a bare stage, accompanied by musical whoops and plonks and Ken's explanatory interruptions. This takes about 20 minutes, then Ken suggests an interval and both cast and audience head for the bars.

This shambolic start establishes the informal atmosphere, and gives one a chance to assimilate the language. The limited vocabulary and cut-and-paste constructions of Pidgin — especially the indiscriminate use of "fala" to denote any person or

Raw method in the madness

Pidgin Macbeth ★
Piccadilly Theatre

NICK CURTIS

thing — wreaks havoc with Shakespeare's verse but throws up numerous poetic constructions, and even more humorous ones. Banquo's speculation about whether the three witches truly exist becomes the beautifully economical "trifala, trifala?" and Lady Macbeth describes her "woman's breasts" as "titi blong mi". Mistakes, deaths and disasters are all reduced to the deliciously evocative word "bagarap".

The story flows more freely in the

second half, and turns out to be very funny and surprisingly easy to follow, as long as you know the plot already. It actually feels oddly subversive to collude with a bunch of half-naked nutters on this bizarre, free-form experiment. As a Campbell fan who shares his fascination with the shameful genesis and current application of Pidgin, I may be too forgiving of the show's ramshackle nature. This is seat-of-the-pants theatre, as raw and disorganised as it is unusual. If that sounds alluring, go along: but please, bone up on Shakespeare's original first.

● *In repertory. Box office: 0171 369 1734.*

Sheer magnificance shines through the grey sheen

RIGHT now, London cannot hear enough Shostakovich. The reputation of the Russian composer has never been greater with the British public. He can fill the Barbican twice with a single programme. What audiences like about his music is the absence of what Anthony Payne once called "the bullshit factor". He never wrote a note that did

London Symphony Orchestra
★★★
Barbican

RICK JONES

his sleeve, but it was a big heart. No one interprets his music with more depth than his young friend Rostropovich, who conducted the London Symphony



Is nothing sacred? Ken Campbell leads the anarchy

first so that we were robbed of the opportunity to feel as short-changed as did those 1946 Muscovites, who knew the sombre, hour-long Symphony No 8. Ninth Symphonies were supposed to be big. Russia expected fireworks but instead heard a jaunty piccolo with a tune like a playground taunt. Rostropovich conducted a gripping performance here. Faint mockery

black chill of the war years. Nothing was as desolate as the cor anglais solo hard on the first movement's thrilling sequence of explosive chords and icy percussion. Rostropovich sought the player out during the applause and kissed her twice. The other soloists only got a wave. In the second, the piccolo shone again. The third belonged to the grey toned vio-

Curtis Standard Pidgin



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