

Except Action Spectacular can play. Bassist Paul Flaherty stands sideways, rocking backwards and forwards, a danger to both himself and guitarist Martin Hiron, who's perilously close to him. Paul Galpin adds some Happy Mondays-style psychedelia with his keyboards — and it's in this stoner's paradise that the band work best.

The problem is that they're besotted with their record collections and too eager to please too many people. As the laid-back charm of Music in the Sun gives way to the embittered rant of Half Empty Bottle, Action Spectacular cease to be interesting, despite an on-off light show and some impassioned playing. Although the punky Roxy Music will go down well with the cheap cider on student night, it's already past its sell-by date. Muir clearly believes his band are the future of rock'n'roll. But they're too much like the Stone Roses' second album for that.

Betty Clarke

Theatre

Spirits from South Africa

Crossing

Riverside Studios, London

★★★

Few people in Britain know more of South African theatre than the work of Johannesburg's Market Theatre and the apartheid liberation plays of Athol Fugard. This is an enjoyable drama written by the country's most prolific contemporary playwright, Reza de Wet, its subject the liberation of the soul.

It is 1930. In the isolated north of South Africa two sisters, the severe Hermien and hump-backed Sussie, live in a cottage by a fast-flowing river, offering travellers refuge and warning of the dangers of trying to cross the river when it is high. The sisters see it as their duty to retrieve and bury the bodies of those who fail to take heed, not least because they are haunted by the restless spirits of those who do not find rest in a named grave.

So it proves with Ezmeralda, the beautiful, unstable assistant of a hypnotist, The Maestro, who drags her unwillingly around the country putting on shows for the rough mining communities of "diggers" who are chasing their own dreams of gold. Twenty years previously, the pair stopped by the cottage on a wild night, ignored Hermien's advice not to cross the river and disappeared into the water. Now Ezmeralda's waiting is keeping the sisters awake at night.

De Wet's play shows how the past influences the present as the sisters' seance raises the spirits of the dead and different variations on the theme of love, dependency, hate and the desire to escape are played out by the four characters.

One of the best things about the evening is the way in which de Wet makes the characters so multi-faceted. The Maestro is truly monstrous, and yet in touching Sussie's hump, a deformity much despised by her sister, and telling her "you have wings there, but very tightly folded", he offers both the kindness and the idea of



David Hare's new play, *My Zinc Bed*, at the Royal Court, London Photograph: Henrietta Butler

escape that have been lacking in her life.

This is a domestic drama — sometimes, in this somewhat uneven production, something of a melodrama — and some of

the play's meanings remain obstinately hidden. But de Wet writes with tremendous power, creating a world both familiar and out-of-kilter, ordinary and magical, and whose surface is

like that of a deceptively calm river under which terrible currents rage.

Lyn Gardner

Until September 30. Box office: 020-8237 1111.