

DIARY

A tale of two marches and two revolutionary music acts

MAY DAY greetings to one and all, and all the best to those of you marching today celebrating the great traditions of the British labour movement — solidarity, inclusiveness and the fight for social justice.

Sadly, we had rather a contrasting march last Sunday in Brighton — the so-called March for England. Ostensibly a celebration of St George's Day, in reality about a hundred scowling bigots — hardly any of them from Brighton — shuffling through our peace-loving, diverse community while about 1,000 Brightonians made it very clear to them that they weren't welcome.

Well done to all those who showed up.

Events surrounding the march gave



new meaning to the phrase “anti-fascist elements.”

First, the actual seafront road collapsed in protest at the prospect of them walking on it, leaving a big hole. Then it absolutely pissed down all through the march — and the sun came out the moment they had left!

Although as an atheist Seagulls fan I'm really not bothered about saints of any sort — though I think Lallana, Shaw and maybe Lambert should get

a chance in the World Cup.

I have no problem if people want to have a march for St George's Day — he's very much a symbol of the multicultural country we've become, being the patron saint of Moscow and Georgia as well as England and also honoured in Bulgaria, Hungary, Portugal and Palestine. And I most certainly will be supporting England during the World Cup.

But why the hell is it that, while the Welsh, the Irish and the Scots can celebrate their national days in a happy, inclusive way, we English have always seemed to have a minority who use it as an excuse for drunken violence and bigotry?

Nothing to do with the England I want to live in, that's for sure.

The Saturday before, I was at the

Shepherd's Bush Empire in London at a sold-out gig celebrating 30 years of The Men They Couldn't Hang.

For me it's one of the great injustices of the history of contemporary music that this inspirational band have never really got the recognition they deserve. Never heard them? Do yourself a favour and put The Colours — Men They Couldn't Hang into Google. I think you might have a very pleasant surprise.

And a couple of days ago I was heading for the Albert in Brighton with great anticipation, looking forward to seeing an up-and-coming duo called Sleaford Mods.

They sound like literally nothing else on the planet — an incredibly sharp and awesomely shouty ranting poet telling it precisely how it is in

screwed-up, divided Britain in 2014, backed by his mate dishing out hammering semi-tunes which absolutely complement the words.

No, they're not the Small Faces and they're not for the faint hearted or for people who like nice, comfortable music — there's far too much of that around right now.

They are the most exciting thing I have heard in years — but I didn't get to hear them last Saturday because frontman Jason didn't turn up. It had better be a one-off, because I reckon they are going to be huge.

I was very disappointed, but I did get a well received 20-minute stand in set and a new poem out of it, so all's well that ends well...

■ www.attilastockbroker.com

LEONCE AGBODELOU'S, Fredy Alzate's and Mario Macilau's well-considered works contrast with the many superficial ones in the Saatchi Gallery's Pangaea exhibition.

But it is David Koloane's works which shine with the rare glow of truth which will stand the test of time.

Born in 1938 Koloane grew up in the Johannesburg township of Soweto. When his tailor father had a stroke, as the eldest son, he had to leave high school early to support his siblings by doing various jobs.

Although he'd been drawing since schooldays and had discovered some modern artists through his fondness for reading, he tells me: “I was a late starter. I never knew that black people could become artists.” A school friend widened his horizons: “I was amazed to discover that black people were allowed in art galleries.”

He began studying art in his mid-thirties with Bill Ainslie, a white, humanitarian artist who founded private art classes to circumvent apartheid laws. This gave Koloane a solid visual education and the intellectual, psychological and physical space in which to develop as an artist.

Group discussions of originals donated by Anthony Caro also gave Ainsley's students valuable access to contemporary international art, then restricted in South Africa by the anti-apartheid cultural boycott.

When Koloane got a grant to attend a New York workshop in the mid-'80s, getting travel documents proved so difficult that he arrived very late “because the authorities couldn't decide on my nationality. They finally wrote down ‘indeterminate’.” Although he now laughs about this and later managed to rejoin the workshop, such asides speak volumes of the obstacles he faced.

Apartheid is at the root of his work. His subject is urban life as experienced by black Africans. Modernism frees him to express oppression and resistance with a rare passion and subtlety which avoids simplistic didacticism.

He conveys the multilayered moods of city life with joyful marks from paint-laden brush and fluid oil pastels which echo the inventiveness of free jazz. Layered and repeated forms suggest insistent energy.

At first sight some works such as Mass Movement III appear almost abstract. Its surface is attacked with furious energy by bold dashes, scratches, squiggles and scribbles. But look again and a solid composition emerges, as do allusions to tightly



INTERVIEW

A rare glow of truth

CHRISTINE LINDEY speaks to David Koloane whose remarkable works are on show at the Saatchi Gallery

packed, anonymous figures hurrying through sharp-edged city streets. An ambience of menace mixed with collective resistance unfolds.

Works such as The Night Has A Thousand Eyes are more colourful and explicit. This painting speaks of danger, solidarity and defiance. A township clearing is packed with an outdoor gathering of an Afro-Christian dissenting faith — which opposed the established churches — its participants surrounded by dogs, owls and a cat. Yellow eyes gleam more brightly than the pale, full moon.

Koloane recalls that Soweto's residents called it Dark City because there was no electricity. Asked how people found their way around he replies: “People got used to mov-

ing around in total darkness. Even the children played in the dark, you could hear them screaming and laughing.”

Packs of malnourished feral dogs plagued the townships. Contrasting them with the white South Africans'

pampered pets Koloane sees them as metaphors for the cruelties of apartheid.

The simplified forms and diversities of scale in this painting appear deceptively child-like but they are based on detailed observation and are carefully composed into a strong horizontal and vertical framework.

An understanding of anatomy underlies the expressiveness of his figures. Movement is implied by the turn of a head or a raised hip — unbridled human warmth is conveyed by the humped curve of a woman's back as she hugs her neighbour tightly.

Years of life drawing inform Koloane's work. He recalls the initial shock and embarrassment of his first life class in Ainsley's school. While this is a memory shared by most ex-art students, for Koloane there was the added real danger of being a black man in the presence of the naked, white female model in apartheid Johannesburg.

The human figure is central to his work. He explains: “Work has always revolved around the human condition, because of the oppression under apartheid.”

Taking his social responsibility seriously, Koloane has supported others by teaching in township schools and becoming head of the Fine Art section of the Federated Union of Black Artists.

He co-founded artists' group studios so that black artists can develop their potential by getting the space in which to work — something almost impossible in small township homes — and workshops in which to exchange ideas.

Koloane's sincere, poetic works are visually exhilarating while conveying serious meanings. Born of oppression, they bear witness to social and political injustices while expressing respect for collective resistance. His work's subtlety of touch and colour is diminished in reproductions. Do go to see the originals if you can.

■ Pangaea: New Art from Africa and Latin America, Saatchi Gallery, ends August 31, free



EXHILARATING: The Night Has A Thousand Eyes (middle) and (above) Mass Movement III