



Olympic artist in residence Neville Gable's *Freeze Frame*, a re-creation of Georges Seurat's masterpiece – a radical image of working-class people.

**T**RUMPESTER Hugh Masekela, who recently wowed audiences in London with his charismatic playing at the Barbican, takes pride of place in the line-up as part of the BT River of Music. He also draws together singers from all the countries that surround SA to take the Africa Stage in July. An integral part of the event, Masekela has been instrumental in organising this weekend of free music that takes place in the heart of the Docklands, with bands from all over Africa.

In the rest of the line-up, super-band Staff Benda collaborate with Zao to bridge the gap across the Congo River between their home towns of Kinshasa and Brazzaville respectively; artists from North Africa play under the title of The Invisible Republic of JuJu; Muntu Valdo partners musicians from Central Africa; Zimbabwean-born Shingai Shoniwa oozes cool along with the indie-rock and soul band The Noisettes.

Can Themba's achingly sad SA fable, *The Suit*, is performed at the Young Vic until mid-June in a production directed by the legendary Peter Brook. It forms part of a unique collaboration of eight top London venues and international producers to showcase the different cultural communities in London.

Themba's short story, adapted

## Summer of arts in LONDON

*South Africans have carved their niche in the cultural festival that forms part of London's 2012 Olympics. Nushin Elahi looked at a few events that celebrate London in the world, and the world in London.*

for the stage by Barney Simon and Mothobi Mutloatse, was first performed at the Market Theatre before touring the world for many years in a French adaptation.

Brook returns to this delicate tale, using music ranging from Schubert to Miriam Makeba.

It's the story of a devoted husband who returns home to find his adored wife with another man. The lover escapes, leaving his suit behind, and the husband has his revenge by making her treat the suit as an honoured guest.

Nonhlanhla Kheswa, who plays



Nonhlanhla Kheswa as Tilly in *The Suit*, Can Temba's bittersweet South African fable.

the errant wife, is a Joburg township girl who got her first break singing in *The Lion King* on Broadway at the age of 16. Not only does she have a glorious voice, but she looks gorgeous, too. Her acting skills, however, don't serve the play well, and we never feel the anguish of the humiliated wife until right at the end. By contrast, narrator Jared McNeill and William Nadylam, as the husband, tease out all the humour, and make the bitter hurt and silent rage palpable.

The play opens with enormous promise but leaves you feeling it hasn't quite delivered. The music and singing are wonderful, and the vignette of the vibrant township life beautifully drawn, but the whole feels a little slight. Perhaps as a double bill with another short play it would have been more memorable. As it stands, the fussing with the tea party, drawing audience members onto the stage and changing hats, brings a wonderful levity that the savage ending undercuts, but it feels as if Brook is trying to make this whimsical story into more than it actually is.

On the Olympic site, another South African has been making his presence felt as the Olympic artist in residence. Neville Gable, who studied in London, produced a variety of artworks and projects during his 15-month residency, responding to the physical changes of the site and the huge range of

jobs, skills and personalities that have delivered the project. One of the most remarkable is a reinterpretation of a National Gallery painting by Georges Seurat, the masterpiece *Bathers at Asnières*.

The modern photograph, titled *Freeze Frame*, re-creates the 1884 pointillist painting's composition, with the characters inhabiting the image taken from across the Olympic Park, including landscape gardeners, designers and security staff. The image reflects the range of tasks, diversity and skills of those delivering the Olympic venues and infrastructure.

Gable said: "There is an obvious and surprising physical connection between the two landscapes, but the concept for the work explores the more striking similarities between the social and political contexts of the two. When Seurat painted (this) it was seen as a radical image, based as it was on working class people in an urban park, in an industrial landscape. Seurat was one of the first artists to celebrate the ordinary working man in the places they inhabited."

Many of these events can be experienced virtually at [thespace.org](http://thespace.org) which showcases the works that make up this extraordinary summer in London, and makes them available to a wider audience. Sponsored by the Arts Council and the BBC, it will run until the end of October.

## Best if Ramone and his music were left to rest in peace

JOEY RAMONE'S ...YA KNOW THERE IS something unnerving – even ghoulish – about the notion of the legendary Ramones frontman Joey Ramone releasing his "second solo record" a decade after his death. This is especially true when you consider that his first solo release also occurred after he died of lymphoma in 2001.

The protracted rollout of a posthumous catalogue can't help but suggest the patina of a cynical cash grab. And yet it is a tribute to Ramone's overwhelming appeal and enduring enigma that this new release – billed as "a cache of demos and unreleased recordings" – cannot help but raise curiosity. On some level, it may have seemed possible that Ramone was lovably weird

enough to have a great record stashed away.

Sadly, such hopes for ...*Ya Know?* are rapidly dispelled during the album's first track, *Rock and Roll Is the Answer*, which chugs along indifferently like 1980s KISS at its most jaded. The ostensible tribute *New York City* is an unhandsome amalgam of power chords and grindingly obvious sentiments that run to, at their most clever and insightful, "I'm proud to make my home in New York City".

Ramone was a surpassing talent, and ...*Ya Know?* isn't a total loss. Among the fleeting highlights *I Couldn't Sleep*, with its Eddie Cochran guitar line and faux Sun Session vocals, is an infectious reminder of the artist's profound love of early rock 'n' roll.

Still, the takeaway is that these half-finished ideas probably should have been left alone. It's possible that, given time to work through this material, Ramone might have done something tremendous. Sadly, that opportunity failed to present itself. The best thing to do is to allow this legend and his musical vestiges to rest in loving peace. Recommended tracks: *I Couldn't Sleep*, *Life's A Gas* – Timothy Bracy, *The Washington Post*

JOHN MAYER'S *BORN AND RAISED* IT WAS a little over two years ago that John Mayer soaked his career in paraffin and lit a match, sitting for a Playboy interview in which he compared a certain part of his anatomy to David Duke, and gratuitously over-

shared about his relationships with ex-girlfriends Jennifer Aniston and Jessica Simpson. It was one of pop history's most spectacular (and purposeful? Freud would say yes) acts of self-sabotage.

Mayer drapes himself in sackcloth and ashes for his first record since, the doleful adult contemporary apology *Born and Raised*. It's seeded with quotable songs about how sorry and ashamed Mayer is, how he's spent these past few years thinking hard about life. "Hard times helped me see/I'm a good man with a good heart," he sings on the first single, *Shadow Days*, one of the disc's many People magazine-baiting couplets.

Mayer is an underrated singer (better than ever, despite his ongoing throat troubles), an extraordinary

guitarist and an overrated melodist who has historically been content to coast on his considerable chops. *Born and Raised* leans into a kind of laconic, *Tapestry*-era California folk that rewards Mayer's lack of effort and need for conspicuous atonement in a way his bluesier numbers never did.

The best songs (like the title track, on which Graham Nash and David Crosby provide non-showy harmonies) sound like they were made in Topanga Canyon in 1972. The worst (like the dirge *Love Is a Verb*) sound like they were made last week, by the really depressed hologram of Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Recommended tracks: *Queen of California*, *Whiskey, Whiskey, Whiskey*. – Allison Stewart, *The Washington Post*