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FTWeekend

Critics’ choice

Life&Arts

Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

Artemisia Gentileschi: Self-portrait

National Gallery, London

Fierce and unyielding in expression and gesture, she turns towards us: a sensitive, finely delineated face bathed in strong light, which also falls on her hands. One of these rests on a broken spiked wheel, the other grasps a palm leaf, symbol of victory, which here resembles a paintbrush. Thus Artemisia Gentileschi depicted herself as saint — a halo is just visible above her head — and painter in the dramatically cropped, sculptural “Self-portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria” (1615-17).

Caravagesque in its play of light and shade and violent undercurrent, this is among the most psychologically compelling self-depictions in baroque art. Early Christian martyr Saint Catherine was bound to a spike-studded wheel but miraculously did not die (she was later beheaded). Gentileschi’s Catherine is a survivor: determined, thoughtful, robust.

Acquired last year by the National Gallery after its

discovery in a French private collection, “Self-portrait” went on display this week. Trafalgar Square could not offer a more culturally resonant Christmas present: an early female self-portrait whose history makes it a #MeToo icon.

Biography too often dominates discussion of this formally assured, original painter, but here it counts: aged 17, Artemisia, daughter of Roman painter Orazio Gentileschi, was raped by Agostino Tassi, employed in her father’s studio. Orazio brought charges and during the trial Artemisia — not Tassi — endured thumbscrew torture, purportedly to ensure she was telling the truth. Tassi, convicted, escaped punishment; Artemisia married and moved to Florence, where she began a stellar career and painted this picture poignantly drawing attention to her fingers.

It is only the 20th painting by a woman artist to enter the National Gallery’s collection; it tours next spring, returning for a landmark monographic Gentileschi show in 2020. *nationalgallery.org.uk, to March*



Artemisia Gentileschi’s ‘Self-portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria’ (1615-17)  
The National Gallery, London

Charles Dickens: The Lost Portrait

Philip Mould, London

A Victorian Christmas show returning the most lively portrait of Dickens to public display for the first time since 1844. In late 1843, while writing “A Christmas Carol” — a privately owned first edition, and John Leech’s original illustrations, are among other festive exhibits here — Dickens sat for Margaret Gillies for an engaging, sympathetic portrait described by Elizabeth Barrett Browning as showing the writer with “the dust and mud of humanity about him, notwithstanding those eagle eyes”. The portrait was lost in Dickens’ lifetime; it surfaced in South Africa last year. The Dickens Museum has a fundraising appeal to purchase it. *philipmould.com, to January 25*

Francisco Rodriguez

Cooke Latham Gallery, London

Welcome to this new gallery, just launched in a 19th-century Battersea warehouse with the faux-naïve storyboard paintings of

Santiago-born, London-based Francisco Rodriguez: fir trees, wild dogs, figures skulking along a fence line, a pair of feet and their shadow, enigmatic imaginary portraits, together form a wintry narrative cycle. *cookelathamgallery.com to March 1*

Souza in the 40s

Grosvenor Gallery, London

A triple-venue show — the London exhibition runs simultaneously with ones in Goa and New Delhi — focused on the early, energetic work of FN Souza, the painter who forged Indian modernism, documenting everyday Indian life in a language derived from Picasso. *grosvenorgallery.com to January 30*

Seen & Heard: Victorian Children in the Frame

Guildhall Art Gallery, London

The Victorian invention of childhood as a cultural construct — of which the Christmas tree, imported into the UK in the 1830s, was a part — is one of the era’s great triumphs of

enlarged sympathy. In literature Dickens is the leading exponent; in the visual arts the field is wide, and is celebrated here in works by a score of diverse painters: Pre-Raphaelites (John Everett Millais’s “My First Sermon”), neo-classicists (Frederic Leighton’s “Music Lesson”) and on to Edwardian decadents (Henry Scott Tuke’s nude boaters “Ruby, Gold and Malachite”). *cityoflondon.gov.uk, to April 28*

William Kentridge: Thick Time

Whitworth Gallery, Manchester

Dancing silhouettes, megaphones balancing on a photographer’s tripod, animations recalling silent cinema, flipbooks; Kentridge’s seductive, absurdist immersive installations evoke constructivist Russia and cabaret Berlin, and muse on time, relativity, revolutions, utopias. Following its 2016 London opening, this original show toured Europe; Manchester is the final stop. *whitworth.manchester.ac.uk to March 3*

Pop Ludovic Hunter-Tilney



Aidan Moffat and RM Hubbert

**Ghost Stories for Christmas**  
Rock Action  
★★★★☆

It does not take long for the festivities to turn sour in *Ghost Stories for Christmas*. “Another silent night in bleak midwinter, getting drunker, getting skinter”, Aidan Moffat intones in the second track, accompanied by RM Hubbert’s thoughtful guitar-playing.

The scenario will be familiar to those versed in Moffat’s writing: the former member of Scottish band Arab Strap is a blackly humorous chronicler of lives that are at an impasse or becoming undone. But the sardonic edge is softened in his Christmas album with Hubbert, the second LP the pair have released this year (after *Here Lies the Body*).

“Such Shall You Be” is a proper ghost story, touching rather than

spooky, recounted by Moffat in a spoken word monologue set to piano. “The Fir Tree” is a sinister tale of dismemberment and burning that would be even more sinister if its protagonist were not a fir tree.

Other songs treat ghostliness as a metaphor for loneliness or bereavement, acutely evoked by lines such as “How can absence fill a room?”. It ends with “The Recurrence of Dickens”, a slow, country music-tinged ode to Christmas joviality that treats it as a kind of truce in life’s slog, a moment for taking account.



RuPaul Christmas Party

RuCo, Inc  
★★★★☆

It is not just Santa Claus who has made a lot of mileage out of Christmas. RuPaul — whose music career has been

eclipsed by television fame but dates back to the 1990s when he was making his name as a drag queen in New York’s nightclub scene — is now on to his third festive album, following 1997’s *Ho Ho Ho* and 2015’s *Slay Belles*.

*Christmas Party* opens with our hero fighting “through the snow and the ice” over the melancholy tinkle of a synthesiser. But the downbeat mood lasts precisely 16 seconds, which is when a crisp house beat gets the titular party started.

“Hey Sis, It’s Christmas” is a gleeful confection of 1980s electro and hip-hop, with RuPaul chanting comical innuendo and catchphrases. There is more 1980s pastiche in “My Favourite Holiday” — Erasure-style synth-pop this time — while “Super Queen” dials the hi-nrg good cheer up to maximum.

The lifespan of these cheerfully throwaway songs is not intended to outlast the kind of glittery jamborees that they are designed to soundtrack. But considering the horrors that have been inflicted in the name of Christmas novelty music, RuPaul’s version is a cut above.



John Legend

**A Legendary Christmas**  
Columbia  
★★★★☆

“Although it’s been said many times, many ways, Merry Christmas to you,” John Legend sings. This particular festive standard has indeed been done many times and in many ways. It is “The Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire)”, which performance-rights organisation ASCAP has calculated to be the most performed yuletide number.

Legend’s version is cut

from similarly sophisticated cloth as the 1946 original by Nat King Cole, all velvety vocals, swooning strings and a polite jazzy murmur in the background. The rest of the old chestnuts in the singer’s first foray into holiday music have also been reheated with a smooth touch of old-school style.

Legend casts himself as a twinkle-eyed crooner serenading co-vocalist Esperanza Spalding in “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas”, and is joined by Stevie Wonder, playing a jaunty harmonica solo, on “What Christmas Means to Me” (which Wonder sang on his 1967 album *Someday at Christmas*). “Purple Snowflakes” is a spot on tribute to Marvin Gaye, sung by Legend in a melting high voice.

The nods to past greats such as Cole and Gaye raise the danger of superfluity: do their songs really need redoing? But Legend sings with warmth and presence, while the arrangements, overseen by classic soul revivalist Raphael Saadiq, are impeccably assembled.

There are six new songs among the 14 tracks, going from innocuous 1960s soul pastiche (“Bring Me Love”) to exuberant retro-R&B (“Merry Merry Christmas”). The closest we get to modernity is “By Christmas Eve”, a contemporary piano ballad that finds Legend bemoaning a festive parting from his loved one. Otherwise the ambience is rooted in the 1950s and 1960s, a vision of Christmas in a more innocent era of consumerist uplift.



Right: John Legend’s Christmas album is rooted in the 1950s and ’60s

Left: Aidan Moffat and RM Hubbert make merry

World David Honigmann



Les Troubadours Du Roi Baudouin

**Missa Luba**  
Éli/Cherry Red  
★★★★☆

In 1958 a Belgian priest, Father Guido Haazen, put together a choir of 45 boys, aged nine to 14, to sing a Catholic Mass in a Luba style, all call-and-response and percussion. The resulting album — initially released with seven traditional songs on side A and the six sections of the mass on side B — was a “world music” success before the genre even had a name. It was deployed in 1960s cinema as a signifier of globalist cool in films as

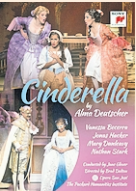
different as Pasolini’s *The Gospel According To St Matthew* and *The Singing Nun*. Malcolm McDowell’s disaffected Mick Travis plays the Sanctus obsessively in Lindsay Anderson’s 1968 melding of public school total institutionality and urban guerrilla chic, *if...*

This delightful re-release from Cherry Red gathers together most if not all of the material from the 1958 recording sessions: the three extra sacred songs (including a lovely version of “Gloria In Excelsis Deo” here as “Mbali Kule”), five children’s songs and the full 16 tracks of *Christmas in the Congo*, including a wobbly “Silent Night” as “Siku Kuu”.

The first disc, of Les Troubadours Du Roi Baudouin, is delightful. Cherry Red could have rounded the set out with more mid-century Central African choral singing, or

other world music masses (the *Messe des Savanes* from Upper Volta, the *Misa Criolla* by the Argentine Ariel Ramírez, the *Misa Flamenca*). Instead they have filled the other two discs with classical pieces from the 1958 recording sessions: the three extra sacred songs (including a lovely version of “Gloria In Excelsis Deo” here as “Mbali Kule”), five children’s songs and the full 16 tracks of *Christmas in the Congo*, including a wobbly “Silent Night” as “Siku Kuu”.

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Alma Deutscher: Cinderella

**Opera San José**  
Sony Classical  
★★★★☆

Every year we are reminded that Christmas is a time for children. It is when the kids go to a show, traditionally a pantomime, and the theatres buzz with youthful excitement. It is not often the child that has actually written the show.

Alma Deutscher, youthful resident of Surrey, England, was 12 when her opera *Cinderella* had its premiere in Vienna two years ago. Since then it has gone on to further productions in Israel and the US, including this charming,

traditional staging, filmed at the California Theatre, San José, and now on DVD.

At this point it is usual to invoke comparisons with Mozart, who had composed a handful of operas by the time of his 12th birthday. In the elite world of teenage opera composers there are not many more comparisons that can be made. Suffice to say that Deutscher’s *Cinderella*, a full-length opera, is innocent and lively, a tuneful and touching piece of seasonal family

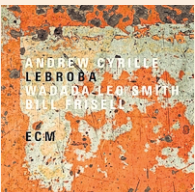


Composer Alma Deutscher

entertainment. It was a neat idea to have the Prince recognise his Cinderella by a song she has composed, and which the ugly sisters purloin for a singing competition, as this puts music at the centre of the story (and provides a corrective twist to Wagner’s misogynist telling of a similar tale in *Die Meistersinger*). We can hear which composers Deutscher likes best, notably Mozart (echoes of *Die Zauberflöte*), Rossini (who also wrote a Cinderella opera) and Tchaikovsky (his fairytale ballets). Nobody more modern is so favoured.

Opera San José’s production, with Jane Glover as conductor, is decently sung and played. The opera is performed in its fullest version with extra music and new orchestration. The world will not shake at its arrival, but who knows what might come next?

Jazz Mike Hobart



Andrew Cyrille

**Lebroba**  
ECM  
★★★★☆

Drummer Andrew Cyrille distils a lifetime’s experience into sparse thumps, lopsided rolls and pinpoint pings. Here, they mesh declamatory statements from Wadada Leo Smith’s trumpet and the resonance of Bill Frisell’s guitar into a pulsating, precisely crafted soundscape. “I wanted to play rhythms with spaces between them”, Cyrille says on the sleeve notes, referring to his playing behind the angular trumpet and guitar elegy that climaxes the lengthy set-piece track. But he could have been talking about his approach to the album as a whole.

Cyrille started out playing snare in his Brooklyn-neighbourhood drum and bugle corps, quickly graduating to jazz and touring in 1959, aged 20, with cabaret/blues singer Nellie Luther. A decade on, he had

developed the rhythmic independence and multi-timed pulse to fuel pianist Cecil Taylor’s expressionist fury. But now he strips the barrage of rolls and splashes down to their essence and they surface only on “TGD”, this album’s single group-improvised track.

The set opens with the atmospheric twangs, positive sustains and anxious percussion of Frisell’s “Worried Woman”. Smith’s “Turiya: Alice Coltrane Meditations and Dreams: Love” follows, a complex structure mixing graphic score, written composition, open interpretation and signposted improvisation — “a limping rhythm starting with a boom-chick” one directive, “west African 6/8 going into a 7/4 blues shuffle” another. As the piece unfolds, blasts of trumpet subside into muted lyricism, elliptic rhythms fragment into spacious booms and Frisell references the blues. Cyrille’s two compositions are equally gripping. The eight-bar blues “Lebroba” celebrates the trio’s accord with vibrating textures. The delicate “Pretty Beauty” features beatific Frisell, Smith’s muted trumpet and the swish of brushes.

Theatre, opera and dance

**Swan Lake**  
Matthew Bourne’s Sixties-set staging (right) gets a major makeover and a sizzling swan. ★★★★★  
*Sadler’s Wells, to January 27*

**The Cane**  
Mark Ravenhill’s complex moral drama tackles a topical debate about remorse and retribution. ★★★★★  
*Royal Court, to January 26*

**Timon of Athens**  
Kathryn Hunter stars in a strong production that offers an alternative to seasonal cheer. ★★★★★  
*Swan Theatre, to February 22*

**Fiddler on the Roof**  
Andy Nyman is a truculent and tender Teyve in Trevor Nunn’s joyful and sorrowful production. ★★★★★  
*Menier Chocolate Factory to March 9*

**Hänsel und Gretel**  
Staging of Humperdinck’s opera that stays faithful to the fairytale (left). ★★★★★  
*Royal Opera House to December 29*

**True West**  
Kit Harington stars in Sam Shepard’s haunting Old West-set family drama. ★★★★★  
*Vaudeville Theatre to February 23*

For full reviews, go to [ft.com/arts](http://ft.com/arts)



**The Nutcracker**  
The Royal Ballet has cracked *The Nutcracker* with a magical production. ★★★★★  
*Royal Opera House to January 15*

**Summer and Smoke**  
Tennessee Williams’ tale of a pastor’s daughter is played with heartbreaking clarity. ★★★★★  
*Duke of York’s, to January 19*

