

No more heroes

Art seems to be obsessed with tearing its figureheads to shreds. **Bob Johnson** questions the validity of heroes as we approach the Millenium

Modern society doesn't like heroes any more. Sorry, society doesn't like nice heroes any more. Take a look at the new film "Hilary and Jackie" (see this month's review); it's causing the biggest furore in the classical music world since...well, since the last big furore. Julian Lloyd-Webber amongst others has spoken out against the supposed misrepresentation of Anand Tucker's latest cinematic effort.

The debate over Jackie du Pre isn't just a tired genre looking to one of its great contemporary icons. It's the latest example of society ripping its heroes to shreds.

People have always had a strange relationship with heroes. They are a way for the plebs amongst us to live out our fantasies, to admire creativity which we don't have, to fulfil our

yearnings through somebody else. In these pre-millennial times, however, the hero has taken on a different aspect. Mass media allows us to thoroughly inspect and challenge people

Perhaps, disconcertingly, we are living through the death throes of the hero

who get caught up in the torturous wheels of fame.

The impulse to dissect our champions is becoming increasingly powerful. Postmodern preoccupations with

deconstructing culture have pushed their way into everyday life. From the respectable biographer to the muck-raking journalist, the media has discovered the true value of uncovering someone's dark secret. It makes money. Big money. And now, in a lemming-like exodus, skeletons seem to be jumping out of closets across the globe. The Hero occupies a strange, new position. They are no longer simply idols or models of aspiration. They have their bad sides, as well as their good. We pick and choose what we want from our icons. For many, genius and disaster go hand in hand. It's a trade off between talent and temper, where work becomes more important than personal life.

But there is a line that can be crossed. A new biography of writer Arthur Koestler (*The Homeless Mind* by David Cesarani) points out his history of sexual violence. A hero to the anti-Communist, anti-totalitarian fraternity, Koestler it seems, was not sweetness and light. His most famous victim was Jill Craigie, wife of former Labour leader Michael Foot. "Hilary and Jackie", in a similar way, threatens to destroy the reputation of arguably classical music's greatest talent in living memory.

So, you might be asking yourself; What's the fuss? If Koestler was a rapist, that's the end of the issue. If Jackie was manipulative, it doesn't mean she couldn't play her cello with the best of them. The reason for controversy is that it isn't about the reputation of heroes. It's about the reputation of the audience, about their guilt. The guilt of using fame as a mirror, and finding out that the person looking back at you isn't very nice. The shock of expecting to see Ariel, but getting Caliban.

Who then, might occupy the new position of Millennial Hero? Perhaps those who remain true to their beliefs above all else. But although follow-



Anand Tucker's Hilary and Jackie is causing controversy in the classical music world.

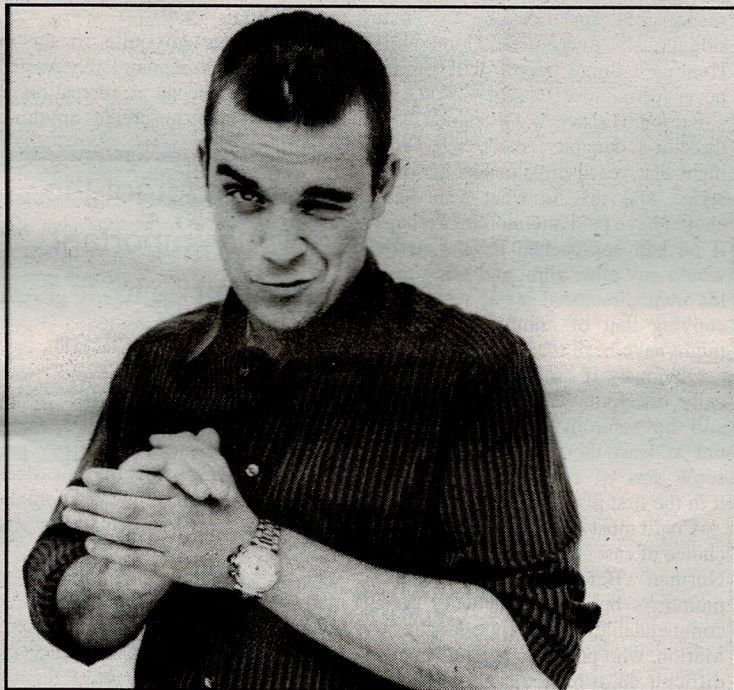
ing in the footsteps of Trotsky or Che Guevara may seem difficult for masters of expedience like Mandy or Portillo, it shouldn't prove impossible. Perhaps the New Hero will be the artist who embraces postmodernity, who can consider even themselves with irony. Take the irrepressible Robbie Williams, for example. yes, I know he may not be everyone's cup of tea, but his ticket now is as a kind of Karaoke singer. His songs steal from James Bond themes and Rolling Stones tunes, and his lyrics ask us to "see the sarcasm in my eyes." In a similar manner, Gus Van Zant's appropriation (read facsimile) of Hitchcock's "Psycho" can be read as contemporary pastiche or slavish homage.

So if irony seems to be the main characteristic of the Millennial Hero, are they still heroic to the public, or simply taking the piss out of themselves? Most people are disgusted by self aggrandisement, and would rather have heroes who were able to view themselves from a variety of positions. Selfishness is not a trait which holds much attraction.

Audiences, admirers, obsessives; all would like heroes who can lay bare their shortcomings rather than shelve them in a closet for later discovery.

Mass media allows us to challenge people who get caught up in the torturous wheels of fame

Of course, there is another conclusion we could make on the modern hero; that since the mass media has managed to pick apart every figure who has managed to achieve some kind of success, there is no room for heroes any more. Perhaps, disconcertingly, we are living through the death throes of heroic culture. Since the days of ancient Greece, the hero has held a lofty position in society. These new pretenders, who are more human than humans, could be the signal for the ultimate death of the hero.



The ubiquitous Robbie Williams. Is this the face of the new iconic icon for the millennial.

FILM

Little Voice

In gritty and generally uninspiring Scarborough a young, very quiet woman, LV (Jane Horrocks), has a hidden talent of escaping reality and meeting her late father by fantastically imitating his old records.

This talent is completely unappreciated by her capricious mother (Brenda Blethyn). There is a potential escape when Ray Say (Michael Caine), a local big cheese, has-(never)-been talent agent, discovers LV. Meanwhile, a young pigeon-loving telephone repairman (Ewan McGregor) is experiencing his first sexual emotions - in LV.

It's a great British showpiece, no matter how well it does in terms of profit overseas. Especially enjoyable are the dreamy 'magical-realist' scenes where LV shows her Alter Ego when performing (or communicating) to her father. This private moment, when exploited, violently invades her private space, resulting in a dramatic finale.

A heart-rendering screen version of Jim Cartwright's successful play 'The Rise and Fall of Little Voice', it retains its stage quality from the very first scenes.

This truly inspirational film expands with the burst of happiness most of us feel when we feel like laughing, after something awful has happened and subsequently, being refreshed, we come to enjoy our lives a little more.

DMITRY TOLONEN

EXHIBITION

Steve McQueen at ICA

Steve McQueen's Deadpan- 1997

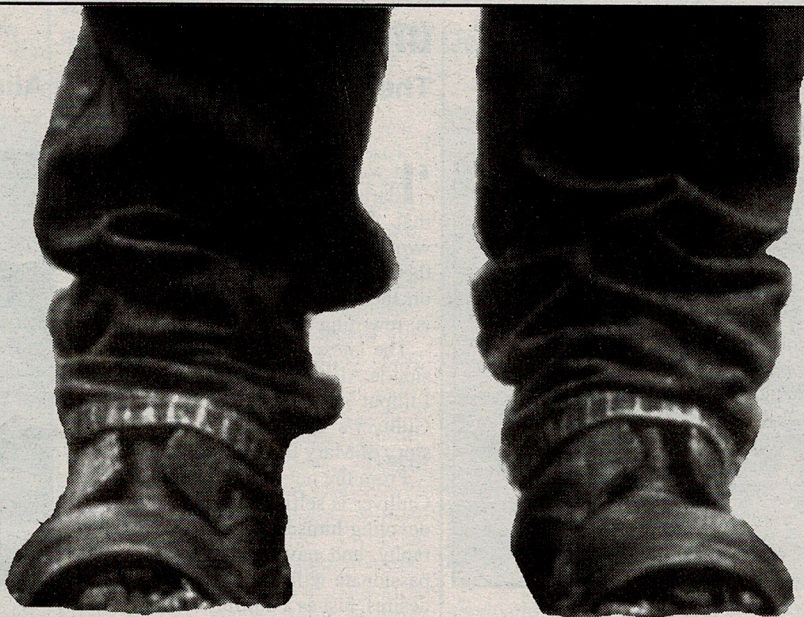
The ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art) is currently displaying five diverse works by the highly respected artist Steve McQueen, who despite being British/Dutch has never had a solo exhibition here. McQueen's work includes short film, sculpture and photography, each of which he uses in a highly personal and innovative way.

In an interview with Patricia Bicker of 'Art Monthly' McQueen stated that he didn't like the formulaic nature of art school and that he wanted to 'Throw the camera into the air'. After visiting the exhibition this feeling of artistic freedom is

very apparent.

The main attraction seemed to be the short film entitled 'Dead Pan' in which the famous scene from "Steamboat Bill Jr", where the side of a building falls on Buster Keaton, is re-interpreted.

Here the humour of the scene being that the Keaton avoids injury as the wall falls on him directly over an open window is drastically altered as McQueen steps into the role. The screen which covers an entire wall and is reflected upon the ceiling is now a source of both anxiety and deadpan calm as the scene is repeated from various unexpected angles.



The five works are highly individual and the lack of continuity is at first quite unsettling it is therefore pleasant to enjoy the simplicity of the silent film 'Exodus'. This very short film follows two West Indian men carrying potted palms around London, conveying the texture and often bizarre sights that accompany city life.

The exhibition is worth seeing, however there is often a feeling that the main attraction is the audience rather than the art, this is especially apparent in the photography and sculpture section, but is also highly entertaining in itself.

JULIAN BALL

WEBSITE

Anna's Arches?
members.tripod.com/~annas_arches/

Hyperreality does things to your mind. Reading William Gibson's seminal cyberpunk novel, "Neuromancer", I wondered who wants to immerse themselves in the Internet. Whoever they are, they're usually faceless, nameless and often shameless.

One such example is the individual who runs a site called "Anna's Arches", dedicated to his Danish girlfriend's feet. Anna, we are told, has kindly obliged to have her feet photographed and displayed for any cybergeek to peruse and abuse.

What we are treated to is a display of Anna's feet, which are quite nice, I have to say, as an affirmed foot loather. There are over fifty pictures of well-formed Scandinavian plates in different positions and states of undress. We have the foot clad in socks, with shoes tantalisingly dangling off, completely bare, and then even with soles to the camera. And, for those who are ardent foot fanciers, there's a "fantasy shots" page.

One wonders about the author's sanity when the pinnacle of his fantasies involves poking toes into a plate of raw eggs. "Anna's Arches" lacks the all important factor which makes most websites interesting; irony. It's all a bit too serious, and to be honest, a little scary.

BOB JOHNSON