RICK JONES

AGAINST THE AGE

William Byrd was a recusant Catholic living in reformed England who took great risks to write overtly Catholic music. One of Britain's leading choirs celebrates his legacy

When the award-winning choir The Cardinall's Musick sets off on its UK tour in March, it will take with a programme which 250 years ago might have incurred a prison sentence or transportation, and 500 years ago burning at the stake. In 2010, the Latin music of William Byrd won *Gramophone*'s Recording of the Year for this choir, yet it was once considered both an unholy branch of superstition and a significant danger to the stability of the nation.

"It's like Shostakovich in Russia," says Andrew Carwood, who is not only founder and conductor of The Cardinall's Musick but also director of music at St Paul's Cathedral, London. "Byrd's life story is fascinating. You have this recusant Catholic living in reformed England yet writing overtly Catholic music. And the quality of that music is exceptional. I'm quite happy to go on record and say that it's infinitely higher than anything on the continent. Palestrina, Lassus and Victoria don't actually come near the emotional intensity, imagination and wit of Byrd."

Byrd wrote music for the Church in both English and Latin but Carwood believes the latter is more heartfelt. "The English music is very beautiful and serene, but hasn't the emotional honesty and directness which you find in the Latin music," he says.

Byrd began to compose during his formative teenage years in the reign of the Catholic Mary Tudor. "I think there's a collective sigh of relief from composers that they can write freely again,' says Carwood. Reform in church music under Edward VI had meant one-note-per-syllable which produced very short pieces. "You can't develop music in terms of form or concept in those conditions. So under Mary, composers relaxed and there's an astonishing flowering, if you think of the great antiphons of Tye or Sheppard which Byrd would have experienced."

Products of these years turn up in Byrd's first publication in 1575, a collection of 17 Latin motets for the seventeenth year of Elizabeth I's reign in gratitude for the granting of sole rights to music publishing in England. Its cumbersome title *Cantiones quae ab argumento sacrae vocantur*, which in paraphrase means "songs which are not really sacred but only called so because of their texts", was presumably an attempt to disperse the whiff of incense. "Writing in Latin was not per se a crime," says Carwood. "Latin was still the language of the court and diplomacy. Elizabeth would have had music in Latin in her chapel because she was that sort of person, she liked her Latin and she liked her music."

None is on a more magnificent scale than *Infelix ego*, a 15-minute polyphonic meditation on Psalm 51 with a Latin text by the Dominican preacher Savonarola. "It's like a symphony," Carwood says. "I have strong feelings about it, about speed, flow and which words Byrd is highlighting and it requires the driving force of a conductor out front. We have early-music performances that sound lovely and distant and ethereal, but I don't think *Infelix* is like that which is why I want to stand up and conduct and say, 'No, no!' I want to smash the idea that this is a crystalline piece of unmoving art. It's about context and subtext. Sixteenth-century Catholics would have performed it with fervour and emotion. It's alive and it's visceral. Slowed up, you lose sense of the rhythm and the emotional heart of the piece is destroyed."

Byrd's Catholic sympathies were apparently hardened by the barbaric 1581 executions of his contemporary, the Jesuit priest Edmund Campion, and others. At the end of the decade, amid growing anti-Catholic feeling in the wake of the Armada, Byrd again anthologised his Latin works and published them in two volumes, the *Cantiones sacrae I* and *II* of 1589 and 1591 respectively, and then left London for good.

"I think they're a tidying-up exercise," says Carwood. "He's getting his papers in order. The Great Service, written for the Anglican Church, was a farewell to London. He then goes off to Stondon Massey in Essex and we're pretty sure that the three Masses date from the 1590s and that he's writing for the Catholic community there based around the Catholic Lord Petre and his household."

If writing Latin motets had been provocative, setting to music the Catholic Mass was downright dangerous. Byrd composed and published with blank title pages three Masses, in three, four and five parts, which rank among the masterpieces of his age. Each concert on tour features one of the Masses as well as the propers, the introit, gradual, tract or Alleluia, offertory and Communion text specific to the feast closest to the concert date. The propers are Byrd's last publishing venture. Dating from 1605 and 1607 under the titles *Gradualia I* and *II*, they are settings of the required festal texts for an almost complete Roman liturgical year. At the time of the Gunpowder Plot, there is a record of at least one arrest for possession of *Gradualia I*, which incidentally contains that most perfectly jewel-like of all Byrd's works, *Ave verum corpus*.

The tour (to 17 May) with performances in Bristol, Oxford, Leeds and London follows the completion of Carwood's project to record Byrd's Latin canon on 13 discs over as many years. The *Gramophone* award in 2010 recognised the entire achievement. "It seems a logical step to tour and it's great for us now to revisit the music with the hindsight of having sung every note. But it's also because I'm evangelical about the music. What I want to do now is show people that there is an amazing body of music here of which we sing and listen to a tiny proportion. It's a huge voyage of discovery."

The Cardinall's Musick

TELEVISION

Generation games

White Heat

BBC2

You can tell you are getting old when television costume dramas start to feature the events of your childhood. *White Heat* (BBC2, from 8 March), a six-part serial by Paula Milne, was set in the context of the death and funeral of Winston Churchill, in January 1965.

It began, however, not in those distant times but in the present day, with Charlotte (Juliet Stevenson) arriving at an empty flat where an old flatmate had died and lain undiscovered for a fortnight. She, and the other five who once lived there together, were gathering with the melancholy task of sorting through what was left.

Then we flashed back to meet Charlotte as a 19-year-old student in a bright red PVC raincoat. Appealingly played by Claire Foy, she arrived at the flat where Jack (Sam Claflin) was interviewing prospective flatmates. Jack owned the flat, but he also fancied himself as a revolutionary, who wanted to establish "an alternative socioeconomic model" of living. He thought it would be a good idea to "eliminate the tyranny of couples" by making a rule that no one should sleep with the same person for more than three consecutive nights.

Well-observed depiction of the period: the flatmates get to know each other in *White Heat*

Only Charlotte voted in favour. Although she confided in Lilly (MyAnna Buring), an art student, that she was still a virgin ("All good things are worth waiting for, eh?"), she showed every sign of wanting to shake off her stuffy middle-class upbringing: we saw her reading *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and smoking her first joint.

Aside from Jack, Lilly and Charlotte, the remaining flatmates were a mixed bunch: there was overweight and impoverished Orla, from a Belfast Catholic family; Jamaican law student Victor; gay Asian medical student Jay; and postgraduate Alan, a repressed and respectable working-class Geordie, who immediately clashed with Jack in a heated discussion about Churchill.

This calculated collection of types would seem to owe less to period verisimilitude and more to the demands of drama, but Milne slyly headed off that accusation. "I've just clocked why he's chosen us, us in particular," said Alan (Lee Ingleby). "We're his guinea pigs. We're his socioeconomic mix." Future episodes will no doubt show us how the experiment works out.

Milne's depiction of the period does not break new ground. The start of the Vietnam War is on the television news, "My Generation" is on the record player, art students are rolling around naked in paint and unmarried girls are going to the doctors to get the Pill. The attitudes, though, were well observed, particularly the unabashed male chauvinism of the revolutionary vanguard: the first time Jack sat down for a chat with Charlotte, he casually reached over to squeeze her left breast, and she barely objected.

At the end of the episode, we watched as Jack had his way with her (and vice versa). "Finally, a girl who doesn't confuse a bit of uncomplicated sex with all that romantic crap about commitment and love," he said, as we cut back to Juliet Stevenson, for whom this didn't seem to be a happy memory.

John Morrish

ROCK AND POP

Faded convictions

Bruce Springsteen: Wrecking Ball

COLUMBIA

"At the end of every hard-earned day / People find some reason to believe." It has never been easy to work out exactly what – or if – Bruce Springsteen believes. He is a paradoxical figure: a working man who lives in a mansion, a remote artist with a common touch, a songwriter who animates working-class lives from a liberal's perspective. Acres of print were expended on the cover imagery and lyrics of 1984's *Born in the USA*. While Vietnam vets and out-of-work steelworkers sang along to bar jukeboxes, media studies students patiently explained that Springsteen wasn't celebrating redneck values but ironising them; *Born in the USA* wasn't a patriotic flag-waver, but a deeply subversive rejection of Reagan-era America.

Springsteen's ambiguities persist. His career has been a careful balancing of hectic party music and a social awareness that draws something from Catholic teaching on social justice, even from liberation theology. He comes of a Catholic family from Long Branch, New Jersey, and was sent to St Rose of Lima grade school in Freehold Borough. In 1992, Springsteen declined to confirm for me a story that a teacher-nun had forced him to sit in a wastebasket because that was where he belonged and where he was bound, but he did smile enigmatically at the anecdote, and he did admit that in his youth "and pretty much after that" he'd rebelled against Catholic values.

Whether the latest Springsteen album *Wrecking Ball* represents any kind of return to the fold is questionable. Its social conscience is consistent with a history of songwriting that draws heavily on Depression-era themes, steadily updated to meet the specific circumstances of Reagan, Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations. It began with 1982's spare, laconic *Nebraska*, a set of unvarnished demos as startling for their lack of "rock" energy as for their bleak snapshots of marginal lives. It continued with *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, an explicit reference to Steinbeck and *The Grapes of Wrath* and in the more recent Pete Seeger sessions. And it is certainly evident on *Wrecking Ball*, which includes such blue-collar anthems as "We Take Care of Our Own", "Death to My Hometown", "This Depression" and the affirmative or stoical "We Are Alive".

In 1992 I sat down with him to look through a collection of photographs I had brought by Dustbowl documentarist Dorothea Lange. "These faces! They're like religious icons, suffering saints on a church wall." He was intrigued to hear that that Lange, a New Jersey girl herself, had a wasted leg and a limp that she believed defined her. "I think everyone who wants to create something has to have some kind of injury," Springsteen said. "It hurts, but it also saves you and it gives you purpose."

The voice on *Wrecking Ball* still has the wounded lift at the end of phrases that defines Springsteen's singing, something between a whoop and a cry of pain. The title reflects a similar ambiguity. Demolition teams continue to take apart America's industrial sector and the housing that supported it, but a "ball" is also a celebratory dance. Rock music is always manipulative and because of that always capable of facing both ways politically. Springsteen has had the skill and good fortune to appeal to middle-class kids who've never seen a redundancy cheque as well as to his natural constituency of the dispossessed. His problem, here as in all his work, lies in the deceptive generality of those people who at the end of the day find something to believe. Springsteen is, unashamedly, a populist, and *Wrecking Ball* is a record that almost mechanically ticks marketing boxes. It may be that the "socially aware" Springsteen of recent years is less convincing than in the past precisely because his undoubted social conscience is now self-conscious. At the end of the day, we still believe he cares, but he has somewhat lost his ability to convince. **Brian Morton**

THEATRE

Pitch perfect

In Basildon

JERWOOD THEATRE DOWNSTAIRS, ROYAL COURT THEATRE, LONDON

Various playwrights have taken Chekhov's characters and relocated them in time or place – including Brian Friel's *Afterplay* and Helen Cooper's *Mrs Vershinin* – but the young dramatist David Eldridge attempts something both more tangential and more radical in his latest play.

In Basildon borrows Chekhov's favoured structure – the four-act tragicomedy – and several elements from his plays: including the sale of a family home (*The Cherry Orchard*), dreams of migration (*Three Sisters*), a radical young playwright (*The Seagull*) and rackety relatives (*Uncle Vanya*). But the twist, as the title indicates, is that the characters are living in contemporary working-class Essex, Eldridge's birthplace and the setting for much of his work – including *Market Boy* at the National Theatre – although he depicted a middle-class London mother who becomes supplier to her heroin-addict daughter in last year's extraordinary *The Knot of the Heart*.

As the play opens, a 60-something man is comatose in a hospital bed transported to the living room of a semi-detached in Basildon. He is Len (Phil Cornwell) who, it rapidly becomes clear in an easily expositional scene, is the owner of the home and whose deathbed is attended by his sisters Doreen (Linda Bassett) and Maureen (Ruth Sheen). Despite their chiming names, they now only communicate through Doreen's son Barry (Lee Ross). The rhyme that works, outside the family, is between Len and Ken, his best friend, played by Peter Wight, a burly actor familiar from films and TV, who here turns in a remarkable portrayal of a widowed lothario and self-made businessman who perhaps proves to know more about loyalty and love than the dying man's blood relatives.

***In Basildon*: 'Written and acted with rare authenticity'**

Wight, Bassett and Ross have all appeared in the work of Mike Leigh and some critics have seen *In Basildon* as over-influenced by the market leader in socially mobile embarrassment. For me, it's that both writers work in the same territory of aspirant working-class ambition and domesticity and the stronger guiding presences are always Chekhov and perhaps also Arnold Wesker, whose 20-year time span in *Chicken Soup with Barley*, an East End family comedy revived at the Royal Court last year, is echoed in a bold final act that flashes back to the election night of 1992, when the Tory victory in Basildon launched John Major's unexpected Tory hold.

The published text has epigraphs from Wesker, about love-hating the people from which he comes, and from St Paul's first letter to Timothy about love of money being the root of all evil. Certainly, the lure of property and inheritance is what turns out to have divided this family, but *In Basildon* is not a Brechtian moral fable about greed. Eldridge understands the weaknesses and aspirations of his characters and permits them many tender moments, such as when they fulfil Len's final request by singing the West Ham United song "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles" during his final moments.

This scene is typical of Eldridge's dramatic skill and wit. Sweet and verging on sentimental, it suddenly hits you with the fact that the terrace anthem concerns failed escape – "Then like my dreams / They fade and die / Fortune's always hiding / I've looked everywhere" – and therefore perfectly fits the themes of the play.

In this and other sequences, Eldridge plays a dangerous game of almost goading the audience to laugh at the characters: an invitation which more than a few members of the audience accepted at the performance I attended. The writer, though, is with his people and this tragicomedy of home ownership is written and acted with a rare authenticity. Eldridge's Russian master would surely nod from the beyond. **Mark Lawson**

RADIO

Faith in adversity

Heart and Soul: Japan – hope amid the chaos

BBC WORLD SERVICE

This two-part edition of *Heart and Soul* (2 and 9 March) found Gerry Northam (plus translator) in north-eastern Japan a year after the earthquake-cum-tsunami which, among other horrors, caused a radiation leak at the Fukushima nuclear plant. The motive was two-fold: to report on the aftermath of last March's devastation, and to explore its effects on the Japanese psyche – in particular the "crisis of confidence" that this national tragedy was assumed to have brought about.

Geography had helped to limit the number of casualties: many an escapee from the 40-metre-high waves survived by fleeing to the nearby cliff-tops. Even so there were 15,000 dead, 6,000 injured and 3,000 still unaccounted for. A Buddhist monk who welcomed refugees to his elevated shrine recalled the house rules on which he immediately insisted. Number one was to greet the people next to you first thing in the morning. Number two was to "honour the gods". These were thought to encourage a feeling of relaxation.

A visit to the town of Ishinomaki, full of buckled concrete buildings, empty window frames and mounds of rubbish, prompted the question of how the local religions – principally Shinto and Buddhism – were coping with this trauma. A simple stoicism had replaced what in the West would have been outraged protests at the capriciousness of a supposedly loving God. On the other hand, the elaborate Japanese death rituals had been gravely compromised by the sheer numbers involved. Happily, interfaith dialogue had wrought a beneficial effect, with Christian ministers brought in to conduct the cremation of the hundreds of bodies disinterred after an initial emergency burial.

Amid many a remark to the effect that "this is the way things are", there lurked a feeling that moral lessons could be learned. The Mayor of Tokyo, after all, had declared that the earthquake was a punishment for material excess and "wasteful" lifestyles. The strongest emotion detected among the survivors by Northam's expert witnesses was guilt. It was not so much that they feared they had worshipped false gods. Rather, they were shamed by their inability to maintain tombs that had been washed away in the flood and preserve what one academic called "pathways to the past". A woman whose son had been swept from the uppermost rung of a telegraph pole spoke eloquently of the "conversations" she had with him as she tended her shrine.

Above all this reportage loomed the fate of the Fukushima reactor. Here, the Catholic Church was playing a combative role, with the Japanese bishops calling for a complete shutdown of all the country's 54 nuclear plants and a wholesale behavioural change that would reduce the need for electricity. This contrasted painfully with the views of the environmental campaigner George Monbiot, whose *Guardian* article claiming that the limited damage was a mark of nuclear power's inherent safety caused great offence. Tactfully done, and full of illuminating comment, this was a moving demonstration of faith in action. **D.J. Taylor**

CINEMA

Off the page

The Raven, Bel Ami, Trishna

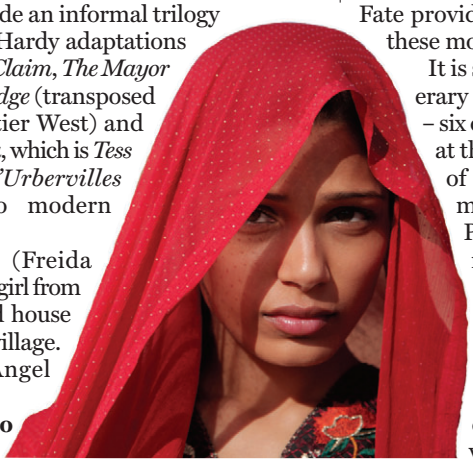
Three adaptations of fiction by nineteenth-century writers arrive in cinemas this weekend. Variously, they are a mash-up of several well-known episodes by one author into a genre piece, a straight adaptation which teases out contemporary parallels, and, in the third case, a story wrestled wholesale into the twentieth century.

The Raven, in which John Cusack plays Edgar Allan Poe, is a grisly thriller which, like the 1845 poem, shows a man's gradual spiral into psychosis following the death of his beloved. Poe is confronted with his own work as a serial killer, rather in the manner of *Se7en*, carries out a series of themed murders (the "Pit and Pendulum" episode is particularly giggle-worthy gory, rather destroying the point of that story's literal suspense). In the film, the increasingly unhinged scribe works with the police until a denouement that apparently explains his own death – he was found, delirious and gravely ill after a mysterious absence of several days. There are rather feeble nods to ideas of authorial responsibility; there could have been more to questions of violence and cinema – but strangely, this film for all its excess seems rather tame, despite robust support performances including Brendan Gleeson. It needed more of Poe's shivery touch and less hysterical insistence on how scary it all is.

Bel Ami, however, makes brave attempts to enter right into the cynical darkness of Guy de Maupassant's 1885 story about a young soldier who scrambles to material success through the beds of the wives of powerful men. For their first feature, directors Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod – long acclaimed for their three decades of stage work with Cheek by Jowl – chose this story of a minimal talent promoted in media frenzy for its contemporary relevance. A corrupt press abets a government set on invading an Arab nation apparently for reasons of international justice but in reality to seize its mineral wealth. Teen heart-throb Robert Pattinson is not always equal to the demands of the later, darker scenes but the women – girlish Christina Ricci, Kristin Scott Thomas in an atypical fluster, and Uma Thurman, statuesque and controlling – do indeed hold the drama. Some may criticise the characters for their stark unlikeability but if you read the book, it's all there.

In a prolific career, Michael Winterbottom has now made an informal trilogy of Thomas Hardy adaptations – *Jude*, *The Claim*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (transposed to the frontier West) and now *Trishna*, which is *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* updated to modern Rajasthan.

Trishna (Freida Pinto) is the girl from the crowded house in the poor village. Alec and Angel are conflated into one British Asian gap-year boy, Jay (Riz Ahmed) who finds himself pulled back into the India of his father to run a family luxury hotel business, where Trishna becomes a member of staff, the twenty-first-century equivalent of the milkmaid. Elements of the story update well – the differing level of tolerance between the sexes towards sexual mores, Jay's sense of displacement, Trishna's family's attitude towards her predicament in a fast-changing world – but other plot developments are less plausible. An episode in Mumbai, where Trishna is talent-spotted for Bollywood, is some distance from the dance in Dorset, for example. Winterbottom's style of filming is notoriously fast and free yet he finds gorgeous moments of grace, just as the couple in early sequences momentarily "find" each other as their paths literally cross during the hotel working day. Maybe Winterbottom is so attracted to these particular stories because the framework of Hardy's relentless Fate provides him with the freedom to let these moments breathe.



Freida Pinto in *Trishna*

It is striking, however, how many literary adaptations are in the schedules – six of the nine nominees for best film at the Oscars this year although not, of course, the winner. It's been on my mind as I've curated the From Page to Screen Festival that will run in Bridport in April. Does this reliance on books suggest conservatism and a paucity of new writing? Or is it a necessary reworking and respecting of literature in a primarily visual culture, a way of further ingesting what we value? **Francine Stock**

OPERA

Director-proof

Rusalka

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN

Stalking the forest lakes and rivers of Europe are the *rusalki*, defrocked divinities, strangers in a place once their home. They entice to watery graves the humans who have spurned them – but sometimes they fall in love with their victims and pine for what people have that they don't – an immortal soul ... Antonín Dvorák's ninth opera, composed when he was turning 60 in 1900, mixes up the Undine of Fouqué with Andersen's Little Mermaid in a work full of a yearning sadness and gorgeous nature music. It reaches a sort of accepting peace at its end despite the horror of loss of love and salvation.

To become human, Rusalka must sacrifice her voice until her Prince loves her truly, whereupon she will regain it and get a soul into the bargain. It never happens: the Prince's fickle head is turned from Rusalka's silent loveliness by a vampish Foreign Princess, and the Mermaid loses not only the chance of being a real woman but also of ever returning to watery innocence. There are plenty of metaphors in here about our estrangement from the world, the redemptive but fragile nature of love, the divine potential and endless treachery of humans, the hideous risks associated with living life fully, the way that our dreams may not come true.

Strangely, this marvellous work, whose mazy narrative has a very Czech dreaminess, has never before been performed at Covent Garden, and one might hope for a more grown-up production than the one provided by Sergio Morabito and Jossi Wieler, who purvey a not-too-scary *Regietheater* – that's German for stuff relocated from Renaissance palace to underground car park – around Europe.

The devices they come up with to highlight Rusalka's alienation are less effective than Dvorák and his librettist Jaroslav Kvapil's original, and less attractive. But there are moments: when Rusalka (shaky on her new pins) is taunted into dancing at her wedding, she falls to the floor and rolls around ecstatically like an otter in water, joined by the Prince, to general astonishment; it's a sweet moment, and the only time they really connect. Elsewhere, the humour is heavy and Germanic, including an obnoxious cat. The poor nymph, having lost her wager, washes up with other social flotsam – wood nymphs, water sprite, witch – in a brothel. Disapproval was expressed at the curtain call, but we've seen worse.

Much, anyway, is redeemed by the most rapt orchestral performance, conducted by the Canadian Yannick Nézet-Séguin; when music is played this well, it eclipses everything else, and this mixture of accuracy, passion, vast sensitivity, sweep and longing, played by an orchestra on dreamy form, is how you want to hear it. Act 2, where Rusalka marries then loses the prince, is the most fabulously organic, concentrated bit of playing, full of aching expectation that makes the loss, expressed in a cello line of appalling beauty, hard to bear.

There is some lovely singing too: the Finnish Camilla Nylund cannot always project over this force-of-nature band, but she is all touching sincerity and pathos; Bryan Hymel's Prince is very strongly sung, with plenty of passion undermined by a lack of directorial ideas; Alan Held's Vodník – the paternal water sprite who sees all the badness coming – has great strength and resonance; and the three Rhinemaiden-like wood nymphs whose underwear is supposed to have upset the punters provided a good deal of aural and visual delight. Given all this, the feeble staging passes into irrelevance. **Robert Thicknesse**