



MANCHESTER INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

Zaha Hadid in concert

Crystal Bennes visited Zaha Hadid's chamber music venue and other events at the Manchester International Festival

Manchester International Festival, 2-19 July, various locations, www.mif.co.uk

It is no accident that classical music is rarely performed outside concert halls: an 'acoustics are everything' attitude means performers tend to remain within them. In an intriguing fusion of music and architecture, Zaha Hadid was commissioned by the Manchester International Festival (MIF) to create a performance space in an art gallery for some of the most well-known pieces of chamber music: Bach's suites for solo cello, piano, and violin.

The result, a striking white ribbon in a black box, wraps around itself to create a stage for the performer as well as a space for the audience. The ribbon consists of a translucent

fabric membrane articulated by an internal steel structure suspended from the ceiling.

There has been much discussion of Hadid's design, situated in a large room on the top floor of the Manchester Art Gallery, and its success or failure as a piece of architecture. With respect to the design brief, however, the most important consideration must be whether the structure works as a concert hall.

I was lucky enough to be one of 200 in attendance for the evening of Bach cello suites performed by French virtuoso Jean-Guihen Queyras. Given that we were essentially sat in a large black box, the acoustics were surprisingly well-balanced,

due to the project's acoustic engineer, Sandy Brown Associates, maximising sound reflection using lightweight fabric and shaped acrylic panels.

While the structure is intriguing even when not in use, it comes into its own as a performance space, enveloping both performer and spectators, making the audience of 200 feel intimate. Perhaps more surprising is that Hadid's structure heightens the performance without distracting from it – it focused the audience's attention to the point where not so much as a single cough occurred during the recital. With this installation, Hadid has created architecture as Goethe famously >>

referred to it: as 'frozen music'.

Other events at MIF included Punchdrunk. The raison d'être of this theatre company is to produce site-specific works of interactive theatre. Their last show at Battersea Arts Centre, *Masque of the Red Death*, sold out a seven-month run and was a huge critical success.

For its MIF piece, Punchdrunk collaborated with documentary film-maker Adam Curtis to produce *It Felt Like A Kiss*. Shepherded into a massive, dilapidated office building in a group of nine, we're sent in a lift to the sixth floor and told only to 'stick together'. This is a 'promenade' piece, which means the spectating takes place on the hoof.

The gutted building has been completely transformed – the attention to detail is spectacular – there are abandoned CIA offices full of dossiers and documents, living rooms

with TVs that never turn off – all very much like abandoned film sets. Strangely, for a piece of theatre, there are no actors.

Once we arrive at the evening's *pièce de résistance*, Adam Curtis's 35-minute documentary, things become a bit clearer. The documentary, on how America set out to remake the world 50 years ago, is fascinating, witty, and grotesque. It quickly becomes evident that we have indeed been walking through film sets – those CIA offices and living rooms are all there in Curtis's documentary. Hence, no actors: the sets are the performance.

The atmosphere is tense throughout; we are always waiting for actors who never appear, a bit like *Godot*, but scarier and more frustrating. As a piece of design, *It Felt Like A Kiss* is incredible and there isn't anything else like it, but as a theatrical performance,

it wasn't so much a kiss, as a tease.

Flailing Trees is an installation of 21 inverted willow trees set in a 12x12ft concrete base. The installation was commissioned by MIF and created by Gustav Metzger and claims to serve as a 'plea for reflection and a plaintive cry for change'.

Interestingly, for a public sculpture, *Flailing Trees* grew out of the winning entry to the Manchester Open, the festival's open commission call, submitted by the Centre for the Urban Built Environment and multi-disciplinary practice Taylor Young.

Unfortunately, *Flailing Trees* is too small in scale for the Manchester Peace Garden, where it is on display, and would perhaps make a stronger impression in a more traditional gallery space.

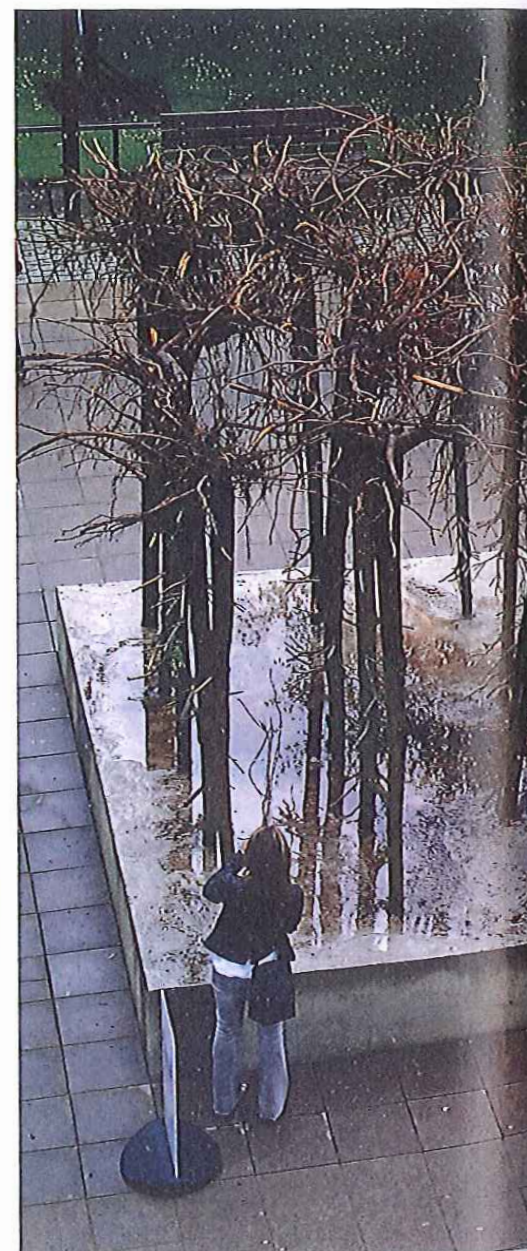
The other problem with Metzger's sculpture is that only the roots and trunks of the trees



Above Zaha Hadid's performance space at the Manchester Art Gallery

Centre Gustav Metzger's *Flailing Trees*

Right A still from Adam Curtis's documentary *It Felt Like a Kiss*



are on display. Because the trees are so close together, the large root balls appear to replicate branches and thus the shock of viewing trees inverted, with concrete where leaves should be, is negated.

The result somehow diminishes Metzger's intention of *Flailing Trees* as a catalyst for debate on the role of the environment in urban areas. As such, what should have been a poignant and shocking wake-up call to urban planners as well as to urban dwellers falls somewhat short of its ambitious mark. There is no doubting that Metzger's concept is arresting; it is only the execution which lets this project down.

Crystal Bennes is the AJ's editorial administrator and a PhD student at King's College, London

Resume Architecture takes centre stage at the Manchester International Festival



LINCOLN SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

The AJ concludes its review of student summer shows. **Soumyen Bandyopadhyay** *visits Lincoln*

Lincoln School of Architecture at University of Lincoln end-of-year show, 22 June-3 July

Over the past few years, the Lincoln School of Architecture has quietly consolidated its position as an important design school in the Midlands. That architecture sits among other design disciplines (design for exhibitions and museums and interior design), underpinned by a strong desire to integrate technology and to prepare students for the wider realms of practice, could only be seen as a positive attribute of the school.

But where it distinguishes itself most from other schools of architecture is through its overt desire to raise awareness of the ethical dimensions of architecture amid growing concerns regarding socio-cultural and environmental change.

The BA (Hons) in Architecture programme exhibited the work of a large cohort of Year 3 students, divided into seven 'units'. This work understandably occupied most of the Rick Mather-designed building. The consequently fragmented display is reflected in the divergent nature of the works. The units' preoccupations ranged from sensitive interpretation of key environmental issues – both poetically and scientifically driven, to exploration of the relationship between form and movement, to investigation of prevailing social issues and urban concerns, to processual architecture.

Lincoln Year 3 student
Richard Wood's
'Repository for
ordinary artefacts in a
shifting landscape'

It is in the latter that one notices some of the most prolific production of artefacts and images – some evidently very professionally handled and seductive. Thomas Woodcock's 'Printing press' and Richard Wood's 'Repository for ordinary artefacts in a shifting landscape' stand out in this group. Yet, therein lies a danger; one wonders whether process-driven architecture, without a continual commitment to understanding inhabitation, might rerun the familiar footage of vacuous architectural production. Richard Barber's school of cinematography, Christopher Allwood's interest in the leftover spaces around the disused viaduct in Nottingham, Andrew Taberner's railway station, Kuljeet Sibia's urban intervention, Joseph Millar's 'Rowing club' and Liam Brewer's intervention in Lincoln are examples of the diversity of distinguished student work.

The relatively small BArch (Part 2) cohort work on display of student-led thesis projects left one unsure whether the thrust of the graduate work lay in complex thematic exploration, image production or exploring technological expression. Andrew McDowall's cultural and civic quarter in Lincoln, Adrian Gamble's exceptionally well-crafted models, Robert Burr's auditorium in Sheffield and Rosie Saunders' evocative treatment of the 'inhabited wall', addressing war and politics in Palestine, were distinctive and engaging.

Perhaps in managing such diversity and in understanding and upholding the common principles that underlie morality in the work of the units lies the opportunity to fulfill the desire to address the ethical dimension of architecture.

Resume A full and wide-ranging show, distinguished by its ethical concerns

Soumyen Bandyopadhyay is Professor in Architecture and Design at Nottingham Trent University

