

ARTS

White heroes and helpless Africans

FILM REVIEW
Freddie Sayers



Shooting Dogs

15 CERT, 115 MINS

Tell you what I'd like to see – a film about middle-class Africans. In mainstream cinema, save for the occasional corrupt dictator, Africans always seem to be presented as hopeless creatures who need our help. What about the millions of African teachers and doctors and small businessmen? What about the ones who drive Opels and live in proper houses and look after their families? Can't anyone find a story worth telling from among them?

This is just one of the reasons why *Hotel Rwanda*, last year's Oscar-nominated film about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, is so much better than its latest equivalent, *Shooting Dogs*. The hero of *Hotel Rwanda* was a middle-class African who, deserted by his European friends, shelters 1,000 Tutsi refugees in the grounds of the Hotel Milles Collines in Kigali. *Shooting Dogs*, by contrast, gives us a nice white Catholic expat priest and a public schoolboy teaching in his gap year as frustrated heroes, just to help us get involved.

Shooting Dogs takes its title from the only thing the UN peacekeeping forces in Kigali in 1994 were authorised to shoot – stray dogs feeding off the decomposing corpses of the genocide victims. In that horrific 100-day period, 800,000 Tutsi men, women and children were slaughtered while the world did nothing; it quite correctly counts as a dark blot on international history.

The fact that it is a real-life story, and



Hugh Dancy, left, and John Hurt star in 'Shooting Dogs', directed by Michael Caton-Jones

an appalling one at that, only makes the need to make a good film about it more vital. *Shooting Dogs* makes much of its faithful rendering of the facts. It is set at the Ecole Technique Officielle in Kigali, where UN troops were stationed in 1994 and which became a safe haven for over 2,000 Rwandans as the massacres started – until, after six days, the UN were ordered to rescue only the whites and withdraw. The film is actually shot there, and it counts a number of genocide survivors among the cast and crew.

But this isn't enough. There is no virtue in sticking to the facts if they don't add up to a good film; otherwise you are just making a re-enactment. Of course it is shocking and moving, and it does certainly convey the desperation of the victims and – worst of all – the carnival-like atmosphere on the streets as the Hutu militia blew whistles and played music, branding clubs and machetes

as they went about their gruesome work. But I can't help feeling that this film is riding on the back of a tragedy to provoke feelings in its audience that should be got by more artful means.

Consider the stories of the two main characters. Each of them had the potential to be personal and interesting and say something specific, but neither of them really got off the ground.

Joe (Hugh Dancy) is a strapping, twenty-something English public schoolboy, just trying to "make a difference" by teaching at the ETO in Rwanda. He is almost implausibly innocent and angelic and Dancy is, I am afraid to say, quite irritating. Joe is somehow irrelevant to the breadth of this story – except as the "what would you do in his position" character – and it is frustrating to have to spend so much time with him.

Fr Christopher (John Hurt) is more interesting. A Catholic priest and head-

master of the ETO, his struggle with his faith does make him more than the typical glibly old man. As he is increasingly powerless to protect his friends in the face of the crisis, all he can do is celebrate Mass and pray.

We witness three services held in the increasingly isolated and hopeless school. The first is jubilant and colourful, where Fr Christopher still feels that the strength of virtue around him will carry them through; the second, after it has become clear that the refugees will not be saved, is a baptism service for a newborn child in which the liturgy suddenly sounds hollow and insincere; the third is essentially a requiem Mass.

"This is nothing we can do," cries Joe. And, in the nearest this film gets to a truly dramatic moment, Fr Christopher replies: "These children might die without taking Holy Communion. We can do something about that."

A bleak vision of Schubert's final quartet

MUSIC REVIEW
Igor Toronyi



In 1988 Herbert von Karajan telephoned Simon Rattle about the possibility of his appearing in Salzburg. The result was a recording so amicable enough until Rattle raised the question of period instruments, at which point Karajan put the phone down.

For a long time period performances were frowned upon. Now, though, they are very much part of the classical music establishment, and you couldn't ignore them if you tried.

Last week, as with any week, Londoners were faced with several period performance choices, the most tantalising

of the Vienna-based string quartet, the Mosaïque, performing Haydn and Schubert at the Wigmore Hall.

The Mosaïque are not prescriptive in their "authenticity". Thus, 18th-century instruments with gut strings rest next to 19th-century innovations such as chin rests, convex bows, cello spikes and shoulder rests. Vibrato, though normally avoided, is at times applied liberally. The sound they produce is heart-warmingly mellow, and at the Wigmore Hall the Mosaïque delivered two exhilarating and (ironically) truly romantic performances.

Haydn's last, incomplete and mildly unhinged quartet, the Op 103 in D minor, was convincingly presented as a romantic quartet. The Menuetto was played violently and hinted at an almost gothic creepiness with its intermittent hushed and detached ascending chromatics. In Schubert's quartet in G minor, D173, the intensity and momentum of the growling-bear-like finale with its Hungarian dance rhythm was such that Erich

Hubarth (the first violinist) propelled himself and his chair a good way back-wards.

It was, however, in Schubert's final quartet that they were at their best. The Mosaïque presented a bleak vision – the major and minor dichotomy appeared unbridgeable. The moments of uncharitably respite were completely removed from the minor key outbursts, as if they were mere delusions. Here, amid the aggressive tremolos-scrubbing – the consequent frenetic head movement making the performers appear demented – the Mosaïque plumb the depths to present us with the most dramatic of madrasas.

The quartet appeared to play with a clear idea of each piece's over-arching structure, always holding enough back for what they considered to be the decisive climax or nadir.

Harry Christophers' performance of the music of polyphonic Tomás Luis de Victoria, with his choir The Sixteen at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, on the other hand, proved frustrating. Alarming, the choir lost one of their number when

Jonathan Arnold fell to the ground during *Nigra Sola* ("I am dark-skinned"), a Victoria motet. The drama of seeing a performer drop his score, swoon, and fall on to the floor, to be bundled off stage like Polonius by the other singers, completely upstaged the motet.

With no organ and one fewer bass, the Requiem that followed fell slightly flat. Although there was some exquisite singing, particularly in the opening *O vos omnes*, the acoustics were as dry as Communion bread, and the sound finished before it began.

Back at the Wigmore Hall last Thursday, Robert King and his fully authentic band The King's Consort, accompanying the counter-tenor Robin Blaze, had no such ill fortune (unless you count Blaze's unfortunate sporadic frog in the throat). Blaze provided tender lute songs, King chatted amiably with the audience. The Consort presented a selection of Purcell's sonatas for four parts; highly sinuous and chromatic music that made me ache as much as it made me feel like I was slipping around on ice.

MEDIAMATTER

Feeble pranksters can't beat real news

April 1 this year yielded a rather disappointing selection of spoof stories in the press. The *Sun*, for example, ran a feeble piece of invention about a penguin found frolicking on the south bank of the Thames. "Experts say the penguin, normally seen at the South Pole, may have been released into UK waters by fishermen who accidentally snared him," it reported.

The trouble with this is that it is entirely plausible, not remotely funny, dismally unimaginative and, in any case, upstaged by the true story of the stranded whale which the *Sun* itself had splashed (sorry, but that is the technical term) some weeks earlier with the winning headline "Celebrity Big Blubber". Is this Rebekah Wade's idea of a joke? Maybe it is. It would never have made it into print in the *Kelvin MacKenzie* glory days.

The *Mail* did rather better, alerting its readers to Tony Blair's decision to have the door of Number 10 repainted bright red, with the cunning corroborative stroke of blaming Cherie's passion for redecoration.

This was a nice one because it had a genuinely satirical twist. By comparison the *Mirror*'s oak tree that has grown to resemble the faces of the Royal Family, and the revelation that ginger nuts are being used to resurface Britain's roads offered by the *Express*, were merely silly. But in any case, any attempt at fantastical humour on the part of the *Express* would have been fatally undermined by its insistence on running yet another daft non-story about the Great Diana Cover-up.

Perhaps this was a more general problem, that so many stories these days have, one way or another, the ring of an April Fool gag that is difficult for us to see, in spite of the fact that they are so blatantly by the decline of their industry, to come up with something genuinely wacky just for fun. The *Guardian* reported that the band Coldplay has decided to endorse David Cameron, and the paper would have scored a hit with me, since I find nothing remarkable in such an idea, given the notorious vacuousness of rock stars, were it not

for the fact that I wasn't remotely interested. So the prankster's victory would have been hollow, for anyone can be fooled by an inconsequential lie.

You have to admit, though, that the task of inventing a story more absurd than real life is not an easy one. George Galloway's election as a Respect MP should have been an outrageous canard, as should Jack Straw taking Condy Rice to Blackburn. And last Saturday, either "Blair Resigns" or "Blair Pledges To Stay On. Indefinitely" would have run the risk of backfiring as an unintentional scoop.

So maybe the way ahead in future will be to run stories that ought to be true but, sadly, are not, in order to engender witfulness rather than momentary outrage or incredulity in the reading public. "Blair Repatriates Poppers From Brussels" springs to mind, as does "Cameron Pledges To Halve State Aid Restore Civil Liberties". "BBC Chief To Institute 'Grammar Police'" would be a good one as well.

Meanwhile, I noticed that the round-up of April Fool jokes provided by my internet news service was disgraced by an embarrassing advertisement from Liverpool University's department of online education, exhorting me to study for a Masters (sic) degree via cyberspace. "Would you like to gain the skills and confidence you need to advance your career?" it asked, the "yes" box, helpfully, already ticked. After a moment I attempted at fantastical humour on the part of the *Express* would have been fatally undermined by its insistence on running yet another daft non-story about the Great Diana Cover-up.

Nick Thomas



Left: Chris Martin

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- Adverts can also be sent to us by mail to arrive at the latest on a Tuesday morning.
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Dance without drama

THEATRE REVIEW
ROBERT TANITCH

Bryan Forbes's modest film version of Mary Hayley Bell's novel, *Whistle Down the Wind*, with Hayley Mills and Alan Bates, was very popular on its release in 1961 and has retained its hold on the public's affection ever since.

Three Lancashire farm children mistake a murderer on the run, who is hiding in their barn, for Jesus Christ. The story is told with a parable-like simplicity; the sentimentality is never maudlin, and there is plenty of gentle humour. The film was shot largely on location, and Arthur Ibbetson's black and white photography presents a bleak vision of the countryside that is both lyrical and gritty.

The New Testament parallels were underlined when the village bully forces a youngster to deny Christ three times and a train whistles in the distance. Right at the end the murderer raises his arms so that the police can search him and from a distance, silhouetted against the sky, he looks like Jesus on the Cross. The murderer gives himself up so as not to shatter a child's faith. As he moves to the waiting police car, he walks through the awe-struck children who are convinced they are witnessing Jesus being taken away to be crucified for a second time.

Andrew Lloyd Webber's

musical version relocates the story to racist 1950s Louisiana. No doubt he felt that the Englishness of the original would reduce its international appeal. The musical, which premiered in Washington DC in 1996, has arrived in London for a second time and is now showing at the Palace. Bill Kenwright's production gets off to a rousing start with a gospel number and ends with the children singing "This Could Be the Night When Children Rule the World", which will please mums and dads everywhere. The singers and orchestra give loud, emphatic performances. Tim Rogers, as the murderer, does far too much emoting. Claire Marlowe, too old to be playing a 15-year-old, brings an unwanted sexual connotation to her relationship with "Jesus". The triple bill by the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden opens with Christopher Wheeldon's *Polyphonic*, which is danced to 10 unconnected piano pieces by György Ligeti and is now the final "scissors" exit is delightfully witty. Matjash Mrosovski's *Carole* is a dance drama without a drama. An aristocratic couple car (Zenaida Yanowsky and Edward Watson) meet for a bit of angst beneath hanging brie-a-brac of broken busts, mirrors, candelabra, lamps and clocks. The story goes nowhere and the choreogra-

phy is never sufficiently interesting to compensate.

Revolutions is dedicated to John Cranko's memory and danced to Gabriel Fauré, ranked by Kenneth Macmillan's finest ballets. Deeply felt and deeply moving, it is danced with total commitment by a company which is led by Carlos Acosta, Darcey Bussell and Leanne Benjamin. You know it is going to be good from that very first unforgettable image of the dancers, tightly knit together, banging at the gates. The choreography – pure, serene, angelic – has a spiritual quality, and it is a great pity that some members of the audience are so insensitive as to clap during the ballet rather than wait till it has finished.

Peter Cook and Dudley Moore first came together in 1959 in the legendary *Beyond the Fringe*, which killed West End revue stone dead and was a major turning point in British satire. Cook went on to found The Establishment club and finance *Private Eye*. Dudley Moore became a successful jazz pianist and a Hollywood star. The format of *Pete and Dud Come Again* at the Venue is an enjoyable, nostalgic mixture of chat-show, sketech and off-stage confrontations. Kevin Bishop is too tall to be Dud but he has mastered the voice and face. Tom Goodman-Hill's Cook, eaten up with jealousy, is horribly vicious and supercilious. Alexander Kirk is very funny as a glibly chat show host.

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PROGRAMME FOR HOLY WEEK
AND EASTER 2006

Monday, 10th April, Tuesday, 11 April & Wednesday, 12th April:

Mass: luncheon 12.30 pm.

The Way of the Cross 1.00pm.

Confessions: 1.00pm until 2.00pm.

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament 8.00am. until 4.00pm.

Maudy Thursday, 13th April:

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament 8.00am. until 4.00pm.

5.15pm The Liturgy of the Lord's Supper.

Altar of Repose: Watching until 7.00pm.

Good Friday, 14th April:

3.00pm until 4.00pm The Solemn Liturgy of Good Friday

will be celebrated, which will include the Kissing of the Cross and Holy Communion.

Holy Saturday, 15th April - The Vigil of Easter:

Confessions: 10.45am until 11.45am.

11.00pm The Solemn Midnight Liturgy of the Resurrection of Christ

followed by the first Mass of Easter Day. The Mass will end at approximately 12.30am.

EASTER SUNDAY, 16th April:

The Resurrection of the Lord:

Mass: 10.15am and 12noon.

Easter Monday, 17th April until Friday, 21st April:

Mass: luncheon 12.30pm each day.