

Having spent £20million on their gold-plated, multifunctional super foyer, the Colston Hall were never going to scrimp on their 10-day celebratory extravaganza. Following an opening weekend full of rampaging teenagers, Andy Sheppard's saxophones and Adrian Utley's guitars, there came one of the most memorable, ambitious and inventive weeks of locally-grown entertainment ever to be seen in Bristol. Here's what happened...

MON 21

Bristol's Comedy Gala

● It was the night of the little people. Bristol's most well-connected comic **Mark Oliver** pulled out all the stops in organising this massive, 15-act showcase of funny people with roots round these parts, attracting the likes of **Russell Howard**, **Richard Herring** and our final, secret guest (of which more later). Even Mr Pear Cider himself, **Mark Watson**, and a bearded **Stephen Merchant** appear on screen for a few seconds each to introduce a couple of the live spots. But ever mindful of his role as promoter of young talent, Oliver's cannily given some of the hall's considerable breathing space to fresh and slightly bewildered faces like weeny **Jared Hardy** and Bemmie-bred **John Robins**.

Ace pop punksters **Bucky** put it best, opening the second half: "We normally play to our gran, or in a garden shed." There is something surreal about seeing such tiny homegrown acts on the city's largest stage, and some get lost. **Kev F Sutherland's** brilliant sock puppets are all but invisible to anyone beyond the front few rows, whilst more heady performers such as Bath's exquisitely middle-class **Tom Craine**, chief Chippenham chronicler **Wil Hodgson** and cider-referencing Somerset lad **James Dowdeswell** can't quite do enough with the quickfire, 10 minutes-each format.

Both Richard Herring and **Sally-Anne Hayward** go for the filth-heavy approach, which works better. Herring's deconstruction of what schoolboys imagine gay sex to be like is probably the funniest routine of the evening, and Hayward's even smuttier musings are squarely aimed at the women in the audience, often to great effect. But the most satisfying set overall comes from John Robins, who admirably faces down any nerves at what must be his biggest ever gig to deliver a consistently funny stream of Bristol-based anecdotes about squabbling couples in Broadmead and Peter Andre's prestigious book signing at, of all places, Bedminster Asda.

The last spot goes to the man who has done most to promote the Bristol accent nationwide, lion-haired **Justin Lee Collins**. Bizarrely, he uses it for a three-minute

Sir David heralds the spectacular arrival of Nature's Great Events; whilst Russell Howard was one of many top funnyfolk to grace the stage on Monday



impression of Tom Jones, singing 'It's Not Unusual'. Collins explains that he was "a terrible fucking stand-up" before finding his feet in light entertainment, and has spared us the ordeal. It's a wise move that underlines the main point of the night – to give genuinely talented but underexposed West Country comics a moment in the sun. To which, hats off. (Tom Hackett)

TUE 22

Talvin Singh & Niladri Kumar/MI21/RSVP

● This was their first date and sitarist **Niladri Kumar** was just in from Bombay. They sat on the floor, classical style, **Talvin Singh** encircled by his enhanced tabla set-up, and began the stilted conversation of long-lost friends, careful small-talk interrupted by individual showing off. With much to show their carefully separated bursts of virtuosity lacked the fluid interchange of a classical duo but as they warmed up, barriers fell, and eventually it became a shared enterprise that ended triumphantly. **MI21** was riveting, an edited



version of 'Mother India' – a startling proto-Bollywood film with Soviet realist influences. The live soundtrack (electronics, cello and drums) fitted the melodramatic images perfectly and the effect at times was stunning. All of which made **RSVP's** joyous Bhangra dance party in the foyer a welcome, carefree contrast rounding off a brilliant programme of contemporary Indian excellence. (Tony Benjamin)

TUES 22

Nature's Great Events

● With Talvin and friends whirring away in the foyer, it was left to the weighty cachet of Sir David Attenborough to comfortably sell out the swelteringly hot main hall for one of the week's most singularly rare occasions. Not that the inimitable BBC lifer needed the wincingly fawning introduction doled out by Colston Hall creative director Peter Conway ("Laydees and gentlemen... the Great Man is here!"), but he took it in his humble, self-effacing stride nonetheless; alternating between word-perfect live introductions →