



Untitled No 7, at the Serpentine Gallery

at him. Though immediately active in Italian as English, Bostridge's performance of his voice open higher he went, is with the force he had left song. had indeed been something, as rest of the recital arched between Maltman and he did, though, Maltman in the t, a slightly account of Purulia, and was The Queen's both pieces were en's realisations companionsments otated, and sers have o resist filling

ain contribu- s Shakespeare Us Garlands as more a stage than he his voice ything even Sylvia? could nial conversa- rn table, but d Johnson of wistful his wartime

work. Milne's diamond-bright soprano was a good foil in miniatures by a whole bevy of composers — Gurney, Bridge, Ireland — but she tended to colour her singing with so much earnest expression that the really important moments got lost. No amount of hard work was going to make these songs seem three-dimensional next to the Britten that followed them, but you couldn't fault Milne for effort.

Erica Jeal

#### Pop

### The Calling

Shepherd's Bush Empire, London

★★★★☆

That anyone could feel inspired by this latest example of American sincerity-rock seems inconceivable, but you need only witness the polite female mayhem at the Empire to realise that the Calling have touched a nerve. The cause of all the excitement is singer and sometime model Alex Band, a Nordic blond whose prettiness demotes his four bandmates to spear-carrying roles. It accounts for the curious audience mix: 60% late-teenage girls at the awk-

ward stage between Britney and Rammstein, 40% boys who have the Calling pegged as the Korn you can introduce to your parents.

The group are equally riven by confusion. They grumble their way competently through an hour's worth of drivetime angst, but despite Band's efforts (Note to self: maintain troubled distance), he can't resist playing to the girlie gallery. He is sporadically overcome by spasms of butt-wagging and fringe-flicking, he climbs the drum riser, he accepts a teddy bear from a fan. It is hard to mind this, really — he is remarkably beautiful. But it undermines the Calling's efforts to be major hard-rock players.

Yet Band could look like a gargoyle and there would still be the problem of material and presentation. Having spent two years touring the US (where their anthem Wherever You Will Go was a hit thanks to its appearance on the Coyote Ugly soundtrack), the Calling should have long since mastered the dynamics of live performance. Their attempts to rock the joint with Aaron Kamin's squiddly guitar playing and Matt Laug's iron-fisted drum solos are to little

avail, though, given the stubbornly average quality of the songs.

Despite Band's deep-voiced sincerity, Wherever You Will Go is third-generation Bush, and the love ballad Stigmatized is apologetic when it should be driven. After tunes like these, a straightforward cover of U2's One can't help but be the night's highlight. A pair of horns appears on Laug's head — psychically planted by Bono, perhaps — and there is an instant of transcendence. It is the exception that proves the rule: far from being stigmatised, the Calling are part of the establishment.

Caroline Sullivan

#### Dance

### Nerve/The Idea of Sea

Robin Howard Dance Theatre, London

★★★★☆

Asphalt — gritty, resistant, dirty — is not a natural surface for dance. Almost the first thing you notice about the two dancers in Carol Brown's latest work is the grimy sticking plaster that binds their feet and wrists. But Nerve is not

about theatrical dance aesthetics; it is more an attempt to bring the street to the stage. Hence the long strip of asphalt flooring, buckled into three uneven folds at one end, upon which Brown and her partner Grant McLay perform their duet.

The dance is preceded by a short, jerky film, also made by Brown, of a woman voyaging out from the inner city to the empty horizons of the sea. Images jostle, implode and unravel into dazed slow motion as the woman experiences that mix of casual contact and entranced solitude that defines city travel. When the lights open on Brown's live piece, these images persist.

Her own first solo, danced between two fiercely focused beams of light, takes us instantly to a place of neon and night-time. As Brown's arms wheel through urgent trajectories, they flash between brightness and shadow. She is a one-woman light show, flickering with electricity, barely human.

The piece progresses through a dreamy duet in which Brown and McLay yield to each other's bodies, although the rasp of asphalt discounts any sense of ease or romance. During some passages they dance separately, one on the flat end of the floor and the other teetering on the steep folds of asphalt. The latter, tilted into sudden speeds and awkward balances, seems to be navigating the disjointed momentum of city life.

Sometimes the dancers segue into an urban rhythm, surfing on the vibes of the street; at other times their movements have the disconnected fizzle of exhaustion. Russell Scoones's accompanying score sounds like the inner organs of the city: its rumbling intestines, its thudding heart.

The public, sitting on the floor or standing along the length of the asphalt are more like a crowd than an audience, and Brown's desire to blur the boundaries between the theatre and the world outside is effectively realised. It is a shame, though, that in the final few minutes she yields to the temptation of words. Standing alone, gazing across at the huddled body of McLay, Brown recites a kind of postmodern version of Streets of London. The images of the poem only reiterate, lamely, what was already there in the choreography.

Judith Mackrell

Ends tonight. Box office: 020-7387 0031.

Guardian Unlimited

Read all this week's arts news and reviews at [guardian.co.uk/arts](http://guardian.co.uk/arts)