

# VARIOUS PLAY REVIEWS

## PIGEON LOFT PRESS...

"A new venue is brought to life." **Sunday Times**

"...inaugurates a terrific new theatre space." **City Limits**

"If you find yourself in the vicinity of 443-449 Holloway Road it's well worth a look." **Estates Gazette**



## PRODUCTION REVIEWS...

"...full of wonders, this mixed media extravaganza from SERIO ENSEMBLE is wonderful." **Time Out**

"A considerable lyric beauty... Engrossing." **Waldemar Januszczak, Commissioning Editor Arts, Channel Four Television**

"The thought provoking piece, imaginatively staged and performed by the group was very well received by those present. All the players displayed an excellent insight into their respective character." **Kodak "Professional" Magazine**

"The material marries Sam Shepard to Soho sleaze. Intriguing." **City Limits**

"By confronting the viewers with the photographs, Serio proved that what stills show is not real life - not what the viewers saw first hand - but something that is only based on actual events, edited and interpreted by the man or woman behind the camera. And in many cases, it is this that becomes more real than reality itself." **Professional Photographer**

"The top of the fringe." **The Times**

"The Emmy Award winning writer/director, Charles Serio, incorporates technical effects that are new to the stage. Get your exclusive ticket to the best seat on the fringe." **The Sunday Times**

"A writer with a fine ear and great emotional depth." **Time Out**

"...SERIO ENSEMBLE'S hi-tech wizardry and subtle changes in direction." **The Big Issue**

"This production (T 'n the Boys) and its environment were like a breath of fresh air. Excellent." **Kodak "Professional" Magazine**

## 'Photograph'

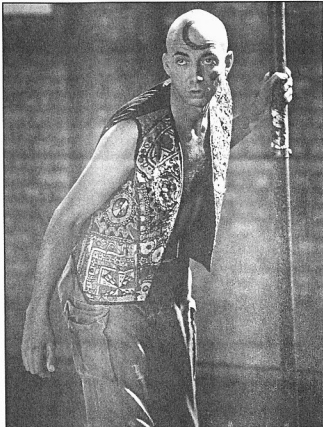
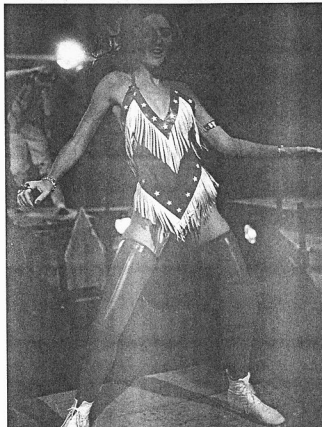
---

### PIGEON LOFT

The audience sit on four sides of a lozenge-shaped catwalk which gently rises and falls in a surge of iron and timber while, in two towers on either side, a pair of musicians-cum-sentinels bash away post-urban traumatically on a shambling jumble of metal junk. Huge stage lights flood the hall with a harsh blue-whiteness, and a flurry of photographers hurtle around, snapping wildly at anything that moves. This is all tremendously exciting, but rather steals the limelight from the four Soho weirdos who eventually strut their stuff on the catwalk. And perhaps that's the point. The characters tell their stories, the musicians clatter and bang, the photographers click click click. And then we clap, and then another show starts. An orgy of colour-slides of the performers are projected on to a large screen, along with — Jeepers! Hallo Mum! — pictures of the audience, taken by the roving photographers at the start of the action. This is damned clever. I don't know how it's done. I don't know what it means. But if a wonderful show is one that is full of wonders and leaves you wondering what the hell it was all about, then this mixed-media extravaganza from Serio Ensemble is wonderful. *Michael Wright*

voyeurism

SEE & BELIEVE



**Jon Tarrant reviews a play in which one of the parts is taken by the camera.**

STILLS photography has long been used to promote plays and motion picture films. In some cases, however, the stills images have proved more durable than the works they promote. Marilyn Monroe's skirt lifting air blast is the most obvious example — so strong being the power of that image that it later inspired an entire film, "The Woman in Red". But there is another side to stills images, and indeed to performance art, which is the audience's role as watchers — or, to put none too fine a point on it, voyeurs. Marilyn Monroe's knickers-exposing pose from "The Seven Year Itch" caters to this very fact. So too does Charles Serio's play "Photograph".

Rather than using stills out of context, Serio's tactic is to have photographers on stage whilst the play is in progress. Exposures capture the audience, the characters and the action. At the end of the play, the photographs are projected before the audience who then have a chance to relief excerpts from what they have seen.

The theme of "Photograph" was inspired by a quote overheard by Serio one day; "you're only as real as your photograph" — said one actor in conversation with another. So it is in the play: the performance is temporal and, consequently, unreal in one sense. The photographs are durable and therefore represent reality. Readers who have not seen the play can only judge by what they see and read here. For you, this is the reality. Whether it is the truth or not is another matter.

Serio's play was one of extremes. The men were macho (a bouncer and a spaced-out convict) and the women were overtly female (as the carefully chosen areas of naked flesh proved). But such also is the "reality" of photography, be it seen in stills from Hollywood movies or contemporary high-street portraiture styles. The images projected after the play told us nothing of the context or history of the characters. The best they could do was to show us how the players were dressed and to capture a few moments of expression. For one character — Raver — this was sufficient for, as she said (somewhat paradoxically), she had

given up talking and now only danced. The other characters had strongly defined images too, but there was more to them than that which could be seen. Unsurprisingly therefore, the best projected images were of Raver. Correspondingly, the bouncer (Hawker) had the strongest story and made the poorest pictures.

For all it's experimental presentation, with a set of scaffolding and planks and accompanied by improvised music, "Photograph" made a simple point and made it well. The voyeur is in fact two people — the photographer and the viewer. By confronting the viewers with the photographs, Serio proved that what stills show is not real life — not what the viewers saw first hand — but something that is only based on actual events, edited and interpreted by the man or woman behind the camera. And in many cases, it is this that becomes more real than reality itself. "Photograph" was photographed by Chris Coles and James Barrington, and produced with support from (in the photographic industry) Joe's Basement, Polaroid, Kodak Professional Imaging and Michael Samuelson Lighting.

Theatre: Preview

Reviews

## 'The Men in Black'

### THE PIGEON LOFT

Take 'The X Files' and blend thoroughly with 'Twin Peaks'. Add a dash of Monty Python and sprinkle with tunes from 'The Teddy Bears' Picnic' or other nursery rhymes. Present in a large empty space of the dark-cornered type, and cover with a tin roof (drumming rain optional). Then you might end up with a concoction like the one dished up by Charles Serio's aliens-are-among-us drama - quirky, scary, and definitely bizarre.

A doctor is commissioned to find out who (or what) has been throwing spanners in the techno-works and sending average citizens off their trolleys. Is it aliens? Or is it all in the mind? In the cavernous expanses of The Pigeon Loft

the silvery costumes glitter, strange gadgets that beep and flash get wheeled around at speed while echoing voices recount eerie visitation experiences with more feeling than clarity. Like his mysterious Men in Black who tee-hee-hee to each other as they slip beyond the range of vision, Serio's metaphorical assault on a society blinded by science skirts teasingly along the edges of comprehension. The complex meld of naturalism, symbolism and parody makes it hard to tell what's leg-pulling and what's not. But it's a stylish sort of confusion, welded together by the notion that we can never hope to understand everything, and it's a big mistake to try. And as the man of letters slips into insanity and the Men in Black close in, what seemed at first an unappetising offering turns out to be a feast after all. *Clare Hajaj*



# Oh yes it is! (Oh no it isn't!)

With the pantlo season in full swing, **M.J. Simpson** discovers that there's more to theatrical fantasy tales than magical pumpkin-to-coach transformations and DNA-altered beanstalks...



What do the following SF/fantasy tales have in common? *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *The Hobbit*, *The Invisible Man*, *Devil Girl from Mars*, *Illuminatus!*, *Interview with the Vampire*, and *Armageddon: The Musical!*

Answer: They've all been adapted for – or from – the stage.

SFX's roving reporters have visited three very different SF plays recently. Looking at them in turn gives a good idea of the range of fantastical subjects being presented on stages up and down the country.

First up, then, is *The Men in Black*, an original studio production by London theatre group Serio Ensemble. Performed in a converted loft behind the National Youth

Theatre, this was a bizarre and intriguing look at the mysterious dark-suited figures who are said to visit UFO witnesses. Using a combination of acting, mime and



Stephen Briggs' latest stage adaptation is of Pratchett's *Maskerade*.



*The Men in Black*, an avant-garde fringe production, proved less can be more.

dance, and with few props and sets, the production managed to conjure up some disturbing images.

*The Men in Black* was a fine example of how SF can overcome the apparent limitations of live theatre by applying the principle "less is more." If you can't afford complex-looking equipment, give somebody a box with a dial on it and let their acting skill and the audience's imagination make up the rest. Easy, really.

While *The Men in Black* was a somewhat avant-garde fringe production, *Maskerade* was an unashamedly populist piece. Adapted from the only-just-out Terry Pratchett

book by Stephen Briggs, who has already adapted four *Discworld* books, it was performed by Abingdon's Studio Theatre Club in the local Unicorn Theatre – a converted medieval barn! Based as it is on *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Maskerade* proved particularly suited to stage adaptation, and was very slickly produced indeed. SFX asked Stephen how he goes about doing the job:

"Step one is to read it at least once, usually twice. Then, and without reference to the book, I write down from memory the basic plot, in a series of scenes. I sort of formulate roughly how these scenes are going

to hash together, then go back to the book, and type the play up directly from that. Afterwards, it's just a matter of remembering where I've got to skim forward or back, where I can afford to drop scenes, and where I can afford to push scenes together."

A quick vox pop of the *Maskerade* audience revealed that the most popular aspect of the production was the young man playing Greelbo (when in human form) who wore a pair of very exciting thigh-boots. The least favourite aspect was the decision to stage the production in said unheated medieval barn in November!

In complete contrast to both of the above was *Nosferatu the Vampire*, a musical based on a silent movie! Based on both FW Murnau's expressionist classic and the novel which inspired it – Bram Stoker's *Dracula* – *Nosferatu* was written by Bernard J Taylor in a style like a New Wave Andrew Lloyd Webber.

After a world premiere in Peoria, USA, *Nosferatu* played one week in Eastbourne as a prelude to a UK tour in 1996. Peter Kartie, a former Phantom of the Opera, played the title role, with Christopher Briggs as Renfield.

Our conclusions? Science fiction, fantasy and horror are all alive and well on the live stage, and long may that continue. You can guarantee we'll be always there to cheer the hero and hiss the villain! **SM**

Stephen Briggs' scripts of *Ward Sisters and Matt* will be published by Corgi in May, and those of *Guarded Gables* and *Men in Arms* following in November.

# THE MEN IN BLACK

## ARTS COUNCIL

14 GREAT PETER STREET  
LONDON SW1P 3NQ

071-333 0100  
FACSIMILE 071-973 6590

Chairman  
The Lord Pakumboo  
Secretary-General  
Anthony Everitt  
Deputy Secretary-General  
Margaret Hyde

Charles Serio  
Basement Flat  
119 Bedford Hill  
LONDON  
SW12 9HE

### UNPERFORMED PLAY

READERS' PANEL SCRIPT REPORT FORM (Please read notes overleaf)

FOR ASSESSMENT ONLY

AUTHOR CHARLES SERIO		TITLE MEN..IN..BLACK.....	
APPLICATION	RSG	BURSARY	(OTHER)
READER TOM RYAN	Signed <i>[Signature]</i>		Date 9.Nov.89.
HIGH PRIORITY RECOMMENDED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	RECOMMENDED	<input type="checkbox"/>
LOW PRIORITY RECOMMENDED	<input type="checkbox"/>	NOT RECOMMENDED	<input type="checkbox"/>

In a futuristic city a Doctor<sup>is</sup> confirmed by a Committee in robes as an Investigator. His task: to find out if the Men In Black-who have become a sort of myth-actually exist.

With his assistants-measurers who measure people-he interviews a number of people who claim to have seen the Men In Black. A rather robotic couple, a woman in an asylum, a futurist (the Men In Black cooked flapjacks for him and since then he has seen into the future). At each interview, without the Doctor seeing them, the Men In Black make an appearance, often dancing "their merry dance".

The Doctor finally sees them, and is very upset. There is a trial but he can produce no evidence that they exist, only his belief. They mock him, ask if he believes in little green men. He is attacked-'trappings'-by the ensemble. They speculate on who the Men In Black might be- unearthly visitors, etc.

The Doctor and the Woman are together in the madhouse. The Men In Black wave.

Not full-length, 47 pages.

This is a very imaginative, metaphorical, non-naturalistic piece with a lovely sense of humour which pokes fun at our scientific, materialistic world view.

In performance it offers opportunity for interesting movement with the Men In Black and various ensemble moments, including the action of the Measurers. There is also choral language at the confirmation and at the trial.

It is quite theatrical and flows quite well, and should be very entertaining. There are so few departures from naturalism I think the good ones should be nurtured.

The theme of the destruction of imagination is imaginatively presented, and the whole piece has an admirable lightness.

## PARTY PIECES

*Pigeon Loft*

Tonight's no ordinary night. The interior of the Pigeon Loft has been transformed into a Butlins-style night-club, small round tables fanning out from the stage. Serio Ensemble have been using this former disused warehouse behind the National Youth Theatre on Holloway Road for several years now, and this time it's the venue for a party.

Charles Serio's new piece looks at the preparation for a big night out by an assortment of odd guests, all linked in ways that gradually become apparent. There's Bea and Lady, two Cosmopolitan-

reared lasses with a taste for tassels, lime green and having a laugh. They're given a ride to the party by coarse Allen and boring Bill, recently separated from his wife Helen and struck down by a nasty cold. Later we realise Helen (Jean Buckland) is also attending as she nervously dresses and peps herself up with self-help mantras: "You're going to enjoy yourself, you won't drink too much." There's the sultry Scandinavian Mary (Meri Pakarinen) and her commitment-phobe boyfriend Jerome - Bea's recent ex.

We also get to witness the preparation by the party hosts, from DJs to dancers to designers. And, of course, party act Korus, an excellent young R&B outfit, who play themselves and who treat us to a showcase at the end - though one feels it won't be long before we see them in the charts.

It could be a disaster, with so many different characters vying for our attention, but Serio is a skilled writer - a previous Emmy winner, no less - and it shows. He knits together the different threads effortlessly climaxing with all the guests arriving at the party in the end - despite cars breaking down, lifts backing out and traffic jams on the M25.

Nor are the guests mere cameos or stereotypes. There's a touch of Mike Leigh, as we learn that the tensed-up Dermot (Dermot Jones) is a sociophobe or that Bill is exploited and ridiculed by 'mate' Allen. A nice touch is the way in which individual character's freeze, allowing them, *Alfie*-style, to say what they are thinking.

Despite one or two weak links in the chain, on the whole the cast does a commendable job. If there's a criticism, it's the theatre lay-out. Audience members have to crane their necks to see a stage that recedes into the distance. And did we really need that dance interlude...?

Still, this ain't heavy, just an extremely enjoyable piece of theatre - and one that's begging to be adapted for television. (See Fringe)

CHERYL FREEDMAN



Girls' night out...PARTY PIECES

# THE HIDDEN HAND CABARET (at CLUB ESPIONAGE)



A member of The Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain

South  
London  
Theatre  
Centre  
Limited

2a Norwood High Street, London SE27 9NS  
Telephone: 01-670 3474

October 1990

## PRESS RELEASE

### NEW PLAY COMPETITION - 1990

MR. CHARLES SERIO formerly of Baltimore, Maryland and now resident in the United Kingdom is a prize winner in the 1990 British New Plays Competition. His play **THE HIDDEN HAND CABARET (AT CLUB ESPIONAGE)** will be produced in London in autumn 1991 at The South London Theatre Centre.

Mr. Serio is artistic director for **SERIO ENSEMBLE**, a group specializing in producing original work for stage and film. The company is resident at The Theatre Museum, Covent Garden, London. Past productions produced in London of Mr. Serio's work include **The Men in Black** and **The Witches**.

He is currently working on a piece under commission from The Royal Netherlands Embassy in London.

# THE HIDDEN HAND CABARET (at CLUB ESPIONAGE)

The American, July 14th, 1995



\* \* \* \* \*

The Serio Ensemble, founded by Charles and Karin Serio, two enterprising Americans, is staging a run of the winning entry of the 1990 British New Plays competition, "The Hidden Hand Cabaret (at Club Espionage)" on the 8, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22,

and 27, 28, 29 of July at 8 p.m. at the Ensemble's resident venue, The Pigeon Loft, on Holloway Road. (8 p.m. tickets £7, £4 concessions). The piece is a series of comic blackout sketches, dances and musical numbers, all on theme of spies and, necessarily, spying. Historical and fictional spy episodes are satirized in an atmosphere in which the audience are addressed as spies themselves, "Coming in from the Cold" into the tawdry, tacky splendour of Club Espionage. Lighthearted, yet subversive, it is suggested, is the mood which sounds just right. Charles Serio is a multiple Emmy Award winner, who founded the Ensemble in 1987. It consists of 35 performers, artists and technicians and, by all accounts, a thoroughly original and high-quality structure. Worth checking out, this time one.

Note: If you ever wonder why these short-run plays don't get properly "reviewed", it is because of that the run is so short, by the time we were able to even press-night them, they would be over when the paper goes to press. Regrets

# T 'N THE BOYS

## TIMES - SUNDAY TIMES

*T 'n the Boys...* SERIO ENSEMBLE production is "Theatre Club" selection two weeks in succession.

### Your exclusive ticket to the best seats

**TO BOOK** any of this week's offers, telephone the Theatre Club on 071-413 1412, 24 hours a day, or call the listed theatre during normal box office hours.

**TO JOIN** the Club send a cheque for £12.50, made payable to The Theatre Club, together with your name, address and telephone number to The Theatre Club, PO Box 490, London E1 9DW, or telephone 071-413 1412 using your credit card. General inquiries call 071-387 9673.

For up-to-date information on Club events, telephone the Theatre Club's News Information Service on 0891 555590. Calls cost 36p per minute (cheap rate) and 48p at other times.

**THE PIGEON LOFT**  
443 Holloway Road, behind National Youth Theatre

**Serio Ensemble**  
presents *T 'n the Boys*

Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays  
until July 31

A new venue is brought to life with a show about a motley collection of low-lives. Emmy-award-winning writer-director Charles Serio has incorporated technological effects that are new to the stage. Members can buy two £6-tickets for the price of one.  
Telephone 071-281 7683

THE SUNDAY TIMES • 18 JULY 1993

**THE SUNDAY TIMES**  
**THEATRE CLUB**

**Bookings only**  
**071-413 1412**

**THE PIGEON LOFT**  
443 Holloway Road  
T 'n The Boys

July 29-31

Serio Ensemble's show about a collection of low-lives. Two £6 tickets for the price of one.

THE SUNDAY TIMES • 25 JULY 1993

## GET ON TOP OF THE FRINGE

**The Pigeon Loft**  
443 Holloway Road  
*T 'n the Boys*

Thurs-Sats until July 31  
A NEW performance space hosts the Serio Ensemble's show about a motley collection of low-lives. Two £6 tickets for the price of one.  
Tel 071-281 7683

**THE SUNDAY TIMES**  
**THEATRE CLUB**

**The Pigeon Loft**  
*T 'n the Boys*: July 29-31  
Two £6 tickets for the price of one. Telephone 071 281 7683.

Monday 26th July 1993

Monday 19th July 1993

**CITY LIMITS** AUG 29-SEPT 5

● **KENNEDY'S CHILDREN**

*by Robert Patrick, directed by Charles Serio, designed by Roland Cleaver, presented by Spiral Candle (Link)*

Plays mourning lost ideals can often be tawdry affairs, sentimental bore-bombs randomly imploding on their audiences. *Kennedy's Children* is different. Located in a New York bar, five burned-out casualties deliver a chain of monologues about their lives which entwine, complement and counter-act each other's. Their stories are bleak, their humour bitter, and the atmosphere so tense that the characters seem on the verge of detonation. But, instead, they just disintegrate before our eyes, a microcosm of a maladjusted society spiralling out of control. This is a haunting, superbly acted and intensely beautiful portrait of an atomised nation harbouring crushed fantasies and buckling under the weight. ARTHUR NESLEN