

Smell the pathos

Dashed hopes, failed dreams and contemporary art.

BY ANDREW PAUL WOOD

I love a good One Hit Wonder: Toni Basil's "Mickey", a pre-Lloyd Webber Sarah Brightman in Hot Gossip singing "I Lost My Heart to a Starship Trooper", Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger" ... It's the aura of glorious failure surrounding their creators, who have concentrated all their talent into one fluke song that becomes famous for a nanosecond, is never repeated and is forever condemned to the purgatory of era-centric compilation albums. Several recent shows in Christchurch have positively revelled in similar bathos and pathos on a Euripidean scale.

The Physics Room showed two installations exploring social engineering and relational aesthetics. In the main gallery

NEW ZEALAND SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
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Arvo Volmer Conductor
Gautier Capuçon Cello
June 2007



DVORAK Cello Concerto
NIELSEN Helios Overture
NIELSEN Symphony No 4 *The Inextinguishable*

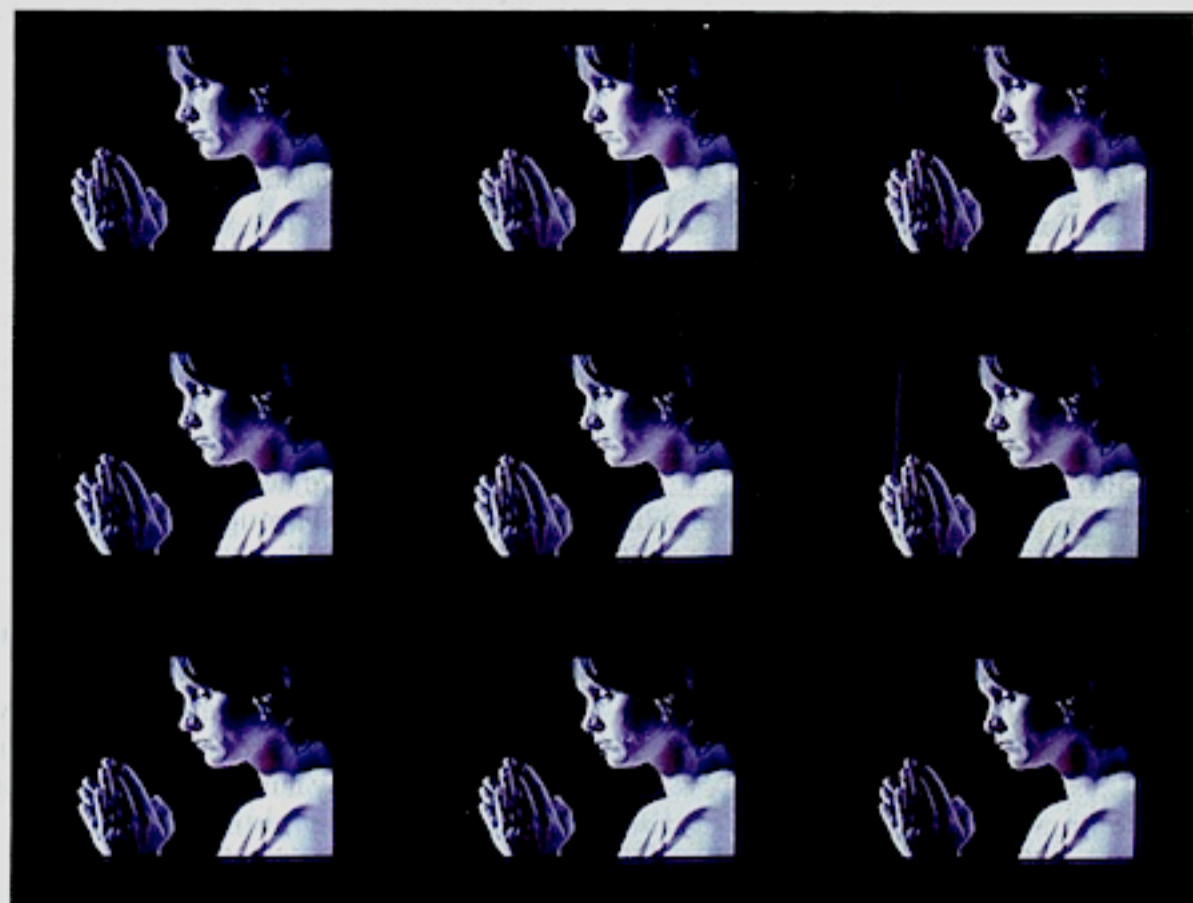
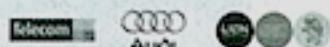
WELLINGTON Michael Fowler Centre Friday 8 June 6.30pm
AUCKLAND Town Hall, Friday 15 June 6.30pm

DE CASTRO-ROBINSON *These Arms to Hold You*
Commission for Children's Voices and Orchestra
WALTON Cello Concerto
DVORAK Symphony No 9 *From the New World*

AUCKLAND Town Hall, Saturday 16 June 8pm
Preconcert talk 7.15pm
HAMILTON Founders Theatre, Thursday 14 June 8pm**
**Hamilton Programme is NIELSEN Helios Overture,
DVORAK Cello Concerto and Symphony No 9
DUNEDIN Town Hall, Wednesday 20 June 6.30pm
CHRISTCHURCH Town Hall, Thursday 21 June 6.30pm
WELLINGTON Michael Fowler Centre
Saturday 23 June 8pm, Preconcert talk 7.15pm

Book at Ticketek or Ticketdirect, Hamilton. RUSH tickets available from ticket outlets on concert day until 30mins before concert start time ID required and offer subject to availability. Service fee applies. Programmes & artists subject to change. Call us 0800 479 674.

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Guidance by Sarah Jane Parton: a paean to flawed, doomed but undaunted hope.

was *Guidance* by Wellington-based artist Sarah Jane Parton, offering a kind of naive utopian manifesto for the future. On a wall of monitors plays a video of Olympics/Band Aid/Oprah/Eurovision aspirations. Clad in a leotard, in a performance reminiscent of Fatboy Slim's "Praise You" video and fetishised *American Idol* auditions, Parton earnestly, but futilely, throws her body through dance moves to the slightly distorted strains of Guns N' Roses' "Paradise City", which Parton sings (of course) in Esperanto. This is a paean to flawed, doomed but undaunted hope: Wagner as high-school musical.

Adjunct to this was a circle of ratty carpet scattered with cushions where the audience is invited to plonk down and view slides of utmost banality, suggesting an effort to explain the existential nature of humans. Parton has a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours), majoring in Time Based Art from the School of Fine Arts, Massey University, Wellington.

In the backroom was an installation by Zina Swanson, both a meditation on the fragility and peculiarity of nature and an evil psychological experiment in human discomfort: a narrow corridor of wooden slats, lined with live potted stinging nettles. The participant is forced to narrow their shoulders and flinch in negotiating this perilous miniature jungle. Swanson is a Christchurch-based artist who graduated from Ilam with a BFA (Sculpture) in 2003.

High Street Project had a spunky installation by Ilam graduate Chris Clements, bringing together some of the most exquisite gouaches (surreal tabletop landscapes

inspired by Kyoto screen painting), and wonderfully utilitarian cardboard boxes tricked out with trompe-l'œil books (self-help manuals, novels of self-destruction, a 3D maquette of that paranormal darling of the 80s, *The Unknown*).

The overall flavour is nostalgic, post-apocalyptic, eschatological, witty, casual and stylish. You can smell the pathos in this uncertain adventure in the psychic terrain of disappointment, a rejection of the modernist quest for the heroic sublime: glorious failure, *Mein Kampf*, Arte Povera, Mike Kelley and all that.

Another kind of tragedy: as one of its Antarctic-themed exhibitions, Christchurch Art Gallery shows Stella Brennan's slightly controversial audiovisual installation *White Wall/Black Hole*, which draws on actual video taken on board Flight 901 before the horrific 1979 Erebus crash that killed 257 people. I'm guessing that the title comes from Deleuze and Guattari's description of the human face as a "white wall/black hole system". The footage, taken by one of the passengers minutes before the crash, shows people (somewhat unnervingly with anonymous black strips over their eyes) happily in conversation, drinking and looking out the plane window. The VHS tape gives a kind of painterly distortion to the image.

Brennan combines this with imagery from her own visit to the crash site and text distilling some of those powerful emotions. It's an incredibly moving tribute to one of our worst disasters – a pivotal moment in our history and a major mark on Antarctica's blank white slate. **WHITE WALL/BLACK HOLE**, Christchurch Art Gallery (until July 29).