Having been to the Haymarket Theatre and, of course, the famous Globe Theatre, it was finally time to visit the Royal National Theatre. Before seeing the final play of the field trip, however, we had the opportunity to explore the theatre’s complex construction and to take a look behind the scenes. In the evening, the curtain rose for William Shakespeare’s All’s Well That Ends Well.

Helena, an orphan who serves in the household of the Countess of Rousillon, is secretly in love with Bertram, the Countess’ son, who has been sent to the court of the King of France. When the King falls ill, Helena offers to cure him. As a sign of gratitude he allows her to marry any bachelor at the court. She, of course, chooses Bertram, who is appalled and, shortly after the wedding, flees with his companion Parolles to fight in the Italian war. Bertram informs Helena that he will never be her true husband unless she can remove his ring, and get pregnant with his child. With the help of Diana, Bertram’s object of desire, Helena is able to get hold of his ring and to trick him into bed. In the end, she tells Bertram that his conditions have been fulfilled, and he promises to be a good husband and to “love her dearly”.

The play has been classified as one of Shakespeare’s ‘problem plays’ because it can be regarded as neither a tragedy nor a comedy. It is also uncertain when the play was written as it first appeared in the First Folio in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare’s death. All’s Well That Ends Well has remained an unpopular and little-performed play as it contains inexplicable turns of events, for example Bertram’s sudden switch from hate to love in one line. With all due respect, the play is poorly written and so our expectations were quite low.

It was, therefore, very interesting to see Shakespeare’s play in a fairytale context. The set included a castle with a high Gothic tower, surrounded by bare trees. The doors were covered by mirrors and golden leaves. At various times, owls and wolves were projected onto a screen in the background to underline the gloomy atmosphere – and to make the audience laugh. Helena reminded us of Little Red Riding Hood, wearing a red cloak, and of Cinderella with her snow-white dress and crystal shoes in the wedding scene. When the action switches to Italy, however, modern items replaced the previous fairytale elements – a neon sign hung in the background, colourful petticoats in the 1960s style were worn by Diana and her friends, the soldiers were dressed in leather jackets, Playboy bunny and cat costumes were used in the bed-trick scene,
and in the end, it rained pink blossoms when Helena and Bertram pose for the “cameras.” Additionally, the scenes were changed in slow-motion, supported by enchanting music. Despite the rather absurd events, the play was surely a visual treat. The play does not offer a sophisticated plot, but the production was successful insofar as the actors make the most out of their roles. At some point the viewer sympathizes with Michelle Terry’s Helena and feels the urge to kick arrogant Bertram, played by George Rainsford, because he rejects the passionate and tender woman. Clare Higgins as the Countess of Roussillon plays a loving (step) mother, Conleth Hill’s Parolles – proving his manliness – somewhat reminded us of a pirate, and Oliver Ford Davies is an entertaining King who reminds you of your grandfather. Even though this play is not as vulgar as Frontline, not as romantic as Romeo and Juliet, not as sophisticated as Waiting For Godot and not as experimental as England, it certainly is ‘light’ entertainment and a good way of rounding off a week packed with theatre visits. All’s well that ends well…

Yingjie Zhou & Christina Licayan

Production Info: All’s Well That Ends Well by William Shakespeare, staged at Olivier Theatre, Royal National Theatre, directed by Marianne Elliott.
Photo: Helena (Michelle Terry) and the King of France (Oliver Ford Davies), © Royal National Theatre
The Royal National Theatre

I’ve been standing here in front of the Royal National Theatre since 2007 and in all these years I’ve experienced a lot. My latest pleasure was making the acquaintance with a group of Austrian university students on a visit to London to explore its theatre scene who, for that purpose, came to the Royal National Theatre.

Actually, I was positioned here because the person I represent was the one who served as the National’s first artistic director. I am the statue of the famous Sir Laurence Olivier. He worked in the Royal National Theatre which is now housed in a large concrete building on the South Bank in London. When you are standing in front of it – as I do – you can see Waterloo Bridge on the left and St Paul’s Cathedral on the right. It’s a lovely view, especially compared to the impression you get from the exterior of the building. Many people are shocked by the façade and it takes them quite a long time to get used to the tons of concrete. Even Prince Charles made a nasty remark about the building by claiming that the Royal National Theatre was “a clever way of building a nuclear power station in the middle of London without anyone objecting.”1 However, I must admit that the Royal National Theatre does better than its reputation would suggest.

It is Britain’s largest theatre complex housing three auditoria, one of which is also named after me, namely the open-stage Olivier. This is the largest auditorium of the three, allowing 1,120 people to see a play. Additionally there are the Lyttelton, with a proscenium-stage and space for about 890 theatre-goers, and the Cottesloe, which is a small studio theatre for up to 300 people. My acquaintances, the Austrian university students, saw all of the three auditoria during a backstage tour.

After finishing their tour they were talking about their impressions in front of me. Everyone was astonished how things worked behind the scenes. They could not believe how big the building was and they really enjoyed standing on a big stage while looking into the auditorium.

However, the most exciting thing was their accidental ‘meeting’ with Helen Mirren. Well, they were just able to get a brief glimpse of her, but this was enough to make the group talk about it for a while. On the whole I think that my Austrian university students were quite happy with this backstage tour!

Karin Ehrentraud & Sigrid Fröschl

1 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/1113298.stm
Inner Monologue of an Actor

Mr. Mal Content on the Globe

Two households, both alike in dignity,
We live in neon, we live in concrete
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
We're on the frontline with a broken heartbeat
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Lord knows the city can take a heavy toll
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
Vultures flappin' overhead you gotta hang on to your soul

What? That's my text? Are they serious?
You know what? I'm sick of it, sick of it all. I mean, I was pretty lucky to get that part in this play, alright, but seriously ... the Globe? How am I supposed to work here? It hasn't even got a roof. And what with all these helicopters and airplanes roaring past every now and then. I'm trying to concentrate here, ok? As if the weather wasn't disturbing enough. I mean, this is England. How could they manage without a roof? The guys rebuilding it must have not thought of that. But then again, they also built it in the wrong place, didn't they, so that's no big surprise. It should have been some 230 metres further down the Thames, I guess, but there must have been some problems with the people living there, or so I'm told. Maybe that's why they decided to put on plays only in the summer, to avoid getting wet. Mind you, I don't ever get to feel that much of the rain anyway, since, apparently, the only parts with a roof are the galleries and the stage. Fair enough. But I really do feel sorry for the groundlings. Getting soaked in the rain, and not being allowed to use umbrellas, the poor fellas. Also, they have to stand for ages, which I assume must be tiring. My feet would be killing me, I tell you. But hey, what do you expect for £5? Should have gotten the more expensive seats up in the galleries, shouldn't they? Oh well.

But I'm getting carried away here. Should be concentrating on memorising my lines for this play. What's it called again? Juliet on the Frontline. No, Romeo and Juliet on the Frontline. Weird. What are those two minors doing in Covent Garden at that time of night anyway? Shouldn't they be busy killing themselves, together with Babydoll and Mordechai? Funny taste, this Shakespeare ... Che Shakespeare, right? Yeah. Right.

But anyway. I like the look of this theatre, I have to admit. The thatched roof really looks nice.
Although, how on earth did they manage to get permission for that, after the Great Fire in 1666?
Suppose the guys in the City Council really were into this whole faithful replica thing. That's probably also why they built the stage in this strange way: right into the audience. It costs me some nerve, it really does. I'm not used to the crowd being so close, but hey ... that's part of the job, isn't it? At least that's what it's like in the Globe. I'll really make sure to be picky about the next theatre, you bet...

Susanna Blöchl, Ursula Höberth
This week I visited the object of any bookworm’s gustatory desires – the British Library. This guide will take you on a tour through the mecca of London’s bookworm-scene, highlighting the best entrées, main courses, and desserts.

Don’t be misled at the very beginning – the mouth-watering giant-sized book not far from the entrance isn’t edible but only a sculpture. Just wait until you get inside… In the centre of the big hall there is what I’d call ‘the Tower of Gluttony’ – the King’s Library. Exquisite books, finest parchments, and the very best manuscripts are piled up there. Yet, beware: the material is ancient (but superbly stored), so only the gourmets among you will truly appreciate the savoury texture of these *amuse-gueules*. Don’t go over the top here because the best is yet to come.

On the left-hand side of the big hall, you’ll see the entrance to the “permanent exhibition” (a nick-name for the main food court). The range of dishes is limited but excellently selected. Bored of simple black printed letters? There you’ll find sheet music (hand-written!), e.g. Handel’s “Messiah,” illuminated maps, books with gilt edging (both luxurious and delicious), and much more. I tried most of the dishes; I even ate a large bit of the Magna Carta, but it was rather a lump in my stomach: very famous but too old and worn out.

For dessert, I was looking for something new. As it happens, there is a temporary exhibition on Henry VIII, so I gave it a try. What a disappointment: hardly any books! Yet this was only my first impression. If you are willing to widen your gustatory horizon, you will find some tasty delicacies. Have you ever tried canvas? There are many pictures of incredibly ugly people, but the material is delicious (although I felt rather full afterwards because of the high-fat oil paintings). For those of you who are currently on a diet, I can warmly recommend the thin handwritten letters, which Henry
wrote to his many wives. Although sometimes I’d have preferred them to have been less eager with their pens; the scribbles and scrawls in their Bibles, exchanging romantic sentiments, are utterly unappetizing. What’s more, there were some beautiful and intriguing books, strongly illuminated and even moving from time to time, but you can’t imagine my disappointment when I discovered that they were only fake books on screens. Never take a bite of one of these! There is nothing more revolting than the taste of electronic stuff and liquid crystals when you’re expecting delicious paper.

Crawling out of the building, I felt highly satisfied with the variety (let alone the amount!) of the menu. To give you an overview of the other criteria I considered, take a look at the rating. All I can say is: Bon appétit!

- Location ★★★★★
- Nutritional value ★★★☆☆☆
- Diversity ★★★★★
- Taste ★★★☆☆
- Style ★★★★★★

Aleksandra Djokic & Bernhard Hirsch
It was a lovely but cloudy Monday afternoon, and we were strolling through the City of London. We enjoyed our leisure time, and the river Thames was purling beneath us as we crossed Millennium Bridge heading towards Southwark. However, as we reached the southern bank of the river, everything had suddenly changed: the sun had gone, the air went cold and there was a whiff of rotten garbage and greasy hot dogs crawling up our nostrils. What’s more, shady figures were crawling out of their holes, one of which turned out to lead down into the depths of promiscuity: a strip club. Having expected to see another historic part of London we were finally getting a little suspicious. Then, we eventually realised that our journey had taken us up north and we had arrived at Camden Town tube station. Although we were wondering how we had spent the previous nine hours – by then it was 3 o’clock in the morning – our attention was immediately drawn to what was happening right in front of us.

Twenty-three people were coming and going, dealing drugs and talking on the phone, sleeping and dancing, preaching and sinning, fighting and laughing, shouting and yelling, loving and whoring, fucking and dying. It was outrageous! We could not believe what we were witnessing in that place. A set of street preachers were handing out leaflets promising salvation. A petty criminal stumbled upon a bag of cocaine belonging to the local villain, took it and kept it. This turned out to be the cause for his premature death two hours later. His girlfriend, an underground construction worker, was devastated. A book-loving bouncer found lasting love with a table-dancing single mother who was constantly trying to talk her own daughter out of joining her in her profession. An ambitious writer/actor was not able to sell his play but succeeded in persuading a tramp to share his telephone box with him. Having found out that he would soon be a father, a semi-professional boxer decided to give up his fulfilling but dangerous career. A gay couple broke up and made up again. All this was commented on by a hotdog vendor, a Celtic fan, and his Afghan counterpart, a Marmite fan.

That did it. This overload of clichés and stereotypes, presented in such an entertaining manner, made us break into roaring laughter. When people next to us started giving standing ovations, a funny thought entered our minds: could it actually be possible that we were standing in the middle of the Globe Theatre watching Ché Walker’s appraised new play The Frontline? Yes, it could.

Michael Maier & Katharina Krischak
On our marvellous field trip to London, we had the opportunity to see several plays, including *England* by Tim Crouch. In contrast to a traditional theatre, entering the Whitechapel Gallery aroused curiosity about what would come next. After we had become acquainted with the modern arts gallery, which exhibited concrete blocks as pieces of art, we were left alone to wonder about this unusual environment.

There was a feeling of disappointment all around. The works of art did not mean very much to us and there was doubt about the whole performance.

Then, the actors began to talk rather incoherently. We, the viewers, were guided through the gallery. We were not guided by the actors but by the play itself, which revealed the tragic fate of a terminally ill person and a subsequent heart transplantation along with a lover’s sympathy and desperation in the face of death.

The two actors, Tim Crouch and Hannah Ringham, arrived and immediately there was something in the air that aroused our interest. I guess it was their manner of appearance, all smiling and warm, but still with some distance in their eyes. One just had to listen to them, to look at them, to follow them around the gallery. It was fascinating, frightening and very emotional at the same time.

On another level, the play also addressed the mysteries of the exhibition and provided an impression of the monetary and subjective value of art.

I basically felt at ease during this first part of the play, but at times I didn’t. I was confused and I just could not stop looking at the actors, although the fact that we were actually at eye-level with them made me feel a bit uncomfortable at the beginning. It was very disturbing to be stared at by the actors instead of just staring at them.

After we had been separated from the concrete blocks and other pieces of art we were suddenly transformed into actors. Our part was the rather silent voice of an Islamic woman who had lost her husband. We took in the gratitude and curiosity of the main character who could have been both male and female. Our husband had been murdered; his organs had been sold to England to save the life of the main character. [The high value of art is nothing compared to such a tragic fate.] We witnessed joy and mourning, the powerlessness of the Third World in the face of Western hegemony. Especially in the second half of the play the actors were brilliant. When talking to the ‘absent’ wife one could see the pain, the relief, the joy, and the sorrow in their eyes.

When we had been walking through Brick Lane with its Hindu community, England’s multiculturalism had struck us. We left the play without being presented with a satisfying ending. We witnessed how
the main character and the widow found common ground through Hasan’s heart. We didn’t know whether to be happy that the main character’s life was saved or to be sad about Hasan’s death. Nevertheless we left the Whitechapel Gallery somehow relieved. The play was happy and sad, male and female, loud and calm. It was like art itself, a way to see things differently. It was something new, lively, active and emotional. And we just could not stop thinking about it…

*Elisabeth Renner & Michael Schumacher*
On 19 May 2009 our group set out to see the biggest love story of all times, *Romeo & Juliet*. Its staging at the sold-out Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre by the river Thames made for a beautiful setting of the play. We were immediately taken back to Shakespeare’s times, because we had decided for yard (=standing) tickets in order to experience a true Shakespearean night. To be honest, we did not have a choice in the ticket selection but we were overcome by a feeling of nostalgia (if not pity for the groundlings). The troubadours added to that feeling, for their song, which introduced the play, was simply amazing and quite funny. We only realized after several seconds that what they were actually singing was the prologue, telling the audience what they may expect from the performance. What made it especially amusing was the fact that they asked the audience to switch off all mobile phones and electronic devices, which surely was not part of the announcement in Shakespeare’s time. Although the storyline is well known and the “star-crossed lovers”’ death should not be that much of a surprise to any theatre-goer, the cast managed to give an exciting and enjoyable performance. So far, nothing new in Verona and Mantua. Romeo and Juliet fall in love despite their families’ feud. However, although the lines were delivered in great clarity, the passion and love contained in them were not entirely convincing. Adetomiwa Edun, who played Romeo, did fall in love all right, but when he saw Juliet supposedly dead in the family vault, his reaction left a lot to be desired. The same is true for Ellie Kendrick as Juliet, whose portrayal of love, passion, despair and shock did, at least to our minds, not vary greatly. Our personal highlight was Philip Cumbus’ portrayal of Mercutio, which was not only lively but also intriguing – especially the stunning swordplay together with Romeo against Tybalt. Yet the suspense, albeit lacking on stage, was taken to the auditorium when, within a short period of time, three spectators collapsed due to the swiftly changing London weather conditions.

*Alice Bogner & Cäcilia Glachs*
“Don’t Talk Faster: There Are No Wolves in This Corner, Only Chickens”

Bloomsbury 2009

Bloomsbury has long been associated with the arts, intellect and education, as high-ranking writers like Charles Dickens and the Nobel Prize winner William Butler Yeats made their home in this district. The area is best known for the famous Bloomsbury Group: a group of artists, writers, critics, and intellectuals who lived and met in the district at the beginning of the twentieth century, and whose members included Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster, to name only a few.

Fascinated by the artistic and cultural history of Bloomsbury, we wanted to find out whether the residents of Bloomsbury shared our enthusiasm, that is, whether they were aware of the artistic heritage of the place they lived in. Armed with curiosity and good will, we decided to investigate how much the average person (and not the tourist guide) knows about the four seminal literary figures mentioned above, who helped establish Bloomsbury’s cultural reputation. Our target group was chosen randomly, as we simply asked people with whom we happened to be engaged in a conversation.

Our first target was a waiter at a cafe right across the British Museum. Trying to recover from our visit to the museum, we decided to have a cup of the famous peppermint tea. The cafe looked fashionable and inviting, and everybody seemed to smile at us. Realizing that this might be the best place to start our investigation, we seized the opportunity and asked our waiter, approximately 30 years old, if he knew where Virginia Woolf’s house was, as we would like to visit it. “Who?” asked the waiter, puzzled, and we answered quickly, convinced of the resonance of the name, “Woolf.” “Woolf?” repeated the waiter, and continued, this time amused, “No love, I’m sorry, there are no wolves in Bloomsbury.”

Disappointed that there were no wolves in Bloomsbury, we came to the conclusion that our waiter was simply too young to be familiar with Virginia Woolf. Learning from our ‘beginner’s mistake,’ we decided that this time we should ask someone older. Tim looked just the guy: around 50, serious, and friendly. “We are looking for William Butler Yeats’ house,” we said, “Do you know where it might be?” “Yeats, Yeats, that sounds familiar,” Tim answered. “Wait a second,” he said, “Alma would know,” and while turning his head he called “Alma! Alma! Do you know a guy named Yeats?” A big, coarse, yet friendly woman came out of the door, looked at us and asked: “Do you mean this famous guy, a singer or something, right? Well, it should be somewhere in that corner,” she said while pointing towards some square. “I know it
because a lot of people come here, asking about his house. I remember his name because it rhymes with ‘cheats’ so I always think of my husband and laugh when someone asks me about him!”

Well, we didn’t laugh. However, we were aware of the progress we had made, from wolves to cheating, and thus encouraged we addressed Salma, our third ‘vicitim.’ Salma had dark, big eyes sparkling with humour, and her Panjabi dress was green and plain. We were all waiting for the tube and after exchanging a few words, we asked her about Charles Dickens’ house. “What?” she asked in return, a bit confused, “Chickens?” “No,” we said, this time louder, “Dickens!” “I know only chickens, no Dickens,” she said while winking at us and stepping into the tube, and we didn’t know if she was serious or not. Whether it was our Israeli and Viennese accents, the underground that was speeding towards us, or simply her hunger that made her think of chicken, we will never know.

Thinking of chickens, we were determined to ask our final question and then go and have something to eat as soon as possible. We spotted a guy who also seemed to be in a hurry, and decided that he was the perfect candidate. We addressed him quickly and asked him about E.M. Forster. “What Faster?” he asked in a heavy accent, irritated. “No, Forster!” we said, partly amused and partly desperate. “Well, you should be talking faster, that’s for sure!” he told us, quite annoyed, and left us standing there, bursting with laughter and going, as fast as we could, to the nearest restaurant, to have some chicken.

Each one of the people we asked failed to recognize these four famous writers and poets of Bloomsbury. In contrast to our enthusiasm, the four locals seemed indifferent and ignorant, as far as the artistic and cultural history of Bloomsbury is concerned. Based on our investigation, there is no doubt that the contemporary population of Bloomsbury does not heed its own heritage, as fast wolves and chickens in corners was all we managed to get out of them.

Stefanie Dirnberger & Shiri Zuckerstätter
Undaunted by death, TFL reporters Teresa Larcher and Marie-Therese Fürböck dared to enter the lion’s den aka the British Museum, where a fight for cultural supremacy keeps the world on tenterhooks.

Despite their missing arms and penises, the Greeks have managed to gain supremacy within the Museum Britannicum and claim most of the space for their exhibits.

In a vain attempt the Romans have tried to obtain equal prominence by imitating the Greek style. Despite their victorious military campaigns, the Romans have not been able to conquer the home territory of the Greek. As Obelix has already put it quite well: These Romans are crazy!

The Assyrians try to impress with magnitude and have kept out of the line of fire behind sealed doors ever since the war started.

While the others were immersed in waging war with each other, the Chinese were contemplating their fighting strategy and finally resolved to fight with their best material: China. At long last they have recently entered the fray with strategically placed porcelain and drawn masks.

By using a cipher, the Egyptians tried to confuse their opponents and hide their plans - but to no avail. The Rosetta Stone has outsmarted an entire nation, revealing the carefully concealed key for deciphering their complicated code. Ramses II would probably turn over in his grave if he knew about this ignominiousness. Despite numerous attempts of disposing of the Stone, the Egyptian battalion has not been able to redeem themselves.

But a new power looms on the horizon. The Aztecs advance rapidly, leaving a scene of destruction wherever they go. With the help of their turquoise dragons and snakes they are determined to become a prominent force in the Museum Britannicum. An eyewitness who wants to remain anonymous confirms the distant rumors that their first target will be the peaceful Islamic world with their graceful predators.
TFL will not shy away from any dangers to keep you up-to-date on the most recent events at the scene of war in the Museum Britannicum. So stay tuned for more.

Marie-Therese Fürböck & Teresa Larcher
Waiting for Godot: An Experience Worth Waiting For?

Sean Mathias is bringing Godot to London’s most loved theatre, the Theatre Royal Haymarket, with internationally celebrated actors Ian McKellen, Patrick Stewart, Ronald Pickup and Simon Callow tagging along for the ride. But could it live up to our expectations?

Arriving at the Haymarket Theatre we realized that we would be faced with more than what we had bargained for: claustrophobia, fear of heights and risk of injury.

The steep steps leading to our seats posed an unexpected problem, not just for those wearing high heels. The seats were obviously designed for school children in an attempt to fit as many people into the balcony as possible. Sitting at such height did not increase our comfort.

The lights went out, the music started and Didi and Gogo stumbled on to the stage. As soon as the two tramps started to speak the whole balcony leaned forward - but not in expectation but to cope with the horrible acoustics. Following the play was more like watching a silent film. We could have relied on facial expressions, but due to the vast distance to the stage that too was impossible.

But the actors’ enthusiasm immediately drew us into the play. Even though reviewers criticized the exaggerated gestures, overblown humor and dancing, the audience on the balcony was immensely thankful because it brought life to the play and made it easier to follow.

However, hard core fans of Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart seemed to have problems keeping up with Beckett’s complex play and staying awake during the performance. Stewart himself reprimanded a fan after the show because not only had he fallen asleep and disturbed the performance with his snoring but he had also dared ask for an autograph afterwards.

After being shooed out of the theatre by a trial fire alarm we were standing backstage, clutching our cameras and speculating on our chances of seeing the cast. Our hopes were dashed when we were told that the actors would not come out. Still we refused to give up and continued to wait. Our antics, chats and jokes to pass the time reminded us of the play we had just seen. We were rewarded when McKellen, still in makeup and bathrobe, stepped out to his fans, patiently giving autographs. The other actors were more difficult to catch; Stewart only came out to get food and Pickup to smoke a cigarette.

Waiting for Godot really was worth the wait, not only because of the performance but because of the backstage experience. Of all the things that Beckett’s play could tell us about life it taught us about waiting, although, unlike Didi and Gogo, we did not wait in vain.

Tanja Meissinger & Melanie Brunner
Patrick Stewart (left), Ronald Pickup (right) and Ian McKellen (middle) backstage, giving autographs.

(below) Our precious autographs for which we waited patiently...and waited...and waited...