

Cara Dillon, Gala Theatre, Durham. Thursday, 7.30pm. Tel. 0191 332 4041. The winner of Best Album at the BBC Folk Awards 2010, this truly original singer squeezes new life from traditional music, creating a musical identity all her own.

Edinburgh previews guarantee some laughs

COMEDY fans in the North East will be getting a sneak preview of stand-up shows bound for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The Grinning Idiot Comedy Club has programmed a selection of gigs at both Live Theatre in Newcastle and the Lamplight Arts Centre in Stanley with some hotly-tipped talent who will be making their way north of the border in August. Kick-starting the Edinburgh preview line-up, Live Theatre will be opening its doors to Gary Delaney and Kai Humphries on July 28. Delaney's new show, Purist, consists of an alarming amount of jokes. Don't expect a narrative, theme or a voyage of self-discovery, but do expect jokes - and lots of them. Meanwhile, at the grand old age of 26, Humphries has decided to take stock of his life so far and see what the implications are for his future. He recently discovered the relationship minefield that is predictive text and the importance of having a lock on the toilet door when the new girlfriend has moved in. The following night Live will welcome Chris Ramsey. The multi-comedy-award-nominee will bring his show Aggrophobic to Newcastle audiences, having already this year appeared on Russell Howard's Good News and supporting Al Murray and Lee Mack on national and international tour dates. Meanwhile Alun Cochrane will bring his spectrum-spanning, and lovingly created jokes about life. Finally at Live, Mick Ferry and Phil Kay get set to tread the Newcastle boards on July 30. Over in County Durham, Lamplight will unveil award-winning Geordie comic, Jason Cook and Viz co-founder, Simon Donald on August 1. Simon is enjoying much success with his honed brand of character comedy and loves a home audience. The season will finish with a visit from Tom Wrigglesworth and Dan Willis on August 2. Call 0191 232 1232 for Live Theatre and 01207 218899 for Lamplight.

Retro rockers take northern sound west

A MUSICIAN from County Durham is making his mark in the American Midwest. SIMON RUSHWORTH talks to Stephen Kilkenny.

A NORTH East songwriter is rocking all over the world after securing a major international distribution deal for his band's debut album. Stephen Kilkenny grew up in rural County Durham before his love of the electric guitar drew him to the bright lights of London. But it was only when the talented musician swapped the UK for America's Midwest that he finally grabbed the opportunity to realise a lifelong dream. Now Kilkenny, originally from Croxdale near Spennymoor, is one of the rising stars of the Milwaukee scene as the face of retro rockers Major Tom. "Major Tom came together by necessity," he explained. "The bass player and I were in another band but I got sick of trying to find the right fit. "In the end I wanted to write an album on my terms and A Night On The Lash is the record I always dreamed of. "In the other bands I've been in, people have always influenced the songwriting from a commercial point of view but there was no pressure in that respect this time. "This is the music which I have huge empathy for and hopefully that's reflected in the songs. There are retro roots but it's essentially material from the heart. It was so natural and so easy writing this album and I'm very proud of what we've achieved as a band." Kilkenny has played more than 100 shows across the Midwest with Major Tom but without a major label deal he turned to the internet to get the band's record heard. "We've played a huge amount of



GOING WEST Stephen Kilkenny has scored major success in the States with his band Major Tom, right

gigs in the States. We did a good couple of years playing 50 or 60 shows a year right across the Midwest. "We picked our way through all of our material, looked and listened to what the crowds were responding to, and put together the tracklisting for A Night On The Lash. "Now we have an international distribution deal with iTunes and 40 other outlets worldwide. "The first day that the album came out I had a look to see what was going on and our first sale was to some chap who lived about a mile from Lake Geneva! How crazy's that?"

Kilkenny is now planning Major Tom's first full UK tour with a return to his native North East top of the agenda. He added: "I scouted out a few venues on my last trip home earlier this year. "I still love coming back to County Durham and it brings back a lot of very fond memories. Croxdale is a small village and I went to the colliery school there. "There were a couple of older kids who lived in the village who influenced me when it came to music but it's always been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. "Now I live in Milwaukee and it

reminds me very much of Newcastle. Traditionally they're both big brewery and manufacturing towns but you don't get Philippa Thomson reading the weather over here - that's the only negative as far as I'm concerned! "It's a good place to live and in the Milwaukee Summerfest they boast what could well be the biggest music festival in the world. I've been to Glastonbury, Reading, T In The Park and Download and it's way bigger than all of those ones." * Major Tom's debut album A Night On The Lash is available on iTunes now. Go to www.major.tom.rocks.com for more information on the band.



Themed supper night left us feeling shipshape

A Supper With... Collingwood, Trinity House, Newcastle Quayside

IF YOU could swap your usual dinner companion and chat over canapes or trifle over trifle with somebody from a different walk of life, who would you choose? Organisers of EAT! festival have given it some thought and come up with a varied selection of characters to add extra flavour to your supper. On Monday night (and last) it was our own Admiral Lord Collingwood and the themed evening proved a great success. While this year marks the 200th anniversary of his death, Admiral Nelson's right-hand man was there in

every cleverly thought-out detail of a hugely interesting and well-hosted night. I'd never been to Trinity House. What a gem it is, hidden behind Broad Chare. Being surrounded by 500 years of history and mingling with some in period costumes was like stepping back in time. Setting a suitably nautical and jovial note as we assembled in the board room - with champagne corks popping for our aptly-named Admiral's Flip (given an added kick of rum) and delicious canapes such as quails' eggs with celery pepper - was Captain Stephen Healy, deputy master of Trinity House. He gave us a tour of the maritime building which has a library, a chapel

and, apparently, a friendly ghost. A displayed hand-written letter by Collingwood was an extra fascinating touch. And, if there was ever a man with an inside line on him it is surely his biographer Max Adams who, as fellow host, was at our table for dinner, served in the banqueting room. Between courses of a Trafalgar-themed menu, the hosts swapped tables so everyone had a chance to ask them about Collingwood - a national hero not just a local one, points out Max. Imagination came into play in the excellent menu by Boldon Farmhouse Pantry, which was in keeping with EAT!'s emphasis on local. Dishes had titles such as St Vincent's Terrine - of shellfish,

accompanied by scallops - and Sovereign Royale. This time TV presenter John Grundy, the third host, joined us for deboned, stuffed suckling pig and asparagus. There was a vegetarian option too and wines - a French Sauvignon Blanc and robust Claret - were picked to complement the food. A summery, creamy "posset" dessert was followed by wonderful cheese and port. The company is, of course, as important as the food and many people who sat down as strangers had a few shipmates by the end. ● For other Supper With ... events visit www.eatnewcastlegetateshead.com Barbara Hodgson


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Dad's Army close to end of its march

Dad's Army Marches On at Newcastle Theatre Royal until Saturday.

FOUR episodes of the famous BBC sitcom make up this latest stage homage marking the 70th anniversary of the Home Guard. Mum's Army sees the ladies of Walmington-on-Sea called up for active service and henpecked Capt Mainwaring getting a tantalising sniff of romance. In Branded, the gentle Private Godfrey reveals his status as a conscientious objector in the

Great War. These two, before the interval, highlight the poignant aspect of Dad's Army which was part of its TV success but tended to play second fiddle to the madcap misadventures. Mainwaring is/was a small town Churchillian figure, mocked for his vanity but heroic nonetheless. You don't doubt he would have died for his country, though probably fruitlessly. In this role, Timothy Kightley has Arthur Lowe to a tee. Whereas all the cast, with Leslie Grantham as Private Walker, are

all recognisable as their mostly late lamented TV counterparts, Kightley's Mainwaring is everything you want in a tribute show - as near as dammit the real thing. That said, this stage manifestation of Dad's Army marches on very slowly. Maybe it's the nature of the chosen episodes or maybe the fact that, just possibly, the enterprise has run its course, but on Monday night the spark between cast and a fairly sparse audience was slow to ignite. When it did, it was after the

interval with Young and Beautiful, in which the Home Guard veterans strive to avoid being pensioned off into loathed Warden Hodges' ARP outfit. The evening concludes with The 2½ Feathers, in which the cast zoom back in time to shed light on a shady episode in Corporal Jones's military past. In all, it is a show with plenty to reward dedicated Dad's Army fans. But it also has the look of one that has just about reached its sell by date. David Whetstone


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