

David Nash uses chainsaws, axes and blowtorches to make his wooden sculptures

and coming to the aid of Thebes, a neighbouring state, for dubious reasons. Wartorn and poverty-stricken Thebes is ruled by the democratically elected president Eurydice, who seems to have given her lover Orpheus the slip in the underworld.

This is the first contemporary mythological epic at the National since 1978, when Edward Bond's *The Woman* put a modern gloss on the aftermath of the Trojan war. The theatre is pulling out all the stops, with Richard Eyre directing, a large cast and a top design team. It's also the latest show in the Olivier auditorium's Travelex £10 ticket season—one of the great success stories of sponsorship.

Buffini wrote the recent Jane Eyre television adaptation for the BBC. Her last play at the National, Dinner, in 2003, starred Harriet Walter as a hostess from hell and transferred to the west end. Her 2007 version of The Suicide by Nikolai Erdman, called Dying For It, deserved to. David Harewood, who was Martin Luther King in the award-winning The Mountaintop last year, plays Theseus, and Nikki Amuka-Bird from Torchwood is Eurydice. Michael Coveney is chief theatre critic of Whatsonstage.com

ART

David Nash

Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 29th May-27 February 2011, Tel: 01924 832 631

David Nash, the heroic chainsaw-wielding man of trees, turns 65 this year. Yorkshire Sculpture Park is hosting an expansive celebration of his 40-year career, with the largest exhibition of his work to date and a new permanent outdoor commission.

Wood is Nash's fundamental material. In 1968 he bought a chapel and adjoining schoolhouse in the small Welsh town of Blaenau Ffestiniog in Snowdonia, establishing his pattern of living and working in situ. Early carpentered towers quickly gave way to the more direct approach of chainsaw, axe, and sometimes blowtorch, tools he wields with tenderness and precision, most often on fresh unseasoned trunks and branches.

His most famous works are necessarily unavailable: *Ash Dome* was planted near his home in 1977 and *Wooden Boulder*, a chunk of 200-year-old oak, was released into a Welsh mountain stream in 1978 (its subsequent journey documented in films, maps and drawings). But with a retrospec-

tive in the sculpture park's Longside Gallery, drawings and photos in the Garden Room, and new monumental pieces—giant redwood "crags" and black eucalyptus spheres—in the Underground Gallery, this is as good an opportunity as you will get to measure his stature.

Emma Crichton-Miller is an arts writer

WORLD MUSIC

Toumani Diabaté presents: Ali Farka Touré Variations Barbican Hall, 2nd June, Tel: 020 7638 8891

Music is not a universal language, recent studies suggest. If so, it follows that our tastes are more culturally determined than we realise: music that makes little reference to the cadences of our youth is less likely to hold any meaning for us. Perhaps the appeal of Malian Toumani Diabaté to western listeners is his willingness to invite the familiar musical syntax of Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, flamenco and Indian raga (popularised by Ravi Shankar and the Beatles) onto the 21 strings of his harp-like kora, thus softening our ears to the exotic complexities of the traditional Malian repertoire.

Similarly, his compatriot Ali Farka Touré rose to international fame after taking up the six-string guitar, on which he played blues-tinged Malian riffs. Farka Touré claimed to have discovered in west African music what Martin Scorsese called the "DNA" of the blues, which centuries ago crossed the Atlantic with slaves, finally evolving into the musical outpourings of bourbon-soaked retirees. This, in turn, provided the basic grammar for rock 'n' roll.

The two Malians were friends and collaborators, winning a Grammy for their 2005 album *In the Heart of the Moon*. In the same year, they met in a London studio to record a follow-up, *Ali & Toumani*. Released in February, the album once again entangles the gentle virtuosity of two of Mali's most extraordinary figures. As a tribute to Farka Touré, who died in 2006, this concert should thrill even the most parochial of ears. Proceed in the Mich Crowe is a music writer

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