

Anna Picard for The Independent on Sunday

Few pubs can boast a house-band including a regal, an organ, a harpsichord, a harp, a lirone, two gambas and assorted lutes, recorders, pochettes and violins. But at the Gatehouse in Highgate, Oliver-John Ruthven's ensemble Musica Poetica London turns the pub theatre upstairs into the ducal palace of Mantua. Monteverdi's Orfeo was designed to be an intimate experience and, although Matthew Eberhardt's production buckles under a concept in which Arcadia is a repressive Christian community and Hades is a 1980s pop video, the central performances of Natalie Perez, Clare Ghigo and Edmund Hastings are beautifully direct.