Tamara Rojo as Frida Kahlo in "Broken Wings" from *She Said* by English National Ballet

neatly solving the problem (for instance) of the aged Lear's entry carrying Cordelia by having them both towed in on a survival blanket. Rhys Ifans's Fool was a wonderful achievement, extremely funny but never off-topic, always probing Lear's situation. Andrea Arnold's vibrant *American Honey* showed this fine filmmaker able to work at full stretch on a free-wheeling road movie with an artfully invisible script, showing the America that the mainstream product ignores, sex, drugs and all. On television the *Doctor Who* offshoot *Class* knocked spots off the granddaddy franchise, with the writer Patrick Ness resourcefully adding the idea of a hell mouth beneath a school (thank you, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) into its genre mix, and Katherine Kelly making droll high camp look effortless – though the bland title did it no favours.

LUCY MUNRO

In this anniversary year, my favourite Shakespearean production was the Donmar's remarkable "Shakespeare Trilogy": *Julius Caesar*, *Henry IV* and *The Tempest*. Directed by Phyllida Lloyd, the plays were given life and coherence by the framing conceit of a theatre project in a women's prison, and they featured stunning performances by an ensemble cast headed by Harriet Walter. I also loved one of the Globe's contributions to Shakespeare400, "The Complete Walk", a series of new films mounted on screens set along the south bank of the Thames, which I saw on a blustery Sunday before heading to the Barbican for *Kings of War*, Ivo van Hove's gripping adaptation of the first tetralogy. But some of the occasions I remember most fondly recognized other events that took place in 1616: the deaths of Cervantes, Francis Beaumont, Tang Xianzu, Philip Henslowe and Richard Hakluyt, and the publication of the Folio edition of Ben Jonson's works. The Education Department at Shakespeare's Globe ran a series of talks, symposia and staged readings, including rare opportunities to see Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* and Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* and *The Coxcomb*. Closer to home, King's College London hosted a production of Beaumont's first play, *The Woman Hater*, by Edward's Boys, directed by Perry Mills. Given the success of Adele Thomas's revival of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse in 2014, it should not surprise us that Beaumont's plays come to vivid life in performance; Mills's production not only made a superb case for the political bite and surreal humour of this wildly underrated play, but also put us in touch with a lost theatrical tradition, that of the professional boys' playing companies of early modern England.

CAROL J. OJA

Gender politics took a beating in this year's US presidential election. But a salutary step forward for women occurred at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City with a mesmerizing new production of *L'Amour de Loin*, composed by Kaija Saariaho and conducted by Susanna Mälkki, both from Finland. It is a shocking fact that in a history of 136 years, the Met has only once before featured an opera by a woman: Dame Ethel Smyth's *Der Wald* in 1903. Furthermore, only three women have previously conducted the Met's orchestra, most recently the British conductor Jane Glover. Structural sexism has clearly reigned, and the team of Saariaho and Mälkki made a dent in one of opera's "highest and hardest glass ceilings", to quote Hillary Clinton.

Saariaho's score for *L'Amour de Loin* shapes shifting masses of sound from exquisitely crafted details. It is simultaneously formidable and listener-friendly, maximal and spare. The Met's production, designed by Robert Lepage, employs flickering ribbons of LED lights to evoke the undulating motion and vast expanses of the sea. The performances conjure up exoticized enchantment, with Eric Owens as the troubadour Jaufré Rudel, obsessed with a far-off love; Susanna Phillips as Clémence, the Countess of Tripoli and the object of Rudel's desire; and Tamara Mumford as The Pilgrim, a messenger between the would-be lovers. The opera had its premiere in Salzburg in 2000.

While in interviews Saariaho can seem impatient to discuss her music rather than the Woman Question, she has a gift for delivering sage commentary about the female creative life. "To write music, concentration is necessary, an interior hearing", she told the *New York Times* in 2002. "To be a woman, to be a mother, one needs to be always available and busy. It's difficult to have, at the same time, your feet on the ground and your head in the sky."

MICHAEL PENNINGTON

This was the year when tragedians, fantasists and farceurs were hard put to it to come up with anything that sounded like fiction. Bad dreams merged with breaking news, the unimaginable became documentary and mendacity methodical. In this great Farrago of Trumpery and moonshine, most categories were subsumed in a series of outrages to the intelligence as well as to common decency.

Unsurprisingly, Shakespeare did a roaring trade: in James Shapiro's words, we read the newspapers to find out what's happened and then turn to Shakespeare to understand it. Half a dozen Lears carved up their kingdoms and ran mad; Phyllida Lloyd and Harriet Walter showcased a company that for sheer innovative panache, ferocious commitment and mischievous audience participation was perhaps the most exciting thing to happen to British audiences since Robert Lepage's *Dragon Trilogy* in the 1980s. Meanwhile Shakespeare's twenty-first-century acting company found a couple of new recruits: a motley Clown called Boris – who presumably abandoned his biography of the great man in disgust at his Europhilia – and we've ended the year with a level of governmental indecisiveness worthy of King Henry VI – another self-proclaimed Christian dithering till he's blue in the face between the red rose and the white.

But what could be wrong with a year that included *I, Daniel Blake* and Akram Khan's *Giselle*? And to see the V & A's *Revolution* exhibition, once you got past the rather callow English contribution to the 1960s, which was essentially to do with haircuts and clothes, and engaged with the American agonies – the self-immolations, the police murder of students, and, opposed to them, great set pieces such as Jimi Hendrix playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and Country Joe Macdonald's "Fixin' To Die Rag" at Woodstock – was unforgettable, especially seen through the dark prism of present-day America.

MIKA ROSS-SOUTHALL

"We were a close-knit brotherhood . . . almost like a mafia", the artist Robert Motherwell tells us in Michael Blackwood's documentary, *The New York School* (1972), about the Abstract Expressionists. Watching this fascinating film – why is it so rarely shown? – at a special screening before wandering through the Royal Academy's colossal exhibition, *Abstract Expressionism*, was a remarkable way to experience their work. Interviews with those of the group still alive when the film was made (a dishevelled Willem de Kooning trundles around his industrial studio, showing us his works-in-progress; Adolph Gottlieb, in his early seventies, now in a wheelchair, paints thick, primitive-looking black shapes on a canvas laid out on a low table) are mixed with archive footage of the group's other major artists creating, and speaking about, their work – some of which I then spotted on the walls in the RA. The room of voluminous stalagmite Clyfford Stills was compelling. So, too, were the Richard Serra steel sculptures at the Gagosian Gallery, Brittannia Street. Serra's elegant, simple, intense structures force you to reassess the space you occupy within the gallery's rooms.

At the Venice Architecture Biennale this year, it was a relief to walk out of the confused, quasi-socialist French pavilion into the perceptive and playful offering from Australia, dedicated to "a bridge between people . . . a well-known public space, where the personal and the communal intersect" – the swimming pool. Presented by Aileen Sage Architects, an angular, wood-panelled shallow pool cleverly abutted a window that looked down on the canal running through the Giardini.

Deniz Gamze Ergüven's *Mustang* is an intricate, powerful Turkish film about five teenage sisters who, when seen cavorting with boys at the beach, are incarcerated at home by their orthodox grandparents. Ergüven delicately balances sharply unsettling scenes with endearing humour, and the cinematography is gripping and beautiful.

CHARLES SHAFAIEH

During a largely disappointing year of New York-originated theatre, the revival of David Harrower's unsettling play *Blackbird* was a rare production that matched the intensity and intelligence of British imports such as the Globe's *Merchant of Venice*, starring a riveting Jonathan Pryce, and Mike Bartlett's *King Charles III*, with its evocations of *Richard II*. The director Joe Montello and Jeff Daniels (one of our most versatile performers) were part of the play's first New York run in 2007, and the resulting maturity and clarity resonated throughout the brisk ninety minutes in which a fifty-five-year-old man is confronted by a twenty-seven-year-old woman (a fragile Michelle Williams) with whom he had a sexual relationship fifteen years earlier. Resisting clichés and sentimentalization, Harrower's script asks many questions – about consent, trauma, childhood innocence, love – that only two actors this well-attuned to each other can tease out and, wisely, leave unresolved.

The most memorable event in my 2016 calendar, however, was a mix of spoken word and music I heard in Helsinki in January: John Malkovich narrating an adaptation of the "Report on the Blind" chapter from the Argentinian novelist Ernesto Sábato's *On Heroes and Tombs* (1961) set to Alfred Schnittke's Concerto for Piano and String Orchestra (1979). The combination is so striking that it seems as if Sábato and Schnittke themselves paired the latter's avant-garde concerto that fuses classical Russian chorales with harsh, dissonant walls of sound and the former's detailing of a paranoiac's conspiracy theories about a Sacred Sect of the Blind that he believes controls the world. In addition to introducing these two under-appreciated works to new audiences, the performance (still touring internationally) acts as a reminder of how little is often necessary to make text and music enrich each other.

Martina Laird as Cassius and Harriet Walter as Brutus in *Julius Caesar*

JOHN STOKES

Theatre and ecological concern are not an obvious match. One is urban, immediate, artificial by definition, the other unbounded, global, anxious to restore the balance of nature. In 2016 two plays suggested a way forward. Both were by women, both at the Royal Court, both directed by James Macdonald. Caryl Churchill's startlingly unpredictable *Escaped Alone* arrived near the opening of an ominous year and revealed the terrors behind everyday life as four women of different backgrounds, all in their seventies, interrupted their tea-time chat to deliver apocalyptic monologues evoking environmental collapse. Churchill has devised a traumatic form of theatre that, by defying the usual conventions of dialogue, takes us directly to the heart of the matter. In Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*, staged near the year's hideous end, a trio of baby boomers, two women and one man, all retired nuclear engineers, bicker among themselves over their sexual past but – much more importantly – guiltily confront a terminal disaster in a local reactor. Although both plays tap into a rage against death that only the old are supposed to feel, there's a sense throughout of "a general sort of terror".

Two instances of Macdonald's use of music to disrupt the foreboding will stay in the memory. In *Escaped Alone* the women broke into a gentle, acapella version of the Crystals' 1960s hit "Da Doo Ron Ron" while in *The Children* the pensioners recreated a slick dance routine to the 70s funk of James Brown. These brief and joyous interludes seemed to recall a collectivity that might yet alleviate the universal fear and even – though, sadly, neither play seemed very confident – help us survive it.

RICHARD TARUSKIN

I never thought I'd hear it, but on December 2, at 10.30 am (Pacific Time), there it was: from St. Petersburg, live-streamed by Medici.tv, the first performance since the premiere, in January 1909, of Stravinsky's great lost work, the *Pogrebal'naya pesn'*, or *Chant funèbre*, or *Funerary Chant*, in memory of his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov, by the Maryinsky Theater Orchestra under (who else?) Valeriy Gergiev. It was found in 2015 just where we thought it was, in the storage rooms of the St Petersburg Conservatory, in a floor-to-ceiling wall of orchestral parts hidden for years behind another such wall, exposed at last when the building was evacuated for renovation.

Some thirty years ago I described the piece on the basis of reviews and other examples of its memorializing genre. How close did I come? Too close. Though it attested to the twenty-six-year-old composer's technical skill, it was conventional and predictable (all those sequences!) and, alas, bombastic. Even so there were surprises. One was hearing, right off the bat, the title character's leitmotif from *Firebird*, the ballet that made Stravinsky famous the following year. Growled out lugubriously rather than wheeling in the avian ether, it was nevertheless unmistakable, replete with the ostentatious retrogrades and inversions we knew from the ballet score.

Towards the end came another surprise, a phrase lifted out of Siegfried's Funeral March from *Götterdämmerung*. It should not have been unexpected. Stravinsky attended the *Ring* with his teacher, and this must have been a loving memento. But the Wagner quote, one then realized with a jolt, was the *Firebird* leitmotif joined to its retrograde. Who knew that Stravinsky leant so hard at first on the man against whom he later proclaimed himself the Antichrist? See for yourself at medici.tv/#!/valery-gergiev-stravinsky-chant-funebre.

And only four years later, *The Rite of Spring*. Inconceivable.

ANNA VAUX

Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens hasn't, perhaps, looked all that pleasurable in recent years, not much more than a windy scrap of green where people walk their dogs or hurry from one side to the other along a concrete path. This autumn however, pleasure can be said to have returned to its south-eastern edge with the completion of Cabinet Gallery's new premises, a small, dark, twelve-sided tower, part medieval keep, part Tardis, that looks as though it has been miraculously folded rather than constructed out of brick. Walkers can now look up to see *trompe l'oeil* ceramic panels on the balconies by the artist Lucy McKenzie and dizzyingly angled windows by Marc Camille Chaimowicz. I most liked the secret-seeming single slot window by the Los Angeles artist John Knight. The inaugural show was the weird and immaculate work of the Chicago surrealist Jim Nutt – square, glowing portraits of a woman with an inscrutable expression and a dark-hued nose, both cartoonish and art-historical, which left me uncertain whether to laugh or cry.

I also enjoyed the small exhibition of work by the English ceramicist Gillian Lowndes, which was at the Sunday Painter gallery in Peckham recently. Lowndes died in 2010 at the age of seventy-four and this was the largest presentation of her work in London for twenty years. Small assemblies of brick, wire, rubber, horsehair, sand, china, metal, the work looks like something you might find in a demolished house or a pile of builder's rubble. Here you can see a fork, there a spoon, a bulldog clip. It is as though you have come across the object by chance and now find yourself wondering what was this, what was this for, how did it come to be here, like this?