

Pop Glastonbury

Worthy Farm, Somerset

★★★★☆

PETE PAPHIDES

From a TV screen you would be forgiven for thinking that Glastonbury was just another music festival. Amid the mud, too, a few hundred stoical souls unfolded their camping chairs and proceeded to sit in front of the Pyramid Stage as though it were a slightly bigger television. At times you overheard them assessing the bands on their checklist. The cumulative twitter of hearsay suggested

that Sunday night heavyweights such as Manic Street Preachers and Kaiser Chiefs further cemented their status in rock's premiership.

As for The Who, well, there's something appealing about the way Roger Daltrey paces the stage like a man in search of a nose that needs punching — or that Pete Townshend will insist on reminding the soggy hordes that his 1971 song *Relay* invented the internet. The rock pyrotechnics of *Who Are You* and *Behind Blue Eyes* were fine. Perhaps you might have deemed this sort of well-drilled efficiency to be precisely what a rock

festival needs. But Glastonbury is no more a rock festival than *The Morecambe and Wise Show* is Christmas, and this year's resounding successes — CSS, Björk, Iggy Pop, Lily Allen — tapped in to that sense of boundless possibility. Over blazing Balkan violins, Gogol Bordello's Eugene Hutz worked up a frenzy of gypsy punk abandon. The flamboyant Mika was no less exceptional. He drummed on a bin and exhorted everyone to deter the rain with a silly Hawaiian "prayer", while assorted chums brandished huge letters that spelt LOVE.

Over at the Jazz World stage, the Bees unleashed a

tropical brainstorm of Latin-soaked reggae. The same for the stoned psych-skiffle of the Coral, who seized their chance to remind us that they have accumulated a fine body of work by stealth.

Shirley Bassey bolstered her *Zeitgeist* rating by singing Pink's *Get the Party Started* and thanking Alex Turner for Arctic Monkeys' version of *Diamonds Are Forever*. Turner, too, distinguished himself from the slew of bands (the Kooks, the Killers, Dirty Pretty Things, the View and the tedious Babyshambles) whose showmanship was inversely proportionate to

the seriousness with which they take themselves. Addressing 60,000 people like the MC at a working men's club, the Arctic Monkeys frontman displayed a rakish charm. His band sounded great too, especially on the stormy domestic dispatches of *Do Me a Favour*.

Of course, it's fine giving people what they want, but the moments you rave about more often come about when you happen upon something you didn't even know could make you feel this good. The history of Glastonbury is littered with such glorious spectacles. And over at the new Park Stage, Damon

Albarn's astonishing five-hour superjam, billed as Africa Express, was rooted firmly in that tradition. Alongside luminaries such as Rachid Taha, Fatboy Slim, Tinariwen and Amadou & Mariam, a riotous raï annihilation of the Clash's *Rock the Casbah* was just such a moment.

There's no reason why we can't have more of those on the more deserving arena of the Pyramid Stage. It is, after all, what Glastonbury does best — and what almost every other large-scale festival fails to understand.

A version of this review appeared in late editions yesterday