



EVENING STANDARD MONDAY 29 JUNE 2009

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Londoner's Diary

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INDIAN Itzacy charity Pratham last night threw its summer party at the Chelsea Conservatory. Guests included Lakshmi and Usha Mittal (above), writer Hasid Koreishi and film director Gurinder Chadha. Indian philanthropist G.P. Hinduja said: "What Pratham is doing is a subject at the heart of the Hinduja family and Hinduja Foundation. Our father believed health and education is the birth right of every human being."

Taxi for Boris over expenses

BORIS Johnson has his back over revelations that he spent thousands of pounds on taxis. "Despite being a fanatical cyclist, I have had to use taxis over the past year to travel to official functions as Mayor," he says in an email to supporters.

"I always prefer using the bike, even to very posh functions. However, sometimes using a taxi is unavoidable. When I was elected, I promised that I would be open and transparent - for good or for bad."

Normally Ken Livingstone is eager to talk about Boris's difficulties but he has been reticent on taxis, perhaps because he once claimed £260 on a taxi home from a Labour Party Conference in Blackpool.

Euro bling

IT'S Asia meets Sardinia via Australia. Well done to Australian Will "G&O" Ricker who over the weekend opened his pop up Eight over Eight restaurant in Porto Cervo on the Costa Smeralda. Eight over Eight is above Flavio Briatore's notorious Billarone club (where Berlusconi has been known to take his pale dancing). Ricker says: "There's only so many times you can eat grilled seafood. I've flown over a whole team and we're very excited. The restaurant's outside and the views over the ocean are fabulous."

Built by the Aga Khan, the Sardinian resort is a favourite of Roman Abramovich and Kate Moss. In London, at ESO, the food's so good even Elton MacPherson has been known to make the kitchen stay open late. Guests at Ricker's opening included Flavio Briatore, and philanthropists Petya and Cyrus Vandrevski. Might they take their pal Mikhail Gorbachev there now to sample its delights?

■ AN unmissable event. Tonight Eliza McCarthy, grand-daughter of Hungarian born socialite Andrea Reynolds-Plunket (the former lover of Claus von Bülow), gives a masters final piano recital in the Guildhall School of Music and Drama of two George Crumb pieces - Vox Balinese (voice of the Whale) for three masked players and Makrokosmos Vol 1 for Amplified Piano. "I will be joined by the delightful Datta Sanford on Flute and naughty Mitsha Ziskind on Cello," says Eliza. Irresistible.

■ SCHOOLS Secretary Ed Balls used to have a distracting habit during TV interviews of incessant bling. The good news is that this has improved. The bad news is that he was constantly rude to his knee. Could be worse. W. Balls.

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No flies on Gummer as he turns to Hirst

IT SOUNDS an unlikely combination but Ben Gummer, son of ex-Tory minister John Gummer, is using Damien Hirst to help launch his new book on the Black Death. Gummer, who is standing as the Tory candidate for Ipswich, is an admirer of the artist whose work he says mirrors his own book on pandemics. The launch for his book *The Struggling Angel, the Black Death in the British Isles*, will be held at the Haunch of Venison gallery in front of *The Ten Plagues* by Damien Hirst - his huge canvases which feature flies encrusted in resin.

Explains Ben: "For the medievalists this is where they got the idea for the plague from the bible, so it's all incredibly relevant. It's good to have someone like Damien Hirst creating art about it, I'm writing about the historical story behind the plague. Hirst's canvases are very big and very dramatic. I'm a fan of Damien Hirst. When I was at school seeing his work in the Seton exhibition, it was a formative experience. I have asked him to the book launch so I hope he can come."

■ HE MAY be best remembered for claiming £14.39 on expenses for a Q&A history book and 79 taxi journeys, but BBC leaders are furious that Mark Byford's most blatant excess has so far gone unreported. Apparently, it costs £250 a day for a chauffeur-driven luxury car to ferry the £459,000-a-year Deputy DC from Waterloo Station to White City. It doesn't appear on his expenses because it goes through the Beeb's hugely wasteful "central booking" system, details of which, my mole tells me, will put the individual expense claims to shame.

■ GREAT Rita's efforts to persuade her husband to read romantic literature have fallen on deaf ears. She is currently enjoying *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie, about a woman who falls for a lawyer. Did the former PM enjoy it? "Tory read it quickly," Clive explains in *The Lady* magazine. "She going over some of the lower-downy bits." Perhaps it was too close to home.

HAPPINESS TIP OF THE DAY

"Work as if the money doesn't matter. Love as if you have never been broken hearted. And dance as if no-one else is watching"

John Bergqvist

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DAVE BENETT

INDIAN literacy charity Pratham last night threw its summer party at the Chelsea Conservatory. Guests included Lakshmi and Usha Mittal (above), writer Hanif Kureishi and film director Gurinder Chadha. Indian philanthropist G.P Hinduja said: "What Pratham is doing is a subject at the heart of the Hinduja family and Hinduja Foundation. Our father believed health and education is the birth right of every human being."