

times2life

◀ Brown have introduced young children to the corridors of power, the halls would seem empty without the odd tantrum from babies as well as grown-ups. Long gone are the days when Harold Macmillan had to put up a sign for his grandchildren saying, “no roller skating in the corridors today, Cabinet meeting”. Aides are now used to avoiding the Lego in their boss's study.

Chequers is also more baby friendly: the lawn has been adapted for football, the indoor swimming pool is equipped with armbands, Victory Drive is perfect for bicycles with stabilisers. They just need a sandpit and swings.

Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, who has his own small baby, will try to be as accommodating as possible (though maybe Mr Cameron should avoid Gina Ford's child-raising methods, which Mr Clegg once compared to sticking babies in broom cupboards). George Osborne still knows how to feed a baby a bottle, his own two children are only 7 and 9.

Mrs Blair was still working full-time as a barrister when she had Leo, aged 44, and was reading through briefs while breastfeeding. She was a role model for high-powered career women. Mrs Cameron, now 39 and from a younger generation, has already decided to work fewer hours. She doesn't feel any pressure to prove



Tony and Cherie Blair with Leo shortly after his birth in 2000

“The Camerons always planned a big family. It wouldn't be surprising if they had another child”

herself and will go to the luxury retailer Smythson only twice a week as a design consultant.

Mrs Cameron's pregnancy wasn't a surprise (although the baby's sex was and the speed of delivery while on holiday in Cornwall). The Camerons had always planned to have a large family. The Prime Minister is one of four children and she is part of an extended family of eight. Their eldest son, Ivan, who died last year, played a huge part in all their lives. It wouldn't be surprising if they had another one.

The Prime Minister seems to thrive in adverse conditions. He likes a challenge whether it's from a bawling baby or plunging polls and he can afford to take his paternity leave now, well before the party conferences and during the parliamentary recess.

Mr Blair said that Leo's birth was the highlight of his time as Prime Minister even if it left him reeling. He always gave Leo a bath and read him a story at night. One evening, during the Iraq war, he was distracted and Leo asked if he was worried about something. His father admitted: “I've got something on my mind at the moment.” Leo replied: “Daddy, I know what you mean because I can't find my dinosaur and it's really worrying me too and I can't stop thinking about it.” Having another baby may even help Mr Cameron to unwind.

## Births on the run

Unexpected deliveries from around the world

**Arriving on platform one...**  
A woman gave birth on London Underground last year, the first to do so since 1924. Julia Kowalska got off the Jubilee Line at Kingsbury station but went into labour on the platform. Paramedics arrived on the scene, realised there wasn't enough time to get to hospital and delivered a healthy girl in the station supervisor's office.

**New York, here I come**  
Elizabeth Brew gave birth to a girl on Fifth Avenue, New York, in her car a block away from the hospital. Passengers in taxis stuck their head out the windows to cheer, but the drama was not over — she made it to the maternity ward before a twin brother arrived.

**Is there a doctor on board?**  
A Ugandan woman gave birth across a row of seats in economy class on a flight from Amsterdam to Boston. Two doctors on board came to the aid of the woman and helped her to deliver a girl that she named Sasha.

**She was born in Canadian airspace, making her eligible for Canadian citizenship.**

**It's an emergency**  
Rinku Rai had a dramatic birth onboard the Tata-Chapra Express train in eastern India. While in the lavatory she felt stomach pains and found herself giving birth, alone. However, as she sat above the toilet, the newborn boy fell through the toilet chute and on to the tracks. Rai leapt from the train and ran to find her son. After someone pulled the emergency stop cord, her husband was able to jump off too and found her, cradling her unharmed baby.

**Captain Kiesel's big catch**  
Cindy Preisel was 30 miles off the coast of Texas, working as a cook aboard a shrimp boat, when she went into labour a few weeks early. The captain Ed Kiesel read four pages in a first aid handbook and then used net twine and scissors to deliver a boy.  
Chloe Lambert

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**The Prisoner of Second Avenue**

Following his sell-out success in *Speed-the-Plow*, Hollywood star Jeff Goldblum makes a hotly-anticipated return to the London stage in Neil Simon's brilliantly observed, award-winning comedy. Academy Award-winner Mercedes Ruehl also stars in this bittersweet, comic masterpiece about a man at breaking point. At the Vaudeville Theatre until 25 Sept.

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## Sathnam Sanghera

Let's boldly go to a Universe where the science is easier

**A**s headlines go, you don't, in my book, get much more enticing than “Fate of Universe Revealed by Galactic Lens”. I was intrigued the moment I saw the words emblazoned on the BBC News website, became even more so when it transpired the piece had been written by a science reporter named Howard Falcon-Lang (all science reporters writing about space should be called Howard Falcon-Lang) and became engrossed when it turned out the story was based on a new study conducted by an international team led by Dr Eric Jullo, of Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California, which had concluded that “the Universe will probably expand for ever”.

Gosh. Infinity. That's pretty big. But this sense of awe and wonder began to evaporate when it was revealed that these scientists also believe the Universe will “eventually become a cold, dead wasteland”. (How can something expand indefinitely and be dead at the same time?) This confusion turned into bewilderment when we were told that the Universe will eventually hit “a temperature approaching what scientists term ‘absolute zero’”. (Surely to “approach” a temperature that is “absolute” is like, mild chilli or totalitarian democracy, an oxymoron?)

And my faith in the story collapsed when it turned out that astronomers had worked this out by calculating “the amount of dark energy in the cosmos”. “Dark energy” making up “three-quarters of our Universe”, but being “totally invisible” and “a mysterious force that speeds up the expansion of the Universe”.

So, to summarise: scientists have worked out that the Universe will carry on expanding for ever, but will eventually be dead, and almost absolutely without temperature, by measuring the size of something that is invisible.

I've reread the story a dozen times and each time it makes less sense. While there is of course the possibility that I'm being dim — as Albert Einstein once remarked “Two things are infinite: the Universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the Universe” — I think it illustrates a fundamental problem with space science in the 21st century: it is utterly impenetrable. And when not utterly

impenetrable, it is mindlessly banal. We have, for instance, been informed in recent weeks that Mars may hold “buried life”, with researchers having identified rocks that they say could contain fossilised remains of life and that Mars' entire surface might have been shaped by water around four billion years ago. So what? I know that this, in theory, means that there might have once been some kind of life on the Red Planet, but it is also possible, in theory, that West Bromwich was once not a dispiriting dump, but it is now, and that's what matters. All I want to know is whether there are aliens living out there in deep space at the moment, whether they look like us and whether they would want to kill us if we met.

The science establishment needs to buck up its ideas on this front if it wants the public to remain engaged. It could do worse than seek inspiration from Stephen Hawking. Britain's most famous scientist did, admittedly, once pen an entirely impenetrable book in the form of *A Brief History of Time*, but he seems to have learnt his lesson and has not uttered a dull remark since 1998.

The other week, for instance, he gave an interview to video site Big Think in which he warned that human beings may have less than 200 years to figure out how to escape the planet before facing extinction, adding that humans stuck on Earth are at risk from various catastrophes. These apparently include: the type we bring on ourselves, such as climate change; an asteroid whacking into Earth, killing people in their billions and rendering the planet uninhabitable; a supernova or gamma-ray bursting near our spot in the Milky Way; or the threat posed by an extraterrestrial civilisation.

“Dangerous aliens may want to take over the planet to use its resources for themselves,” Hawking was quoted as saying. “It would be safer for the survival of our species if we had people living on other worlds as a back-up plan.”

That's more like it: invading aliens, apocalyptic asteroids, supernova explosions and the transportation of the entire human race to another planet. Things that aren't boring and things we can understand.

I hope Howard Falcon-Lang and Dr Eric Jullo, of Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, are taking note.



Edinburgh First Night Exploring the terror of Stockholm syndrome Page 50

## Does my bourrée look big in this?

**The all-male Trocks cleverly and hilariously subvert classical ballet. But does our man Tim Teeman have the right legs?**

**T**he tutu was orange, beaded and corseted. My editor had suggested I dress up as a Trock — I was in midtown Manhattan watching the all-male ballet company in rehearsal for its imminent London run — suddenly it seemed a terrible idea. I don't have the body or inclination for drag: too hairy, hopeless in heels, the usual boy impediments. More humiliatingly, I don't have the body of a Trock: rippling hard legs, flexibility, suppleness, an arse like two scoops of ice cream — you don't want to be Mr Ordinary in a tutu next to these guys.

The company (full title: Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo), which started in 1974, has what its 20-year-old member Long Zou calls “serious fun”. Its 16 dancers are professionals and so dedicated to, and knowledgeable about, ballet that they are perfectly placed to deconstruct it, with as much glitter, make-up and flouncing as possible. They perform 40 weeks a year, all over the world, taking the work of the classical repertoire and subverting it, not just by playing the female (as well as male) parts, but by spiking the melodrama of ballet with mocking glances, outrageous moves and deliberate pratfalls.

Ballet and ballet history is also gently mocked in the diva-ish old-school ballerina personas that each of the company takes on, such as Ida Nevasayneva, Giuseppina Zambellini and Nina Enimenimynimova. Each dancer also has a male persona, such as Yuri Smirnov who, “at the age of 16, ran away from home and joined the Kirov Opera because he thought Borodin was a prescription barbiturate”, or Boris Nowitsky, “who has been with the greatest ballerinas of our time and has even danced with some of them”. Boom boom.

Tory Dobrin, the artistic director, directs the dancers through an exhilarating, exhausting rehearsal: out of drag the humour is muted, the physical demands evident. The London show will include the “abstract ballet” *ChopEniana*, the Merce Cunningham-inspired *Patterns in Space*, the pas de six from *La Vivandière* and *Raymonda's Wedding*. The second half has a Trocks crowd-pleaser — the second act of *Swan Lake*; expect feathers to be shed — as well as a *pas d'action* from Marius Petipa's *Harlequinade* and *Valpurgisnacht* (“Wal-purgi-snacht”), set to music from the opera *Faust*, with a stage full of bare-chested fauns, nymphs and frolicking maidens engaging in a bosky bacchanal.

Dobrin, 56, says he likes the stage to be “full of activity”, the apparent chaos that creates so much hilarity — vain, swaggering princes falling over; a diva trying to hog centre stage a moment too long — is, emphasises Dobrin, “controlled”.

**Right, Tim Teeman and supporting cast; main pic, Raffaele Morra performs the Dying Swan**



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The company is all-gay, but Dobrin says they are not making overt political statements: the Trocks don't need to. That they are all-male and enact love, flirtation and romantic slapstick cleverly rewrites the classical ballets they perform, whether in drag or not — no other banners are needed. Usually for a rehearsal room full of performers, there is a warm sense of togetherness here. The resolutely democratic Dobrin ensures all the dancers rehearse all the roles. He has been with the company since 1980

with flowers being scattered, progresses through a crazy Cossack-looking sequence (folded arms and crouching leaps), before a sudden mélange of gallops, a perfect set of pas de deux, piqués and furiously precise fouettés and jetés. “We mix it up,” says Dobrin. “You wouldn't see the Bolshoi doing that.”

As more than one Trock tells me, the female dancers do most of the work in a ballet, so these talented men are gaspingly occupied, rather — as Christopher Lam, 36, puts it — than “standing around and acting as a crane for the girls, or as decoration”. The Trocks dance en pointe (in specially designed shoes), traditionally the preserve of female dancers. Lam says that where male dancers use “the big muscle groups — glutes, quads — female dancers use smaller muscle groups and that's challenging to reprogramme your body to”. He demonstrates and it looks like impossible physical agony, as if it is putting heinous pressure on the ankle; but no, says Lam, all the centring movement comes from the hips, “digging down” through the calves.

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and recalls the Trocks (like the British theatre troupe *Bloolips*) coming out of the gay rights ferment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when, as Dobrin puts it, “you'd do these little performances in little spaces these little weekends in a row after midnight”.

Dobrin, who stopped dancing in 1996, has seen the Trocks decimated by Aids and near-penury after funding from the National Endowment for the Arts dried up when right-wing Republicans targeted gay-themed theatre and art in the late Eighties. “There was a time when all I did was go to funerals. For about two years, it was only touring in Japan that kept us going,” Dobrin recalls, “but our strength has been that we've always kept it simple: we don't have an office or infrastructure or permanent space.” The Trocks flourished after Dobrin carefully researched what venues wanted from the company and tailored their programmes accordingly. Now the Trocks perform to deliriously appreciative audiences in the US, Australia, Japan, Europe and Russia.

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, Peacock Theatre, London WC2 (saddlerswells.com, 0844 4124322), Sept 14-25

**T** Watch Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo in action [thetimes.co.uk/stage](http://thetimes.co.uk/stage)