

**John Hardy, Chapter Arts Centre.**

## High theatre at the black grand piano

DRAMA comes to the song recital. And it had to come to Canton rather than to the Hayes.

American critics like John Rockwell and the ever-stimulating Gregory Sandow have long pointed out the difference between uptown music and downtown music.

In our terms that difference is between, say, Giuliani in the Temple of Culture in the Hayes and John Hardy in a converted school in Canton.

Hardy is not the first to create a theatre work out of a song recital. Come to that, the betailed pianist at a black grand piano in the centre of an empty stage is in itself high theatre.

But it is now several decades since the likes of John Cage, La Mont Young and David Tudor went further and turned the simplest of musical events into a happening.

*Boy Child* is billed as a "solo show" and Hardy had created a fully-fledged theatrical experience in which darkness,

By IFAN PAYNE

silence, stillness and the elements of water, earth and fire all play an important part.

The songs, all composed by Hardy, ranging from Irish-tinged ballads to cathartic Pink Floyd, were poetically interesting enough and harmonically stimulating enough to hold the attention throughout this engrossing production.

Yes, there was a naivety to Hardy's movements and this was certainly not everyone's cup of tea — as those who noisily left in the middle of the performance demonstrated.

But Hardy is right to explore the theatrical potential of songs at the piano and it is not surprising that this happened in downmarket Canton rather than in the upmarket Hayes.

*Boy Child* will be repeated at Chapter on June 14 and will be included at least in part in Chapter's showcase at the ICA in London on June 29.