



ARTS

At the Fisher Gallery, Pakuranga (see Lively Arts) the show *Pacific Threads* begins on Saturday, 4 March, where it remains for almost a month. It's a celebration of traditional and contemporary Cook Island patchwork and appliqued quilts called tivaevae. Events during the exhibition will feature a number of demonstrations of techniques, including one by Matarenga George on designing and cutting a quilt.

Chekhov's classic drama *The Cherry Orchard* opens on Mercury's big stage on March 18,

in a production directed by Raymond Hawthorne and designed by Paul Sayers. Mellow, witty and bitter-sweet, this should not be missed. It's years since anyone did a Chekhov play in Auckland.

English pianist Peter Donohoe, another Tchaikovsky Prize winner rocketed into international stardom, plays a recital in the Maidment Theatre on March 14 and is soloist with the NZSO in Prokofiev's Third Concerto on March 10 and Beethoven's Third on March 11.

CLASSIC

Fountain pens are making a comeback. They're popular both as a status symbol for professionals — particularly lawyers — and as a last-ditch attempt at resurrecting illegible handwriting.

Whitcoulls in Queen Street stocks five brands which start at about \$20 for a Parker Vector. Top of the range are the store's three blue Sheaffer Thuyas which also happen to be the only ones of their kind available in New Zealand. They come adorned with five 0.4 carat diamonds and six 3mm sapphires or rubies and sell for \$1500 each.

However, most people opt for the cheaper goldplated Parkers at \$625 or sterling silver ones at \$499.

While earlier generations made do with writing in black or blue ink, today's users of fountain pens can have red, green, brown and peacock blue at their pen tips. But tradition has not kept pace with the inkmakers it seems, and blue and black are still the most used colours on fountain-penned documents.

RESTAURANT

At the Alex in Parnell, the garden bar is gone and so are the hoons, but the music is as good as ever and the food and hospitality even better. Parnell's famous (or infamous) Alexandra Tavern has had a major facelift. It's now an indoor pub-restaurant, not a limited bistro, serving meals all day from noon till night inside a new, stylish steel and glass brasserie renamed Mary's after Mary Edser, owner of the Alex from 1936 to 1967.

The most expensive meal on Mary's menu is grilled Spatchcock and Prunes for \$16. What's Spatchcock? Grilled chicken and a little more.

The new Alex has not only had a major redesign, it's also become something of a beer boutique with over 40 brands from all over the world on tap or in the cooler. Once again it's cool to be seen at the Alex, especially if you're drinking Corona.

Alex the resident cat is still around, unfazed by all the change.

BEER

Darker, stronger tasting, far less sweet than northern beers, Speights, "The Pride Of The South", is now available on tap at five Auckland pubs — the Nag's Head in Parnell, Newton House, the Royal George in Newmarket, the Ellerslie Oaks and the Alex in Parnell — and well worth trying it is too.

Speights is batch-brewed the

old-fashioned way (the same way, in fact, since 1876) not much more than a couple of hundred metres from Dunedin's Octagon, and has long been one of the Deep South's best-kept secrets. Now it's available, if not readily, at least sporadically, at Wilson Neill in pints at \$15.90 the dozen.

