

JUNE 2009

REVIEW

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*Royal Ballet*

*New Works in the Linbury:*  
*'Dear Norman', 'Recordato',*  
*'Les Lutins', 'Yes we did...', 'Now',*  
*'Non-linear Interactions',*  
*'Consolations and Liebestraum'*

*May 2009*  
*London, Linbury*

*by Bruce Marriott*



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A good night for those who love the company, with some strong classical work and also more modern ideas and experiments on display. In fact it's the best of the RB Linbury shows I can recall and that's saying an awful lot. My only real whinge is that there are not enough nights like this. If we are serious about growing choreographers then we should be having 2 or 3 New Works nights a year really(\*).

Christopher Hampson's *Dear Norman* is the shortest work on the bill at just 3 minutes, and actually was conceived as part of a tribute night to Norman Morrice, who taught Hampson and many others and left an indelible mark on them. All I've ever heard are profoundly fond memories of the support and encouragement he freely gave fledgling dance creators. Hampson's personal piece has Johan Kobborg supporting the young Sergei Polunin as he tries out various big classical moves, gently adjusting here, cajoling there all with the slightest of touches. He is a physical presence but you also sense that what he did stayed with choreographers and he is probably still looking over their shoulders, gently questioning and supporting what they are at. All this background makes it a different work from the others by the more junior choreographers, and for which the evening is really



constructed. I just wished Hampson's soulful and moving piece had been longer and surrounded by the great words of Norman's friends and admirers - if impossible here, of course.



Johan Kobborg and Sergei Polunin in Christopher Hampson's *Dear Norman*  
© Bill Cooper

Ludovic Ondiviela looks a class act in the making and his *Recordato* was another move in the right direction. To a Michael England commissioned score that is classical but with a rock backing at the start and end, it was these sections that had the most drive and where two or all three couples buzzed in the natural easy-flowing unison I associate with Ondiviela.



The all-out audience pleaser of the night was Johan Kobborg's *Les Lutins* to two skiddingly fast virtuoso violin pieces. First Steven McRae and then Sergio Polunin paint the music with giddy and jaw-dropping delight - it's a gala-type piece and the dancers show what they can do just for the fun of showing what they can do. The icing on the cake is the appearance of Alina Cojocaru, bemused by the boys trying to out-do one another; in the end she gives her love not to one of them but to Charlie Siem, the violinist on stage throughout. A delicious and fun piece of froth and a reminder that Kobborg knows how to connect with audiences using ballet's traditions.



Kristen McNally's *Yes we did...*  
© Bill Cooper



Kristen McNally's *Yes we did...* is about as far away from ballet tradition as it is possible to get and the strangest piece of the night by some margin. To a soundtrack of stirringly eloquent JFK and Obama speeches and Copland's inspiring Fanfare for the Common Man the weirdly cheap reality of American family values is played out with surreal comic panache. This is not a piece to take on the American tour I fancy. I particularly liked Sian Murphy and Thomas Whitehead as the loud 'n brash Ma and Pa. "I decided to brave it and put out there what was in my head!" says McNally in the programme note and good on her. How on earth one harnesses her ideas to move beyond 10 minutes, or to a larger stage, I don't know, but she is seriously fresh fun and that's good enough for now. Jonathan Watkins' work I've tended to view as rather strange, with angular, irregular movement often cutting across the natural rhythms I hear but his *Now* seemed a much more grown-up, classical even, piece to a lyrical string quartet. In a strong group of 4 girls and 3 boys it was Yuhui Choe and Steven McRae who

stood out that extra bit. Viacheslav Samodurov also surprised me, though not positively. I've generally associated him with intense duets but his *Non-linear Interactions* for 6 dancers, despite being led by Mara Galeazzi and Gary Avis, seemed all stop-go introversion and strange postures from another century. In its presentation of our minds and the way they integrate reality and thoughts in odd ways, it seemed to abandon notions of what movement might communicate best with us out front. The 16 minutes were a long haul.



Mara Galeazzi and Gary Avis in Viacheslav Samodurov's *Non-linear Interactions*  
© Bill Cooper



Liam Scarlett closed out the night with a beautiful Liszt piano work for three couples including Tamara Rojo and Bennet Gartside who recently performed their pas de deux in the Clore to much praise. The full 18-minute work, *Consolations and Liebestraum*, is a delight and I think his best piece to date. He threads classical steps together with wonderful ease and assurance and yet it all looked so fresh and in the best restrained good taste. There were also some hints of deeper emotion here and a MacMillan-like way of communicating them. Rojo and

Gartside moved around each other with trusty grace and ease, but it was Laura Morera and Ricardo Cervera who presented the closer and more compelling bond, coming up through the company together as they have. But I'm splitting hairs - Scarlett takes classicism and doesn't shake it all around, he just (just - huh!) mixes its steps rather better than many - and still in his early 20's.



Tamara Rojo and Bennet Gartside in Liam Scarlett's *Consolations and Liebestraum*  
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I've written a lot more than I ever planned - but there was a lot of good new work on display - that's very exciting and enthusing. We really do need more!

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(\*) And no I'm not including the smaller Clore "Drafts" events with that - where again you'd hope for two a year really...



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