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REVIEW

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Birmingham Royal Ballet

*2009 Midscale South Tour:
'Mozartiana', 'Twilight',
'The Centre and its Opposite'*

*May 2009
Cheltenham, Everyman, Poole,
The Lighthouse*

by Terry Amos

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I saw the first week of the South-West mid-scale tour with performances at Cheltenham and Poole. Because none of the three ballets on this tour required very many dancers only 17 were used but they were all good performers who danced very well with much energy and commitment especially in the new work *The Centre and Its Opposite*, which had its premiere in Cheltenham.

While there could be no complaint about the quality of the dancing, I do not feel the three ballets chosen made a very satisfactory combination. Only one ballet, *Mozartiana*, made full use of the classical technique and overall it was rather low-key Balanchine. The other two I think of as dance pieces rather than ballet. There is nothing wrong with that, of course, and I think just one of them would have been fine, two using much the same dance vocabulary was for me one too many. To anyone unfamiliar with BRB, this programme would give a very misleading impression of the company's usual repertory.

For many of us, the first half of *Mozartiana* is very ordinary, enlivened only by the gigue, a male solo. In most of the performances I saw, this was danced and danced very well by Jonathan Caguioa. As well as praising his dancing I commend him for managing to retain his dignity while having to wear a very ridiculous costume. The second half of the ballet is much better and consists of a short pas de deux and a series of solos for the two leading dancers. I suspect these appeal

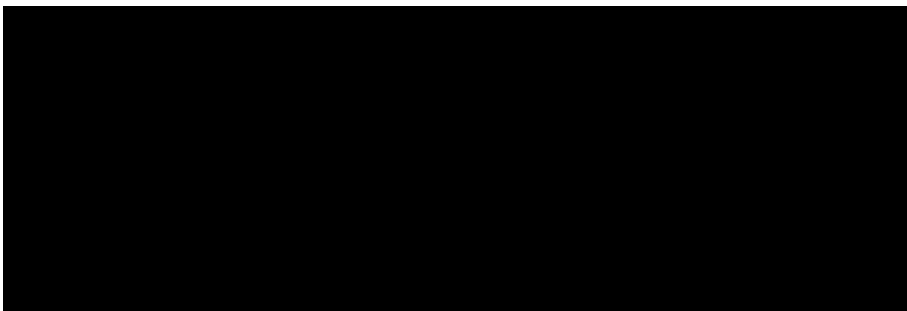


mainly to the purists since they are not terribly exciting and look easy to dance although I am sure that in reality only very fine classical dancers can bring them off. Fortunately that is what the five dancers I saw, in various pairings, in these leading roles were more than capable of doing. Looking to the future, it was especially pleasing to see the youngest couple, Momoko Hirata and Joseph Caley performing to the same high standard we saw from them in the leading roles in *Sylvia*.



Victoria Marr and Tyrone Singleton in *Twilight*
© Andy Ross

Twilight is a short pas de deux which is open to alternative interpretations and, as described in Janet McNulty's previous posting, we had three pairs all excellent but different. Two of these were interesting with an intriguing touch of ambiguity. The third, danced by the youngest pair wasn't ambiguous at all since the way they played it made clear that from beginning to end they hated each other. Normally I would prefer ambiguity but in a less than 15 minute ballet the odds change. So while I enjoyed all three casts, the one I preferred had Samara Downs and Aaron Robison dripping bile all over the stage and looking ready to kill each other.





Dusty Button and Aaron Robison in *The Centre and its Opposite*
© Bill Cooper

I'm glad that Janet has given a description of *The Centre and Its Opposite* because such a task is completely beyond me. That is not because the ballet isn't good but because it is so complex; most of the time there are not just one or two dancers or group of dancers in view but four or five all doing different things on different parts of the stage. Having seen it lots of times, I still found new things that I hadn't noticed before. This should not put anybody off. Just seeing it once gives you plenty to enjoy but it certainly holds up for multiple viewings. The rather small stage at Cheltenham did the ballet no favours and it looked much better on the somewhat wider stage at Poole. I think it will look great at the Hippodrome. All 14 dancers in this piece had plenty to do and they were all pretty wonderful but it was nice to see some of the less experienced dancers such as Christopher Rodgers-Wilson and Nathanael Skelton given chances and taking them. If a work like this has any stars I suppose they were Dusty Button, who was terrific and is one to look out for, and Aonghus Hoole, who seemed very much at home in this style of dance.

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