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REVIEW

ballet.*magazine**Henri Oguike Dance
Company**10th Anniversary Programme:
'Front Line', 'White Space', 'Falling',
'Finale'**March 2009
London, Queen Elizabeth Hall**by Ann Williams*

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So varied, so musical and so whimsical in the best sense of the word is the work of Nigerian/Welsh choreographer Henri Oguike that if he actually set out to make a dull dance, he would be bound to fail. Last night's 10th anniversary programme at the Queen Elizabeth Hall proved that beyond doubt – I found it the most enjoyable evening of dance so far this year.

The retrospective programme covered his major works – Front Line, White Space, and Finale. Initially there are distinct similarities in the two major pieces Front Line and White Space – the stamp and slap of bare feet on the floor, the almost aggressive feel of the rushing lines of dancers are common to both, but Oguike has an uncanny ability to surprise; there's a sharp mood change half-way through Front Line, danced to a Shostakovich string quartet played onstage by the Pavao Quartet. The rush and dash of the dancers abruptly stops when the stage is flooded with red

light, and the piece becomes more serious, a dancer repeatedly slaps another on the arm, suggesting aggression, even violence - at another point the dancers unexpectedly form a line facing the audience, hands linked, for a thrilling simultaneous high leap. Oguike provides solos for most of his nine dancers; it's here that one can judge them, and none fail. The black costumes for the piece (designer uncredited) were notably elegant and simple and there were similarly elegant white costumes for the next piece, White Space. This piece was danced to extracts from Scarlatti's 'Complete Keyboard Works' played live by Carole Cerasi. The choice of Scarlatti music almost dictated the courtly feel of this piece;



dancers acknowledged each other with lavishly ornamented formality and sly, witty posturings. Here was the first hint of a pas de deux, but it too had unexpected, cheeky ornamentation. A real pleasure.



Fukiko Takase in *White Space*
© Nuno Santos

‘Falling’ – the shortest piece - was new to me at least. Based on NASA astronaut Steve MacLean’s space walk, it featured a giant screen on which two filmed bodies – dancers Laura Pena Nunez and Nuno Campos – floated in slow motion, her long black hair sweeping slowly back and forth giving the piece an unmissable resemblance to a TV shampoo ad. The music for the piece was provided by the distinguished singer and composer Errollyn Wallen accompanying herself on the piano. Finally, Finale, and what a delicious piece to end with! Danced to recorded music by Rene Aubrey, not the least of its joys was the feeling that the dancers were loving it every bit as much as the audience. Impossible to describe it in detail, but there was much skipping, shameless mugging, not a little campy and the whole piece had a riotously carnival feel. I see from my scribbled-in-the-dark notes that I wrote ‘knows how to match movement to music’. Must be the understatement of the century.

There’s one more performance tonight at the QEH and a final one at South Hill Park in Bracknell on Friday (27th). After that, sadly, we won’t hear from the company until January 2011 – Oguike needs a break to recharge his artistic batteries after ten intense years running the company, but he will be making a new work for Rambert’s 2010 season. That at least will be some compensation.

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