

APRIL 2009

REVIEW

ballet.*magazine**Birmingham Royal Ballet**'Sylvia'**February 2009**Birmingham, Hippodrome**by Paul N*

© Steve Hanson

*As posted on our Postings pages...*

I was bowled over by this reworked version of Sylvia; there's so much to enjoy. The main course is very much a feast of exciting and enthralling choreography, from the ensemble and set pieces to the solos and pas de deux. And although this on its own is ample sustenance, the ballet is far more than this and can boast an entertaining narrative that carries the excellent choreography, as well as fine designs and of course an outstanding score. Throw in superb touches of comedy – the effect is quite surreal at times – and it's a full and well balanced package.

The narrative, on the whole, works very well, is straightforward to follow and is sustained over the course of the three acts. Only in the ending perhaps, are we asked to give it the benefit of the doubt and stretch our imagination to believe that Eros really has, at a stroke, put the world and all its unions to right. His emergence amongst Diana's legions at the height of the storm and fury is a great piece of theatre though.

There's a story within a story, with fictional and mythical figures appearing as larger than life realisations of their 'real life' counterparts. It's good to see Diana taking a full role from the very first hunt – she leads; Sylvia follows. Not only do we get to see more dancing for Diana, we get a relationship between them, with clear contrasts between their two characters – the steely, authoritative and quite ruthless Diana against the softer, more lyrical, compassionate and free spirited Sylvia (echoes of Myrtha and Giselle). It fits well with the story and the varied

[BRB 'Sylvia' reviews](#)['Sylvia' reviews](#)[Oughtred in reviews](#)[Morales in reviews](#)[recent BRB reviews](#)[more Paul N reviews](#)[Discuss this review](#)

(Open for at least 6 months)

choreography.

With such a plot, the ballet knows not to take itself too seriously or get any illusions of grandeur. From time to time, it takes a break, sometimes abruptly so, to send itself up quite deliciously. I'll long remember the look on Orion's face as he promenades one of his slaves during the grape treading dance, almost sure he's being made a fool of, but not enough so to be certain that he won't yet get his wicked way with Sylvia. Or the posturing between Diana and the pirate chief – he looks like he quite fancies abducting her; her contemptuous look says that if one or other of them is not careful, him ending up stuck to the sole of her shoe will be the highly undesirable result; (my money's on her).



David Bintley's *Sylvia*, here danced by Nao Sakuma as Sylvia and Chi Cao as Amynta  
© Steve Hanson

The show can only be as good as the performance and the Saturday afternoon cast certainly brought home the bacon. Natasha Oughtred was a quite wonderful



Sylvia, a brilliant storyteller, sublimely lyrical in the glorious Act 1 dance sequence with four of her sisters while Diana takes a nap, quicksilver in the Act 2 drama. César Morales was an equally effective Amynta, great to watch in his solos and partnering Natasha beautifully in the pas de deux. Matthew Lawrence made a very strong Orion, truly larger than life, his partnering impressing in the difficult Act 2 sequences. Gaylene Cummerfield (Diana) and Chris Larsen (Eros) completed a five star must-see line-up.

Watching David Bintley's video diary of Sylvia is a salutary reminder of the amount of work to be done in so little time to bring a large scale production to the stage in a 'fit for audience' state. It also shows something of the inevitable stresses and strains experienced by the director. Even now, Mr Bintley is probably still thinking "we're not quite there yet". Well, as could be seen on Saturday, it's all worth it in the end and of the Bintley works I've seen (Hobson's Choice is a notable omission from my list), this could well be the best yet.



---

[{top}](#)   [Home](#)   [Magazine](#)   [Listings](#)   [Update](#)   [Links](#)   [Contexts](#)

---

...apr09/pn\_rev\_brb\_0209.htm

revised: 2 March 2009

Bruce Marriott [email](#), © all rights reserved, all wrongs denied. [credits](#)

written by Paul N © [email](#)

design by [RED56](#)

---