



Rambert's rocking Rooster will run and run

Ismene Brown reviews the Rambert Dance Company at Sadler's Wells

By **Ismene Brown**

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THOSE poor old thirtysomethings - what a dismal time they lead in their clubs at night, compared with the youthful mating dances of fiftysomethings. Compare Cheese and Rooster on Rambert's opening programme of two in their 75th anniversary Sadler's Wells season. Jeremy James's Cheese is bang-up-to-the-minute stuff, created in 2000 to be performed in today's nightclubs. Christopher Bruce's Rooster refers to the Sixties and the Rolling Stones. One is as anaesthetic as the other is funny, sharp and sexy.

Cheese was a dumb choice to open the party celebration. James was in early development as a choreographer, and, though he died last year before fulfilling a commission for Rambert, this is one of his least engaging pieces.

Teetering orange figures in the dark are assailed by a soundtrack (by Peter Morris) of loud electronic club music with a moaning female singer. The five seem stuck in inertia, breaking out in backward runs or hasty fidgets, like a secret knitting circle, as bad dance was once described by Trisha Brown, the American choreographer. Though Rafael Bonachela and Samantha Smith in particular gave it their all, it was a bore (and an unfair epitaph on James's talent.)

Whereas Rooster is a great dance. Created in 1991, it pinpoints the last era when the sexes danced together (as opposed to jogging solipsistically side-by-side, viz James) and enacted exorbitantly amusing mating rituals on the dance floor. Bruce exactly captures the innocence of first mating rites: those nervous boys and artful girls, the flirtation strategies only one step from the playground, the way that tie-straightening and hair-combing segue into cock-a-hoop jives as Mick Jagger's lyrics and rude delivery provide perfect food for dance images. My heart fills right up, and my body wants to be dancing there too. Rooster will run and run.

Between these two glimpses of leisure time came Rambert's decent first attempt at Jiri Kylian's monumental Symphony of Psalms, a 1978 company piece about Eastern European experiences of war. This is a fine marriage of dance and Stravinsky's sombre 1930 choral symphony, and should have been a moving experience with the London Musici and the New London Chamber Choir in the pit, but one needs less hesitant singing than this to hear the cry of the pursued.

Kylian's congregation, apparently under siege in a church hall hung with Eastern carpets, are mustering for some group decision, defiance or surrender. Great group waves of running across the stage shed individuals on the way, like victims of gunfire or sickness.

Balletic couples tell brief stories of love for each other, their bodies surging with a silvery, classical liveness that is prettier than the music's chanting austerity. They die, bear each others' corpses, or fly like departing souls.

At the end the chorus sings "Hallelujah, laudate dominum" with a dismayed, hushed resignation, and the dancers walk away from us into the darkness. The strength of the piece is that it does not impose a single reading. We can't tell whether they are the condemned or an impersonal crowd. Kylian gets that absolutely right.

- This programme runs until Sat; second programme next week, ends June 23. Tickets: 020 7863 8000.

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