
Mesmerising masterpiece

Ismene Brown reviews George Piper Dances at Queen Elizabeth Hall

By **Ismene Brown**

06 December 2001 • 12:00am



CHRISTOPHER BRUCE announced yesterday that he will retire as [director of Rambert](#) next year. It is not a crisis, merely a natural stop. He has done extremely well perhaps the hardest job of any artistic director in Britain, which is to rescue and rebuild a company that was on the point of being closed down when he arrived in 1994. But he is also a world-class choreographer whose choreography has suffered in the job - at 56, he deserves to return his full energies to creativity. Major choreographers are at a higher premium than artistic directors.

It won't be hard to find a successor, if Rambert choose a non-choreographer. Bruce has groomed potential successors in-house. The repertory of Britain's flagship contemporary company is now so wide and broad, and the dancing standards so polished, that more of a dynamic artistic curator is needed. It is less important to be a creator than an enabler of creativity, alive to today's world and with a sharp eye for talent, like Marie Rambert, who started it all 75 years ago.

Meanwhile [George Piper Dances - the company of Michael Nunn and William Trevitt](#), formerly Royal Ballet, now television's "ballet boyz" - has improved its repertoire with the addition of a pleasant piece by rising British choreographer Charles Linehan.

The two superb ballets with which they launched last summer, William Forsythe's bruising quartet Steptext and [Russell Maliphant's mesmerising male duet Critical Mass](#), remain the architectural columns of a fine evening's dancing.

The soft centre contains a grief-stricken husband-and-wife duet by Paul Lightfoot of Netherlands Dance Theatre (a British expatriate), and on earlier outings there were some of their own, flimsy creations.

For the Queen Elizabeth Hall, they commissioned Linehan's Truly Great Thing to sit with the Lightfoot, and a more solid programme results. Nunn, Trevitt and Matthew Hart make a male line-up of heartstopping quality in Steptext, testing the impermeably feminine Oxana Panchenko in her red swimsuit to extremes. It is wonderful to see Hart back on stage, a stiletto presence next to the broadsword attack of Nunn and Trevitt.

After all that volcanic ballet aggression, Linehan's five little people in street clothes

seem almost Lowryesque, suffused in anxiety, outlined in cells of light and shushing, pulsing electronic sounds. A hand discreetly traps someone else's foot, or pushes down on a shoulder, setting off little rippling falls. In the dark, the powerful Nunn whirls Trevitt in a flat aeroplane spin at waist-height as if he were weightless.

The intimate marital hysterics of Lightfoot's *Sigue* are easier to watch now that it has a recording of Maurizio Pollini playing the Chopin, rather than an inferior person live. But the *Maliphant* is an enduring masterpiece. I have seen it magnificently danced by Maliphant and others, but *Critical Mass* seems to embody to the last degree the remarkable and powerfully evocative fusion of Nunn and Trevitt, a unique male team.

They have expanded since they quit the Royal Ballet into a formidable force of energy, popular appeal and high standards. Rambert could do with what they have to offer.

- George Piper Dances is at QEH (020 7960 4242) tonight. Further touring info: gpdances.com



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