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Future without a plot

Dance review: *Random Dance Company / Olympic Dance Company, Queen Elizabeth Hall*

Wayne McGregor is the ET of modern dance. His slithery limbs are too long for comfort, and his head is hairless and knotted with veins, yet there's something young and cuddly about him.

He imprints his skeletal body into his choreography for others, writing fiddly, double-jointed elements into strong phrases, like break-dancing crossed with ballet (Sylvie Guillem and Michael Clark look like influences). It is exact and sexless, and snaps perfectly into the technological, sub-human world that he often conjures up.

Though computer manipulations inspire several choreographers today, only McGregor actually makes me see his dancers as cursors bearing instructions from a microchip - and like it. *The Millenarium*, his new work for his company, Random, is a plotless, undramatic, unsexy exploration of a virtual-reality future world. If that sounds terribly boring, it isn't.

We could be inside a television, with its three translucent gridded screens transmitting video "snow" or sudden soft colours (by Vicki Mortimer and Lucy Carter) and the unisex dancers in short dark metallic ciré are like fish, or globules of mercury.

The pulsing score by Zoviet France sounds like the innards of a washing machine. At intervals a laser-beam searchlight slices over the stage, like a Nazi searchlight, and the dancers freeze in their activity.

McGregor himself is a lonely presence, prowling bonelessly inside a prison of crimson light bars. Is he the group's dissident or Big Brother? One's thoughts lurch through melodramatic options, but the mood is reassuring - as if these lithe, self-contained performers are no more to be feared than commuters tuning in to radio waves.

It is too long - like most things made by independent choreographers today under the damaging diktat of the Arts Council. Martha Graham, George Balanchine and Frederick Ashton found 40 minutes about adequate for their longest masterpieces.

On the other half of the bill was McGregor's first work made for ballet dancers, *Medusa* (1996), was shown by the Italian company Olympic Dance, a muscular, athletic group of nine who declaim rather than inhabiting their choreography.

It's a concise telling of the Perseus myth, more subtle than Graham Fitkin's banging, over-amplified piano music. Andromeda had a plangent back-bending solo, and Perseus had a tawny male buddy to whom he gave equally yearning lifts. He ends up with sad Andromeda, twitching his head nervously, knowing that he has just turned the rest of society to stone.

Tour information 0171 383 5623 **ISMENE BROWN**