



Wrestling matches and gamey wit

Ismene Brown

17 September 2004 • 12:01am



Ismene Brown reviews the Scottish Ballet at the Theatre Royal, Glasgow

Ashley Page deserves acclaim for the smart and convincing modern look he has been giving to ballet north of the border. Scotland knew it couldn't handle or afford the most difficult classics, and wishy-washy folksiness hadn't sold under previous directors.

So the Scots decided they wanted modern, but not scary; spectacle, but not fairies; and a piece of the European glamour surrounding ballet. All on the cheap.

Page is filling this demanding brief pretty well so far, and he follows his first season of British heavyweight contemporary choreographers with a new one that looks towards Europe. The dancers' huge improvement in fitness and sharpness is endorsed by the arrival in Glasgow of two of the world's big hitters: Hans van Manen to stage two of his sexy duets and William Forsythe to rewrite part of a 20-year-old landmark, *Artifact*, specifically for Scottish Ballet.

The fly in the ointment of this happy story is Page's own choreography. There's a long and reliable tradition of minor choreographers spoiling their potential as major directors because they simply must make a piece of their own. Page's new epic *Nightswimming into Day* is a terrible opener to what should be a zippy programme, 45 minutes of formless, charmless sulks.

Dark blue glows, misty river views, slashes of red light, a mysterious red house, diving boards that whizz up and down, an arrow in the air – Jon Morrell and Peter Mumford's work is all immaculately fashionable and bemusing, needing a Wagner opera or a late-night arts show going on in inside it, rather than Page's exhausted choreography and the loud air-conditioning throbs of Brian Eno and J Peter Schwalm.

Girls in swimsuits strut self-consciously on the diving boards, while men writhe under them – rather *Baywatch*, in its way. The pas de deux are Page's usual ungainly wrestling matches, hands locked, groin-tendons stretched, legs all over the shop, like incompetent lifeguards trying to save drowning women against their will.

John Adams's *Shaker Loons* joined the scrum. tentatively played by the Scottish Ballet

Ensemble, but this piece is so dated already that the hip-and-happening Scottish Ballet shouldn't hang about with it.

The terse, gamey wit of vintage van Manen and the athletic vigour of some recycled Forsythe blow Page out of the water. Though Scottish Ballet's women haven't the killer sexual confidence or technique that van Manen's ballerinas require, the men are impressive.

In Twilight, an amusing encounter in front of a nuclear power station between a young man and a petulant tart in high heels, Cristiano Vivancos glowered with handsome bravado, while in Two Pieces for HET Erik Cavallari, sheathed revoltingly in a minute thong and stockinette, still succeeded in exuding machismo.

The smartness with which the company dealt with Forsythe's quick tilts and formally patterned twizzles in his new cut of a 1984 work, Suite from Artifact, showed how creditably Page has invigorated Scottish Ballet's dancers. This has many of the same irritant factors as the Page piece – a bathing beauty doing silly semaphore, curtains crashing randomly down, Bach's Chaconne torn to shreds by a wilful pianist – but the movement hooks and pierces your eye because it's the real article: choreography.

- Until tomorrow (tickets: 0141 332 9000), then Edinburgh, Inverness and Dundee

What did you think of this article?

Share your thoughts



Your feedback will be used in accordance with our [Privacy Policy](#).



More stories