

Dance Second thoughts Ismene Brown

Akram Khan Company – Kaash
Sadler's Wells

Rosas – Golden Hours (As You Like It)
Sadler's Wells

You revisit an old love with wariness. Time's passed for both of you — sharp edges have been smoothed, and reputations built. But seeing *Kaash* again last week, Akram Khan's tremendous debut ensemble work, made when he was 26, revived at Sadler's Wells now that he is 41 and a world name, I felt the earth move just as before.

Like Athene, born fully armed from Zeus's head, *Kaash* leapt astonishingly out of the modest, watchful mind of Khan, then a superb classical Indian soloist embarking on his first choreography for other dancers. One of the great pleasures of this past fortnight for a veteran dancegoer has been seeing his dazzling piece again days before the latest creation of his former mentor, Belgian choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, now 55. The two dancemakers have in common a nervous attraction to the place of percussive rhythm and time statements in dance, in both textures of phrasing and in overarching themes. And, contra those sceptics who postulate that contemporary choreographers can offer no specific language to challenge the academic vocabulary of ballet, here were two danceworks showing instantly recognisable physical signature and grand imagination, like it or not. Not, comes into discussion of the De Keersmaeker, but more of that in a minute.

The Hindi word *kaash* means 'if...'. Schooled in the dynamic north Indian danceform Kathak (a dance tradition more than 2,000 years old), Wimbledon-born Khan stepped out with an epic inspired by Shiva myths of creation and destruction and of a 'multiverse' of alternative worlds.

In keeping with the theme, Khan and his composer Nitin Sawhney destroyed and recreated parts of the 2002 work for their 2016 dancers — and yet if anything the fiery emotiveness and apocalyptic mystery of the original is intensified. The drama explodes in your face from the first: a lone man staring into darkness is subsumed in the cacophonous fiery-red eruption of a cohort of dancers remorselessly scything across the ground with huge, jagged drags of the arms. The need for dreams, the beautiful violence of imagination and the lure of death are all encapsulated in the thrilling opening moments, and these true themes are not let down during the piece's 55 minutes.

Central to the imagery is Anish



'La Vecchia', c.1506, by Giorgione

Himself'. It is folly to play the attribution game, partly because it's not the point of the show, partly because it's impossible (Bernard Berenson noted that 'every critic has his own private Giorgione', which is still true). But I couldn't resist.

By my count there are three indubitable Giorgiones at the RA. The 'Terris' 'Portrait of a Man' in the first room, the dawn landscape 'Il Tramonto' — or the part of it not by a 20th century restorer — and the picture of an aged woman carrying the message 'Col Tempo' in the last. Each of these gently dominates everything else in its room. They are naturalistic in the manner of the Dürer portraits on display, but have a delicate, airy, living quality that is distinctively Italian. In other words, they are right at the centre of European painting, at the point where Northern and Southern traditions come together. That's why Giorgione was so important.

By chance there are also just three authentic works by a great artist on show in *Bruegel in Black & White* at the Courtauld Gallery. There is unlikely ever to be a blockbuster devoted to Pieter Bruegel the Elder, for the unusual reason that one always exists in the room at Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, where most of his great works are hung. But the Courtauld has put together a micro exhibition bring-

ing together all Bruegel's surviving works in grisaille — that is, monochrome: 'Christ and the woman taken in adultery' from its own collection, 'The Death of the Virgin' from Upton House, and a little panel of three soldiers from the Frick.

What this reveals is Bruegel's extreme subtlety and finesse. Working on an almost miniature scale, with a limited palette — with only a few notes of brownish grey for

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warmth — he created space, complex drama and texture. The copies and imitations on view — even by his talented son Jan Bruegel the Elder — only demonstrate the indefinable extra quality in the originals.

Francis Towne's watercolours of Rome, on show at the British Museum, depict a city at once familiar and unfamiliar. Most of the monuments Towne visited are still there, but when he drew them — using, one would guess, a portable camera obscura — they were luxuriantly overgrown with vegetation and almost empty of tourists (even grand ones). The best of them constitute a sort of virtual time travel, taking you back to the Coliseum or looking over the rooftops towards St Peter's 230 years ago.

Kapoor's mesmerising backcloth, a blurred rectangular void framed in white, which, washed and drenched in colours by lighting designer Aideen Malone, can appear to be a portal into the unknown, or a wall of fire, or a vanishing illusion. The floor is a blood-red carpet, or chequered like a jasmine-yellow quilt, which transmutes the wheeling dancers into celestials bouncing on air.

The marvellous deep focus of Kapoor's vision mitigates the sentimental eclecticism of Sawhney's lightweight musical frame to the work, decorating it with everything from whispers and heavy breathing to gamelans and plainchant.

From his five dancers, austere dressed, Khan constantly conjures suggestive formations, each telling of a particular dynamic relationship: one with four, or opposed by four; one confronting one, or one with one; mass *martellato* lines against blurry meltings-away, while the light plays tricks on your eyes. An exhausting, frantic solo for a woman in ultra-dark-blue light becomes a nadir of lostness, stilled by the sentinel appearing at the window. There is omen, there is release.

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It's the work of a blessed young talent, and the revision is tauter but no less wondrous. Bouquets to each of the five dancers.

De Keersmaecker's reputation as the grande dame of European contemporary dance enables her to think along lines unthinkable in Britain. *Golden Hours (As You Like It)* is the polar opposite of *Kaash* in its uncompromised plainness — nearly two and a half interval-less hours long, largely in silence, with no costumes or set, and only minimal clues to what it's about. At which point you might say, enough already, it's not as I like it.

On the contrary, among the myriad Shakespeare danceworks this is one of impressive boldness, both faithful to the sourcework and yet absolutely original. The dozen dancers have each learned *As You Like It's* lines and their dance is almost a casual dance-mime of all the comedy's roles. Lines from the play and Brian Eno's 1975 song 'Golden Hours' (from *Another Green World*) sporadically add signposts, but in fact this is an unusually dance-friendly plot, full of youthful physicality — wrestling, loveplay, cross-dressing, and homoerotic banter between long-haired boy Rosalind and rugged Orlando in his sequined sneakers.

Like Khan, De Keersmaecker frames her dance within a larger time signature: the ensemble moving in almost imperceptible slow motion, as if the earth is turning. Despite being dressed down indistinguishably in T-shirts and jeggings, they are dis-

tinguishable as the comedy's characters through their performing and their choreography, as gleeful as skaters, hunkering down, spiralling around each other and through each other, fresh in emotion. De Keersmaecker, who also debuted in memorable style, has stayed a 30-year course.

Cinema

Building block

Deborah Ross

High-Rise

15, Nationwide

High-Rise is Ben Wheatley's adaptation of J.G. Ballard's novel, and it is deeply unpleasant, if not deeply, deeply unpleasant. (Ideally, I would wish to repeat 'deeply' several hundred times, but I do not have the space.) Based on the dystopian notion of tower-block residents regressing into a primitive state once societal norms and the class structure are removed, it sounded promising, like an adult mirroring of *Lord of the Flies*. But Wheatley is so in love with his own visual style and excesses that all allegory and satire is lost while the violence escalates and women are beaten then raped. Misogyny with social commentary comments on misogyny, but without that it's just misogyny served up for its entertainment value. That said, after the screening I shared a lift with a group of young men who declared it all 'absolutely brilliant', so you pays your money and takes your pick, although if you pays your money for this, I will think rather less of you.

The novel was written in 1975, which is when this is set, and it opens with the tower block's newest resident, Dr Robert Laing (Tom Hiddleston), who is sitting on his balcony, blood-splattered and eating dog. The action flashes back three months to the day Laing first moved in. How did he end up that blood-splattered and eating dog? I wanted to know. So this seemed promising too.



'Oh, God! Not another grey one.'