
to a prettified final redemption — it certainly felt like everyone meant it. A packed Wales Millennium Centre cheered and cheered.

Dance

Losing the plot

Ismene Brown

Frankenstein

Royal Ballet, in rep until 27 May

Rambert

Sadler's Wells

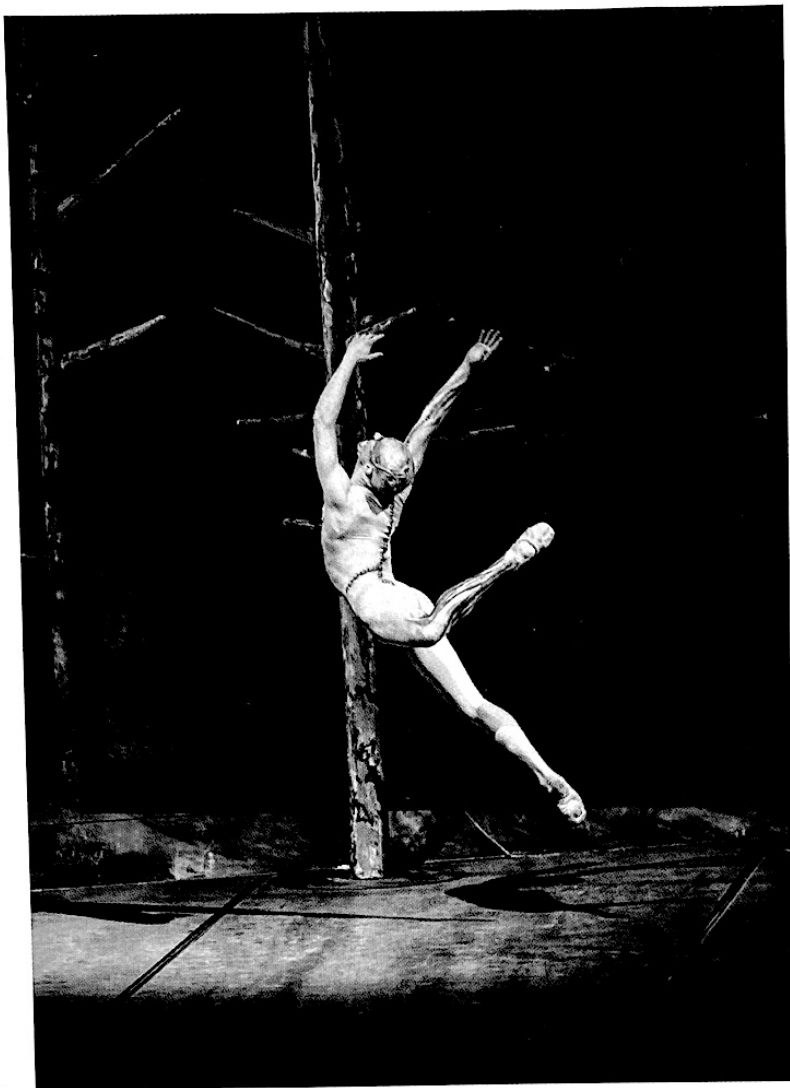
If a football manager produces a string of losses, the writing is on the wall and out he goes. He's accountable — to shareholders, to the fans. The director of the Royal Ballet is not a football manager.

Nor is it easy to see to whom he would account for his plans and outcomes. The Royal Ballet governors are not like *MotD* panels unleashing Gary Nevilles and Alan Shearers on the play, or select committees foaming with Tom Watsons and John Whittingdales demanding explanations for the cultural strategy. They are a group of veteran ballet chums, and it appears to be inconceivable that it is their business to turn round and see if the latest Royal Ballet production scored or not. Let alone to sack the manager.

But really something has to be said after this frightful season, and given the ROH's fondness for digital communication with the masses it would be a jolly good thing to have a live-streamed governors session where Kevin O'Hare is asked to explain why the Royal Ballet has so copiously lost the plot.

Lost the plot, literally. For the company that brought British ballet a worldwide reputation for dramatic storytelling seems mystifyingly incapable these days of producing a ballet of competent emotional narrative. This season has reached a nadir: Carlos Acosta's *Carmen* last autumn, Christopher Wheeldon's *Strapless* in the spring, and now Liam Scarlett's *Frankenstein*; all of them luxuriously mounted and extensively botched.

Successful dramatic ballets always have a scene or two where you feel the choreographer's heart quickening with excitement: the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, the trio in *Manon*, the Shades in *La Bayadère*. But nowhere in Scarlett's flat Mary Shelley transliteration is there a dramatic sweet spot. The Creature vanishes disappointingly quickly after surgery before we can get a good look at him and he dances no more or less gracefully than anyone else (though Nehemiah Kish, being less gifted a mover than Steven McRae, inhabits it with more pathos). His maker's unnatural ambitiousness doesn't register at all in the conventional Des Grieux-lookalike provided by Scarlett. Far too many characters — eight corpses by the



Vile body: Steven McRae as the Creature in 'Frankenstein'

end, did you notice? A seven-year time gap in which no costumes change. In the enervating logistical process of mounting a full-lengther, Scarlett seems to have suffered not just a failure of imagination but a failure of relish for his creation; the heart of the fanciful horror story never starts beating.

What *Frankenstein* does have is astounding stage design. John Macfarlane's marvelous paintings sweeping over huge cloths emit clammy mists and apocalyptic fires; his sets are creepily meticulous, particularly the anatomy theatre, and the Creature is made a perfectly horrid cadaver, with thick red seams over a naked body. Macfarlane's head is full of visions obedient to 19th-century romanticism, offering maximum ignition to all manner of dancing forces, from abstract mass effect to detailed character. The sets deserve better choreography.

Lowell Liebermann's commissioned score generates plenty of film-score energy, but again talent seems mischannelled. While showing the melodious orchestral expertise of his First Piano Concerto, well used by Scarlett in his fluidly inventive abstract ballet, *Viscera*, at this 140-minute length the

American's score runs out of originality, if not stamina, and riffs far too readily for comfort on Prokofiev and Stravinsky ballets.

There are executive questions. Should the talent be more carefully mentored? Kenneth MacMillan, Javier De Frutos, Matthew Hart are three examples of rare choreographic talents broken by a bad experience. And young Scarlett needs something in the confidence bank if he's going to do himself, the Royal Ballet and *Swan Lake* credit in the forthcoming new production.

Secondly, all three flops this season are co-productions — Acosta's with Queensland Ballet and Texas Ballet, Wheeldon's with the Bolshoi, *Frankenstein* with San Francisco Ballet. Is this strategy feeding expense and neutering the outcomes? Those who should be sleepless sit in the offices over Scarlett's head, the non-directing director, the non-governing governors of the Royal Ballet's increasing reputation for expensive cock-up.

That there are smarter, more stimulating ways to do plot, character and consequence is demonstrated all over the contemporary world. On Rambert's entertaining new triple bill there's a take on *Macbeth* that is a delib-

erate brainteaser. Lucy Guerin's *Tomorrow* splits the stage in two for a right brain-left brain experiment. Seven dancers in white hippie dresses on the right swoop and flock like the witches, seven dancers in black suits on the left mime the *Macbeth* plot — backwards.

Scanner's score, both electronic and played live, lulls and buzzes while your wits are in a spin. How concise yet ambiguous the movements of action are; and how strangely eloquent a group can be made to be in signalling the gradual forming of intention or emotion. *Tomorrow* is a tricky pleasure in the same way that Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's silent *As You Like It* was last month, and sits happily between Shobana Jeyasingh's lyrical, Asia-nostalgic *Terra Incognita* and the giddy Brazilian beach-party of Itzik Galili's *A Linha Curva*.

I'm not saying Scarlett should have turned *Frankenstein* into a brainteaser — or am I? Isn't that what the story is?

Radio Pulling power Kate Chisholm

Monday's 'World on the Move Day' on Radio 4 was a bold challenge to government policy and proof that radio is much the most flexible, the most accommodating, the most powerful medium when compared with TV. Without much ado, the day's planned schedule was squeezed, manipulated, overturned to allow the team behind the *Today* programme to mastermind a live discussion throughout the day about the migration issue, as if to say to the government, here's what people not just in the UK but from around the world care about. Let's listen to them and see what solutions they might have to offer.

Angelina Jolie Pitt was the biggest prize as she took over the *You and Yours* slot to lead a live lunchtime debate on Radio 4 and the World Service that looked beyond the overcrowded boats in the Mediterranean and the homeless refugees queuing up on the borders of the EU to the migrants who have already arrived but not settled and to the reluctant hosts themselves who are not always so welcoming or accommodating. Why did she choose to use this forum? Because it gave her immediate access to a global audience. But not only that. She knows that speaking on the BBC gives her an authority, a cachet that surpasses her own glamour. Ponder that, Mr Whittingdale.

The BBC's pulling power depends on its back story, those 90 years of producing programmes like *Science Stories*, Radio 4's attempt to breathe life into areas of knowledge that for many are offputting or misunderstood. On Wednesday night Naomi Alderman looked at the myths about Florence Nightingale, the lady with the lamp,