

Reviews

The politics of hunger

THE Laughter of Our Children powerfully, poignantly commemorates the intransigent bravery of Irish Republican inmates of Long Kesh who starved themselves to death in 1981 while trying to achieve political prisoner status. The play's authors, Laurence McKeown and Brian Campbell, were both given long prison terms and ended up in Long Kesh. McKeown even refused food for 70 days during the 1981 hunger strike. So both men write from grim, direct experience, though they're not primarily concerned to reveal what it's like to be threatened with death for maintaining the courage of your dangerous convictions.

They are intent upon showing what impact the prisoners' campaign and vows of suicide had upon their families, friends and local communities. They have a surprising, poignant story to tell, but it's imperfectly delivered. They are first-time playwrights and it shows. They frequently adopt an off-putting style of impersonality, with direct address and information given to the audience. The play consists of infinite brief scenes. It meanders, shooting off in too many directions and characters are sketched in the vaguest of outlines. And Pam Brighton's static production seems suited to radio not the stage.

The set is like an old-fashioned stage picture. It consists of three semi-circular rostra, on whose high-

THE LAUGHTER OF OUR CHILDREN ★

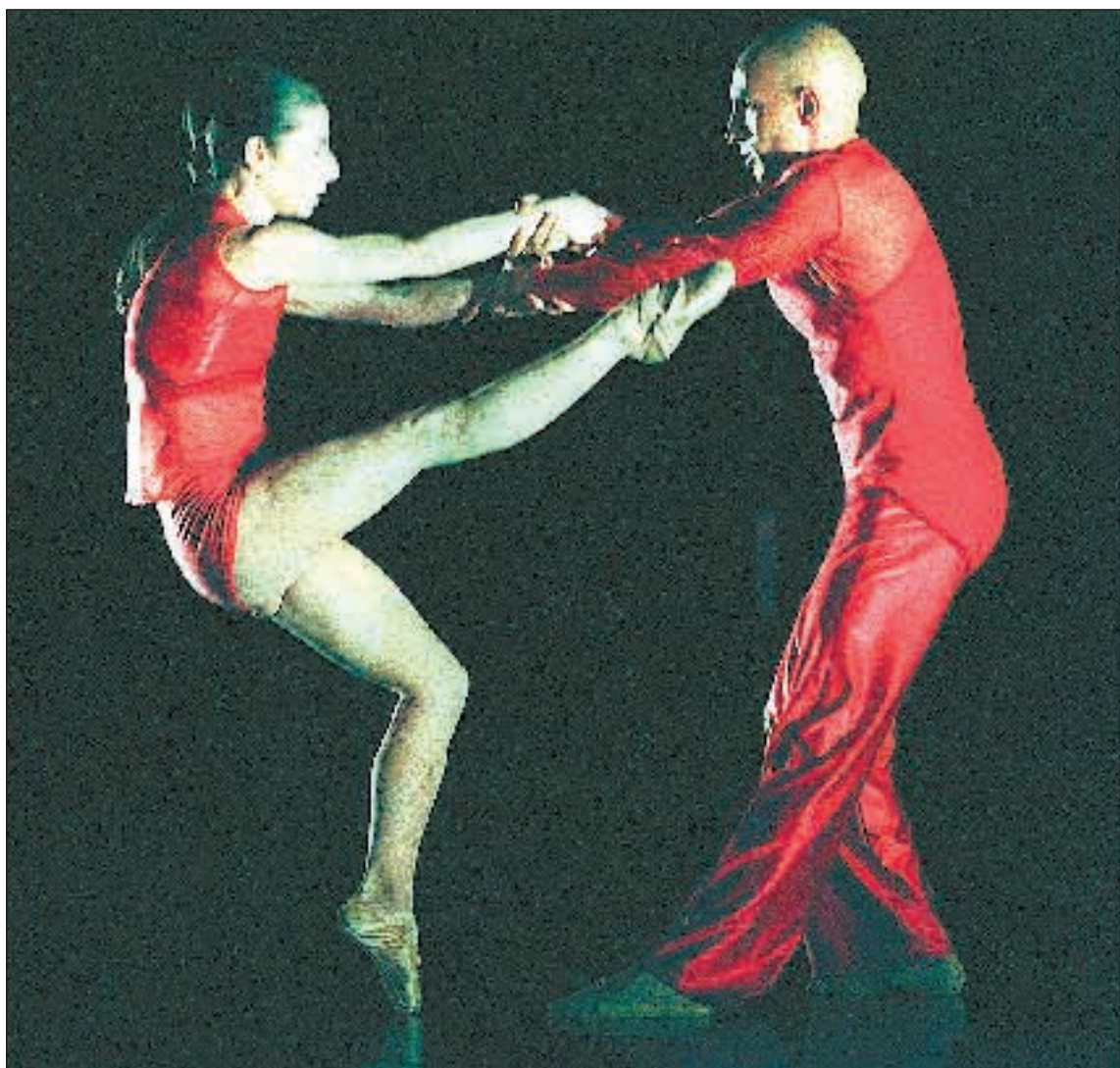
Hackney Empire

Nicholas de Jongh

est tier stands Kevin Elliot's young, hunger-striking Peadar. Behind him stands a giant medallion, with a list of the Republican prisoners' demands inscribed upon it and images of the 10 hunger-strikers. There are scenes of stinging pathos in prison, when Peadar admits he may never reach his next birthday and his simple, bemused father (Padraig O'Gallchoir) breaks down in shudders of tears.

These doleful prison vignettes are counterpointed with fiercely convincing battles of wills in Peadar's village, where Gerry Doherty's reactionary priest impugns a campaign by the local schoolteacher to rename Cromwell Park after a hunger-striker. The cowed Catholic community, Peadar's parents and friend from university renounce their obedient passivity. A small victory of the spirit is rousingly achieved to honour their dead, hunger-struck heroes: passionate, partisan, political theatre.

● *Until Sunday. Box office: 020 8985 2424.*



Thirteen dancers and a suspended limb: Wayne McGregor's detritus

Alastair Muir

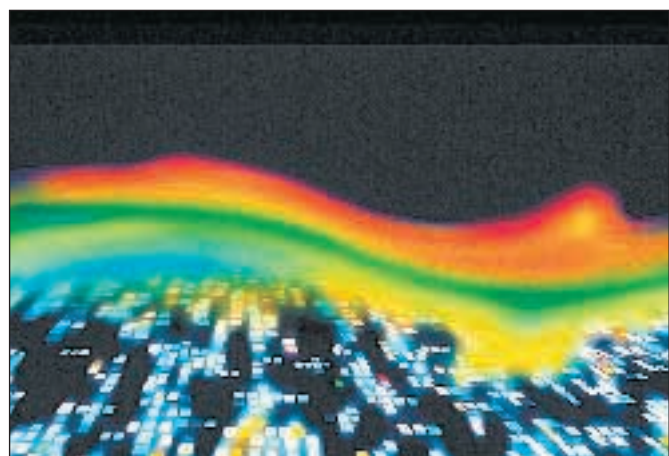
Dirty landscapes

INSPIRED by the optical effects of LA's polluted atmosphere, Chemical Sundown is a looped, 12 minute-long digital animation displayed, in its manifestation at Dot, as a video projection.

The piece veers from abstraction to figuration, but throughout conjures a sense of distortion that waxes and wanes. When the distortion is weak, you can make out the form of a city scene that stretches out before you, but on its strengthening you are robbed of your surety and plunged once again into a world of abstracted colour and form.

It begins with a vague and unstable horizon that stretches across a field of colour. Semi-circular shapes appear in pairs. The forms gently blur, lose their shape and their hues flow into strips that undulate in a slow and steady rhythm until they fade, and before you appear grids of brightly coloured rectangles, a spectrum of urban lights, set against a deep blue background. But the fidelity of the rectangles fails too, all the colours streak and bleed into each other until they become one flat field and the semi-circular forms emerge once again.

The accompanying ambient soundtrack builds the trippy, hallucinogenic feeling of journeying through a warped vision. The sense of unreality culminates in an unexpected moment when a fragment of film footage suddenly appears. It's a clip



Hallucinogenic: Jeremy Blake's Chemical Sundown

JEREMY BLAKE/Chemical Sundown ★

Dot, Beak Street, W1

Nick Hackworth

from Casino Royale of a beautifully dressed woman dancing on a bed in a pink room as feathers float about her — a reminder of the solipsistic lives that are played out beneath the hazy atmosphere.

In calling the work a "time-based painting", Blake goes some way to describing a medium that is somewhere between traditional video art and traditional painting and he exploits this artistic no-man's land to the full, creating an impressionistic journey through what are ultimately dirty landscapes of the mind.

● *Until 2 July. Dot, 4th Floor, 41/45 Beak Street, London, W1, Monday to Friday, 1-6pm (020 7494 0434).*

The way we live now

WHILE Rambert's second programme is a perfect freeze-frame of British contemporary dance, it also makes radiantly visible the company's classical underpinnings. The evening opens with the premiere of Richard Alston's *Unrest*, performed to Arvo Pärt's *Fratres*. Characteristically, Alston scatters his clues thinly. Samantha Smith is discovered alone and we witness the frantically ordered expression of her solitude. One dancer becomes six, and there are fleeting gestures of physical interdependence. Embraces are shaped, but the emotion that might have informed them has been pared away, leaving us with the washed bones of a narrative from which we deduce what we will.

Siobhan Davies's *Soundings*, to Giacinto Scelsi's hypnotic *Okanagon*, is equally enigmatic. There is an air of ritualised challenge, of activity performed far from sight, perhaps underground. The dancers are impelled into

RAMBERT
BALLET/Programme 2 ★★
Sadler's Wells
Luke Jennings

motion by waves of kinetic energy, and there is a repeated motif of the leg raised high in second position. With the final, dipping tableau we are left with the feeling — paradoxically satisfying — that we have glimpsed no more than a fraction of the picture.

If Rambert has a signature piece it is *Pierrot Lunaire*. Mounted on Rambert in 1967 with Christopher Bruce in the title role, Glen Tetley's setting of Schoenberg's song-cycle has lost none of its sad, saccharine edge. Each generation provides new interpreters; last night was the turn of Martin Lindinger, whose rigorous classicism furnished a nice counterpoint to the *Pierrot*'s exasperating

innocence. Deirdre Chapman was a dream Columbine — fabulously whimsical and pitiless — while Branden Faulks was a suitably beefy Brighella. May there always be white scaffolding poles in Rambert's scenery-dock.

Wayne McGregor's *detritus*, last night's second premiere, features 13 dancers and a suspended kinetic limb. This sinister prosthesis lowers itself at intervals, disrupting the choreographic structures beneath. Initially these are classical — half the cast is on pointe — but they quickly deform, and the dancers' bodies hyperextend into frantic insectoid writhings to Scanner's throat-laden electronic score.

As each group, and finally each dancer, pursues his or her own densely convoluted agenda, the activity becomes all but unwatchable. But then this is the way we live now. This is hard-core. See it. ● *Until 23 June. Box office: 020 7863 8000.*

Going through the beat barrier

TAKING their cue from the new all-tolerant mantra that says you can like Big Star and the Chemical Brothers, French band Tahiti 80 push out into power pop and psychedelia while keeping an eye on the dance beats that actually sell records this century.

Well versed in the joys of old-school bods like the Byrds and Buffalo Springfield, the Tahiti troupe also know that Pierre Henry is not a dodgy Arsenal striker. Mixing what the French call *les jerks* with Stateside-styled rock grooves à la Phoenix and Cornelius, Xavier Boyer and *les garçons* did their level best to suck what available oxygen remained inside the Monarch and utilise it to fuel their slick rocking tunes.

Those who didn't pass out from heat exhaustion managed to preserve enough energy to jump around during the mind-bending *A Love From Outer Space*, a high point on the current album *Puzzle*, while cooling off during the chillier moments from the band's *Extra Pieces* EP.

The Tahitians couldn't really shine in this pre-Solstice sweat pit but their pop credentials, good

TAHITI 80 ★
Barfly at Monarch, NW1
Max Bell

enough to persuade Fountains of Wayne and Cardinals members to contribute, still carried them through the stickier patches, even if a lot more volume was required to offset the lack of air.

Talking of Air, Tahiti 80 are showing every sign of moving towards that ensemble's brie disco in *Swimming Suit* and *Things Are Made To Last Forever*.

Maybe next time they should play in a sauna and cut out the middle man.

Ratings: ○ adequate, ★ good, ★★ very good, ★★★ outstanding, X poor