

## The Arts



Dwarfed: Svetlana Zakharova of the Kirov (centre) is a lovely Odette/Odile but the stage of the Albert Hall is too large an area for her sensitive performance

# Swans lost in space

AS I was sitting in the vast wasteland that is the Albert Hall, I began to think of polar exploration, as you do. In the days when the land was terra incognita, explorers had a purpose. But once it was mapped, they had to think up gimmicks — the first to get to the Pole without dogs, the first women, the first to go while turning cartwheels and singing the Hallelujah Chorus. All very difficult, but why would you want to do it?

Derek Deane's production of *Swan Lake* takes the most architecturally specific ballet in the classical repertoire, wrenches it out of context, and puts it into theatre in the round. Like modern-day polar exploration, it is

## DANCE

**Swan Lake**  
Albert Hall

Judith Flanders

physically draining, but why would you want to do it?

To fill the huge space, virtually everything has to be doubled, quadrupled: Deane, no modernist, clearly believes that More is More. To ensure that everyone gets a partial view, he has also ensured that no one gets a complete one.

The real pity is that the English National Ballet is looking so good at the moment, once you work your

way past the fuss and feathers. The corps is in excellent shape, and dances with far more dedication and seriousness than this production warrants. Svetlana Zakharova, of the Kirov, is a lovely Odette/Odile, by turns pliant and fiery. She was sensitively partnered by Sergei Filin, from the Bolshoi.

In theory, the more earthy style of the Bolshoi, with its slight music hall, over-the-top acting style would seem to be a bad fit with the severe, austere beauty of the Kirov, but in this instance it works astonishingly well. Both give performances that go to the heart of the mystery of *Swan Lake* — that human fallibility brings destruction, but that a noble death can triumph over a compromised life.

This is no easy task, as Deane has decided, for this populist version, to go with the old Soviet happy ending. To supply this, and throughout the evening, he has had to patch filler material into the original choreography, and his rather prosaic work stands out brutally from the original.

But the Albert Hall is so huge that it takes the dancers much longer to cover the ground, and there is neither enough music nor enough choreography in the original to cover the epic voyages required by the terrain. One leaves only hoping that the dancers are getting paid by the mile.

● Until 22 June. Box office: 020 7838 3100.

# True tale needs retelling

A DARK stormy night, a mysterious stranger, and an empty house by the sea have long been stock elements in the suspense game, but this quirky piece is more likely to slow the pulse than to quicken it.

Tantalising for all the wrong reasons, it cruelly whets the appetite for an offbeat psychological drama — and instead delivers a joke with a don't-hold-your-breath punchline.

Based on a true story, this production's main crime is to excel during the first 10 minutes, before deteriorating into directionless banality. Orla O'Loughlin is without doubt on the rise as a young director — last year she won the prestigious James Menzies-Kitchin award — and as the wind whistles loudly around a lonely

## THEATRE

**Sob Stories**  
BAC, SW11

Rachel Halliburton

female figure standing on the stark sand and wood set, several possibilities seem to hang in the turbulent air.

Enigma dissolves disappointingly when she is rescued by Rob, whose life is otherwise dominated by a telephone answering machine, a solitary chair, and an absent character called Geoffrey.

The inevitable question — will they or won't they sleep together? — is delayed because Rachael Spence's character speaks no language that Rob (James Palm) can

recognise, and with distinctly pre-feminist cuteness, seems intent on turning his house into a fairy-tale world where she can dress up in brightly-coloured garments and help him discover his inner child through drink.

"Shahid," she cries as she raises her glass to him.

"Sh\*t," he laughs in return. It isn't funny the first time, but as the formula is repeated ad tedium, it feels that the evening may be based on a true story, but has been retold by a drunkard with an entertainment by-pass.

Frustratingly, all the ingredients are there for an unusual, original comedy. But the audience member is left with too many questions, including: "What am I doing here?"

● Until 30 June. Box office: 020 7223 2223



Odd couple: Rachael Spence and James Palm

# Fragments of life, remnants of dreams

## EXHIBITION

**Robert Rauschenberg**  
Waddington Galleries, W1

Nick Hackworth

NOW in his 76th year, Robert Rauschenberg, long regarded as a figure of major art-historical significance, is showing a series of 10 large works produced over the past two years. He first came to prominence in the Fifties when he began assimilating real objects into his paintings, creating collages of life and art. He beat Hirst and Emin by several decades to the use of dishevelled beds and dead animals in art, exhibiting a stuffed goat and a bed, both splattered with paint. The Pop artists inspired by Rauschenberg (and Jasper Johns) extended this logic of appropriation until the surfaces of their work became almost indistinguishable from the fabric of everyday life.

Rauschenberg's new works, too, are an exercise in the arrangement of disparate, appropriated elements, in this case fragmented images of everyday life: people, beaches, dogs, pavements, windows, walls, plants and cars all culled from magazines and photographs. Rauschenberg has collaged them together on white backgrounds, but loosely, so that much of the background is visible in each piece. Superficially, the works appear to be inkjet prints on canvas, but are, in fact, vegetable-dye transfers on poly laminate board, a mysterious technique that leaves the colours washed out and the images flat. These effects are uniform, however, giving the pieces an overall visual coherence.

Narrative coherence, however, is absent, despite the expectations conjured up by the name of the show, *Short Stories*, and by the title of each work being a page and paragraph number. In Page 33, Paragraph 4, the incomplete images of three cartoon figures, a chef and a couple in Alpine dress, float next to an illustration of an armchair and some photos of a wall painted black and white.

Most of the other pictures are similar unhappy marriages of mundane images that have little going for them individually or collectively, either aesthetically or as starting points for imaginative journeys. A few of the works, it is true, wear a moving air of melancholy — as if the faint fragments were the remnants of a half-remembered dream. Unfortunately, the few good pieces that there are, such as Page 1, Paragraph 3, stand next to others that record only the dreams of dullards.

● Until 6 July. Information: *Short Stories* is at the Waddington Galleries, 11 Cork Street, W1 (020 7851 2200).

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