

The Arts



Favouring the more athletic style rather than gossamer romanticism from another age: Craig Hall and Alexandra Ansanelli

Homage to Balanchine

IT is nearly two decades since the full New York City Ballet appeared in London. For the moment, Balanchine junkies across the city will have to make do with a small fix of 10 principals and soloists from the main company in a chamber performance.

For decades, the City Ballet was anchored by Jerome Robbins, one of the 20th century's great choreographers, and by George Balanchine, the century's genius. It is not surprising, therefore, that since their deaths the company has been groping its way forwards. It thinks that perhaps it has found its way in British-born Christopher Wheeldon, and on last night's showing of his Polyphonia, it may well be right.

Polyphonia is very much a homage

DANCE

**New York City Ballet:
Dances Concertantes**

Sadler's Wells, EC1

Judith Frater

to Balanchine, with quotations from, among others, Apollo, Episodes and Bugaku. However, it is not simply pastiche, but a serious exploration of movement and music and how they are linked. Wheeldon is one of the most musically astute choreographers working today, and the initially formidable Ligeti opens up magically to his organisational skills.

The curtain rises, as with so many

Balanchine works, on four couples in practice clothes staring out into the audience. In a series of 10 dances Wheeldon runs through an acrobatic range of spiky, inventive steps.

Particularly remarkable is the central pas de deux for Wendy Whelan and Jock Soto, where the intricate partnering is always surprising, but never seems to be odd for oddity's sake.

Earlier in the evening, Benjamin Millepied's pas de deux, Triple Duet, was less successful. It was a pleasant enough piece, to a Bach partita, but there was not enough cake under the icing. It suffered hugely, too, in being programmed back to back with Balanchine's Duo Concertant, a pas de deux choreographed 30 years ago, and looking as thrilling today

as if it were its première.

When Balanchine and Stravinsky worked together, it is hard to say whether the music drove the dance or vice versa: each encapsulated the other so perfectly that they become fused into one. Yvonne Borrée and Peter Boal were in perfect harmony throughout.

The same cannot be said for the Jerome Robbins' In the Night. The intense, swooning lyricism is now beyond all the dancers, who favour a more athletic style, and only Borrée looked remotely at home in this piece of gossamer romanticism from another age.

Still, if you can only see one company this year, make it this one.

● *Until 28 September. Box Office: 020 7863 8000*

Grand evening with the talented Ms Rusby

WITH her magical voice, rosy cheeks and tumble of corkscrew curls, Kate Rusby is English folk music's favourite poster girl, one of a bunch of talented babes intent on subverting the beard-and-woolly-jumper stereotype and giving the genre a good seeing to.

A 28-year-old Barnsley lass who sings like an angel on matters — murder, misery, mayhem — distinctly devilish, Rusby burst on to the mainstream scene in 1999 when her second album, Sleepless, was nominated for the Mercury Music Prize. "I'm dead proud to be a folk

WORLD MUSIC

Kate Rusby Band

Queen Elizabeth Hall

Jane Cornwell

singer, me," she said back then.

She should be even prouder now. With three hugely popular albums under her belt and another, Ten, on the way, Rusby has gone from the club circuit to selling out "posh" venues like the QEHL without an inch of compromise.

There were none of her

self-released CDs on sale at the merchandising stall — run by her mum — in the foyer. The venue had priced them too high. "So I refused to sell them," she said to applause, in the same rich Yorkshire accent she sings in.

In black slip dress and bovver boots, an acoustic guitar slung over her diminutive frame and star-shaped lights from her garden at her feet, Rusby closed her eyes and sang, brow furrowed, of parting lovers, lonely ghosts and things withering and dying. Time and again she shook us out of our reverie with

no-nonsense chat or pleas for sing-a-longs on tracks, including the self-penned I Courted a Sailor or the transportation lament, Botany Bay.

Her equally amiable husband, Scottish fiddle virtuoso John McCusker — a folk musician with a mohican haircut — led a backing band on accordion, bass, guitar, penny whistle and, when Rusby was taking a break, a guess-the-tune competition on the kazoo.

An utterly life-affirming evening, despite the subject matter, and with hardly a beard in sight.



Kate Rusby: sings like an angel

Making light of heavy themes

EXHIBITION

Lothar Hempel
ICA, SW1

Nick Hackworth

IT'S hard to know whether to laugh or cry in response to the work of Lothar Hempel. Maybe it's more fashionable to do both at once. A German artist, he makes complex installations with lumbering titles such as Abstract Socialism, on display here, and employs amusingly simple visual metaphors, like bicycles without front wheels called Bismark and images of people with keyholes in their foreheads waiting for their consciousness to be unlocked.

Despite Hempel's evident liking for the simple and direct, his pieces are in fact absurdly indecipherable. In general they include man-made objects, bits of newspapers, and sometimes human figures made of pieces of felt stitched together, all of which are situated in relation to large sculptural elements made by the artist. Hempel's mix of the complex and the simple is so gratuitous that one is left with the disconcertingly uncertain suspicion that he might be completely taking the piss.

Such suspicions are fuelled by the video pieces that accompany each of three installations. Shot in black and white, each one features the same scenario shot from a different angle. Highlights include a severe looking German lady falling off a chair, an earnest man who makes a stew out of paper and root vegetables and a bit when the severe-looking lady finds a large key in a bowl of stew and promptly unlocks someone's mind.

Elements within the video pieces and the installations play off each other, but obliquely and incoherently. In Strike, for example, the video plays next to a large wooden screen that frames bits of medieval tracery. Beyond sit two tables. On one stand two coffee machines, one of which is made by Krups, the German manufacturer, and might be a casual reference to Germany's Nazi past. On the other table, amid odd black wooden objects, lie fish bones and whole loaves, conjuring an image of a gluten-free version of the feeding of the 5,000.

All these disparate elements are meant to come together and evoke emotive responses and associations. Specifically they point towards the failure of the Utopian dreams of the West, including socialism and modernism — heavy topics which, in the hands of this joker turn into silly putty.

● *Until 3 November (020 7930 3647).*

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