

BALLET URSULA ROBERTSHAW

Dancing for Fanfare

Gala ballet performances can be difficult occasions. Aware that gala audiences are likely to be less knowledgeable and enthusiastic about dancing than their usual ones, companies understandably tend to go for the virtuoso party pieces that will show off their dancers to advantage. Watching them is like eating a nine-course banquet composed entirely of *canapés* and meringues. It is pleasant therefore to report that the several offerings for Fanfare for Europe by Britain's ballet companies left this observer comfortably replete.

Covent Garden served a *Cordon Bleu* repast with contributions from all the member countries except Ireland and Luxembourg. The evening began with the Fairies' variations from *The Sleeping Beauty*, with outstanding performances from Laura Connor and Lesley Collier. Next came Limon's *The Moor's Pavane*, a potted dance-version of *Othello* to Purcell's music danced by the Royal Danish Ballet: slightly old-fashioned looking, but with a splendidly sinister and sinuous Iago by Henning Kronstam and with Vivi Flindt as a beguiled and sexually besotted Emilia. La Scala Milan gave us a *pas de deux* from *Coppelia*, danced with great charm by Carla Fracci and Paolo Bortoluzzi.

Then came the first of the "moderns", with the Dutch National Ballet's *Twilight*. Choreographed by Hans van Manen to John Cage's score for prepared piano, this was an effective duo of attraction and repulsion danced strongly by Alexandra Radius and Han Ebbelaar.

The *pas de deux* from Cranko's *The Lady and the Fool* (Beriosova supremely assured, MacLeary a poignant white-faced lover) was followed by a piece of Orientalism called *Bhakti* by Béjart from the Ballet of the 20th Century. Described by a member of the audience as a couple of pages out of the *Khama Sutra*, it was performed with dedicated agility by Angele Albrecht and Daniel Lommel. The *pas de deux* from *Le Corsair* (Fonteyn regal, Nureyev electrifying) completed the first half of a near-three-hour programme.

The second half rose to even greater heights, beginning with *Symphonic Variations* impeccably led by Merle Park. Then the Stuttgart company gave us Cranko's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Marcia Haydee was superb, a *jolie laide*, spitting fire and packing a fine left hook, melting finally to Richard Cragun's irresistible, swashbuckling Petruccio. MacMillan's new *Pavane* to Fauré's music, for Sibley and Dowell, is a delicate, tender *pas de deux*—perhaps too delicate for a

gala: it seemed to need the context of a full ballet, and we all wanted to see more of Dowell, who here had mainly a supporting role.

The Paris Opéra presented the Act III *pas de deux* from *Swan Lake*, danced by Noelle Pontois and Cyril Atanassoff with elegance and style. And finally, before a grand file past of the entire cast, came Seymour and Nureyev in MacMillan's *Side-show*, danced to five pieces from Stravinsky's suites. Nureyev as the Strong Man gave us a full view of that delightful sense of humour that we have glimpsed in *Dances at a Gathering*, besides more of those incredible leaps and spins, so that we were hard put to it to know whether to laugh or gasp. And Seymour, that dancer who has made us weep in anguish with her Anastasia, here made us sob with mirth as an Equestrienne *sans* mount and *sans* expertise, though game to the last. Broad humour verging on the burlesque, and it stole a thoroughly memorable evening.

London Festival Ballet's offering to Fanfare at the Festival Hall was generous, consisting of four specially created works and a British première. *Mozartiana* (Ronald Hynd, with handsome designs by Peter Docherty) was bitty and muddled. But a remake of *La Péri* by Peter Darrell, designed in full Arabian Nights splendour by John Fraser, did come off in its own terms, with Samsova dancing the spirit of the magic lotus flower, ardently pursued by Prokovsky.

Peter Schaufuss's father Frank had arranged a *pas de deux* for his son and Dagmar Kessler from *Raymonda* to Glazunov's music: run-of-the-mill stuff but well danced. Next Maina Gielgud performed, with great wit and expertise, Béjart's *Forme et Ligne* to Pierre Henry's sound track, which sounds like a squeaky gate. The main course of this evening was *In Nomine*, a new work by Barry Moreland to a Peter Maxwell Davies score. This was a tough piece for a gala audience full of allusions to sin and Redemption. It was given fine performances by, especially, Kenn Wells, Jonathan Kelly and Alain Dubreuil.

Ballet Rambert, performing at the Young Vic, also produced a new work for Fanfare, in *There was a Time*, by Christopher Bruce. Danced to an electronic score by Brian Hodgson, this is an effective but overlong survey of the Trojan wars. Bruce is obsessed with the waste and brutality of war, and he makes his point with a harrowing slow-motion fight which recalls black vase paintings and the great Attic friezes. Gideon Avrahami and Leigh Warren were outstanding ●