

BALLET

Same again

by Ursula Robertshaw

London Contemporary Dance Theatre, inventive as ever, showed three London premières at their winter season at Sadler's Wells. The first was Robert Cohan's *Field*, danced to a sound backcloth by Brian Hodgson of twitterings and murmurous noises reminiscent of a summer's day. The ballet is plotless, dealing with "impressions and thoughts on crossing, sitting in and watching others in a field"; and we have beautiful, fluid movements from Kate Harrison as she wanders, in melancholy or introspective mood; from Patrick Harding-Irmer as he bounds across, glorying in his own athleticism; from Lenny Westerdijk, Christopher Bannerman, Celia Hulton and other members of the company as they saunter and leap and intertwine—all combining to produce very much the feeling of a hot summer's day wearing uneventfully to a warm summer's evening.

The effect is soothing, not to say somniferous; and the ballet shows off the company's strength and style to good effect. Indeed, were it not for the fact that the same choreographer's *Forest* is already in the repertory, Cohan's *Field* could be welcomed with more enthusiasm; but *Forest*, a more sharply structured ballet, is similar in mood and movement and one queries the need for this near-duplication.

The second new work, Siobhan Davies's *Something to Tell*, is danced to Britten's Third Cello Suite, Variations on Russian Folk Songs, in an attractive set composed of louvres and giving the effect of a living room with a patio outside. What the something is that Davies has to tell is never revealed, despite the programme's promise that the theme emerges at the close. There seem to be a hostess and host (Davies herself with Robert North), and guests consisting of two couples (Patrick Harding-Irmer and Linda Gibbs, a most promising newcomer, Philippe Giraudeau, who has a huge personality and fine technique, dancing with Lizie Saunderson), plus a pair of very close friends indeed (Anca Frankenhäuser and Celia Hulton), who are the only ones who appear to have any fun at all.

There are cross-currents of attraction and repulsion, a degree of partner-swapping and a taut and dramatic atmosphere. The ballet is compulsively watchable, even if one is baffled at the end as to what it was all about. It is rather like attending a performance of a well acted drama in a foreign language; irritated by the desire for illumination, yet one cannot drag one's eyes away.

The third addition to the repertory, Robert North's *Death and the Maiden*, danced to the first two movements of Schubert's well loved work, was the best, combining a deft use of the strength of company dancing and the

superlative talents of two in particular, with tight structure and dramatic shape. The first movement is for seven dancers plus North himself, in black, as Death moving among us unnoticed all the time, Linda Gibbs, the doomed maiden, entering only at the end. The second movement consists mainly of a series of *pas de deux* for her and North, broken up by episodes in which the other dancers display sympathy but ultimately reject the girl in a kind of communicated terror as her end reveals itself as inevitable, and a fine interpolation of consolation from Anca Frankenhäuser. I was reminded of *Everyman*, deserted and alone, at the end of that great play. This fine ballet is a valuable addition to LCDT's repertory.

Among plans for the next year or so, LCDT announced that they would be approaching various choreographers from outside the company to create works for them—with the dancers in such fine form this is an opportunity that, one imagines, will not be refused. This, a reversal of the company's original policy, has already been done to a limited degree—Paul Taylor's *Cloven Kingdom* was repeated with success this season—but an extension seems a good idea. The repertory at present is based on the work of three company choreographers—Cohan, Davies and North—and excellent though this is an infusion of new blood would give audiences more variety and the dancers new insights and challenges. Most important of all, it would take some of the pressure off LCDT's prolific, precious three.

A glittering gala at the Palladium, in aid of one-parent families, proved much more interesting than such events usually are. Instead of bits and pieces from old war-horses such as *Le Corsair*, Anthony Dowell, the central star, and the organizing committee had devised a programme "to delight, amuse and surprise" its audience, mostly new and as varied and delicious as a Scandinavian cold table. Among prime delights were Monica Mason as the Italian ballerina and Michael Coleman as her acidulated partner, wildly funny in an excerpt from Tudor's *Gala Performance*; a lovely *pas de deux* for Lesley Collier and Robert North, choreographed by him to Howard Blake's violin and piano score; Ni-jinska's solo for Daphnis, remembered by Anton Dolin and danced by Stephen Beagley; Doreen Wells most miraculously executing tap; Dowell and Antoinette Sibley, warmly welcomed back to dancing again, in a romantic *pas de deux* by Frederick Ashton; another fine *pas de deux*, this time sexily amorous, by Kenneth MacMillan, danced superbly by Dowell and Jennifer Penney to McCartney's "Waterfalls"; a virtuoso explosion from Wayne Sleep; and a "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails" number from Dowell and—another *revenant*—Christopher Gable. A gala to remember ●