

## Dance

**Robert Cohan at 80****Sadler's Wells**

May 9

**Choreographer:** Robert Cohan**Composers:** Brian Hodgson,  
Eugene Lester, Antonio Vivaldi**Producer:** The Place**Cast includes:** Jonathan Goddard,Ino Riga, Yann Seabra, Douglas  
Thorpe, Gesine Moog**Running time:** 2hrs 30mins

To celebrate the 80th birthday of Robert Cohan – prolific choreographer and founding artistic director of The Place, this performance of three of his works ranges from American modern, through the beginnings of abstract expressionism to pure dance. Although today's audience may consider the choreography – first created in the sixties and seventies – far removed from choreographic chic, it is important to remember the context in which these pieces came about.

Forest (1977) is performed by Phoenix Dance Theatre. Using abstract narratives and considered placings, the dancers move to their own rhythms above a soundscape of rolling wind, bird calls and strange sounds. They have flexed feet rather than pointed toes, rigid postures and juxtaposed dynamics. The cartwheels, high leaps and low arabesques that would in now be deemed seriously uncool, are here strangely hypnotic and beautiful even to those used to the more rigorous pace of contemporary performance.

Next is a short film of Cohan's life (including baby

pictures, footage of Martha Graham and the devastatingly handsome young Cohan dancing in New York) and a discussion with Richard Alston – Cohan's successor as The Place's current artistic director.

Two dancers from the Richard Alston Dance Company then perform *Eclipse* (1967). This is a tender yet solitary duet of what happens when the sun and the moon (as a metaphor for a couple) eclipse each other. Jonathan Goddard as the Sun dances with spot-on precision, perfect technique and fiery strength.

*Stabat Mater* (1975), performed by Ballet Theatre Munich, is a far cry from the entertaining ballet or Broadway dance that predominated the day. This piece is a good example of the introduction to dancing with feeling – deep anguished contractions, tormented expressions, downcast eyes, sombre steps and pensive arms, which do not detract from the beauty and clarity of the movement but add a level of poignancy.

From this performance, it is easy to see just how much we owe to Cohan and his pioneering work within British dance.

*Katie Phillips*