

AUGUST 1985 £1.25

DANCE & dancers

Caterwauling: Ashton's new solo in Vienna

Candle-power: a Bournonville ballet recreated

Capering: David Bintley's new ballet



Keynes started with a new and much more pianistic score for *Les Sylphides*. It is clear, fresh and unsoupy. The overture Prelude is solo piano, which goes theatrically into orchestral colour as the curtains open. That works well but when the piece is repeated in mid-ballet, we were back to monochrome piano again, which seems illogical. On the other hand I like solo piano for the Valse; it gives it a more pizzicato feel and really does suit Madgwick's darting wren performance. The matinee saw Samira Saidi making a lovely debut, creating plenty of time and space for a very beautiful and musically controlled Prelude. The evening saw Iain Webb's first appearance as the poet in what seems to me his most convincing debut so far; his lightness, elevation and softness are right and he knows what the role implies. So many men in this role look either abashed and uneasy, or truculently butch. Webb was all ardour and all dream, wrapt in the pursuit of these women, who are not wilis but life-respecting, dance-loving, air-inhabiting spirits of romance. With Tait skimmingly light and serene, Madgwick firefly flickering and Barbieri gently drifting, it was one of the most satisfying *Sylphides* I have seen.

In *5 Tangos*, Leanne Benjamin is sensationally superb: dominant, driving, flaunting and dominant, even in the total stillness of acceptance of male homage. Webb's first British performance, in the Tent, ran out of steam but he learnt the lesson and in Birmingham gave a strong performance of that narcissistic solo. At the tent matinee the synchronisation of Mark Francis, Maliphant, O'Hare, Nicholas Ringham, Mark Welford and Yow was prodigious.

The Tent season ended with *Les Patineurs*, *Median* and *The Lady and the Fool*. *Patineurs* was a bit slushy and I have to confess that I find *Median* pretentious, soulless and intensely boring.

At the final triple bill in Birmingham which introduced Bintley's *Flowers of the Forest*, it followed *Lady*. The juxtaposition was interesting because both works have ingredients of raucous vulgarity and emotional deeps in unimaginably close proximity, and both succeed. *Lady* is Barbieri's finest role and Stephen Wicks is proving a notable Moondog. I also greatly admire Nicholas Millington, who never forgets the elegance under the tatters. It is a matter of stance, of expressive feet and arms, rather than of facial acting. He makes one see the physical representation of that spiritual nobility which attracts the fastidious Lady. It is not enough for her to feel sorry for the woe-begone, she actually loves him for his soul. That is what Millington defines in the way he dances it, I would

like to see Barbieri and Millington together. An extra delight in *Lady* was a gloriously operatic Midas from Price. His legs scissor arias out of Cranko's purple passages – a sort of colloraturus. It was good to see this comic richness in *Lady* as well as the sensational slinkiness he produced in *Tangos* on the same day, to end the year with the audience acclaiming.

John Cowan

The Big Apple

Bloomsbury

THE idea behind 'A Bite of the Big Apple' was good: to bring American dancers, musicians and other artists, soloists or groups, who might not be high-powered enough to get to London under their own steam and present them in mixed bills giving our audiences a taste of work from New York, alias the Big Apple. Why did it flop?

The first week, by general consensus, was not good. I was away – in New York, as it happens – but several of our writers tell me I missed little, although Judith Cruickshank added that the standard of performance, except for one 'video artist', was more professional and competent than one habitually gets from comparable British groups and the standard of choreography no worse than a lot that is shown in Dance Umbrella. Yet the audiences stayed away. Merce Cunningham was playing in competition at Sadler's Wells and, of course, there

was nothing of his quality at the Bloomsbury but surely our often-quoted growing audience for modern dance should have been interested in the chance to sample perhaps three different companies in one night?

Well, in the second week the stay-aways missed some very rewarding work. The best single dancer was Felicia Norton, whom I saw on different days in two works. *Flying Saucer Baby*, by Lynn Taylor-Corbett, showed her flair for rhythm and movement in jazzy mood, with some ingenious use of a wide skirt. *Fantasia Interruptus* showed Norton as Narcissus, falling in love with his/her own beauty. Michael Mortilla's music (a harp and watery sounds) neatly suggested both antiquity and the pond in which the Greek youth saw his own image. An exiguous white costume by Mario Camacho, which looked unlikely to stay in place but always did, also hinted at ancient Greece. Mark Dendy's choreography required all sorts of bends and stretches, and a remarkable control – at one point, for instance, just the stretching and wriggling of a foot maintained the action. Norton held all this together with a display of extraordinary sensual intensity: a lovely dancer.

Dendy's own group was better shown in *Rock*, a piece for three near-naked men in which perhaps they were representing violently animated rocks rather than people, than in *Face* with its enormous collection of properties overwhelming the rather limited dance element. Christina Jones had the benefit, in *Cheers*, of collaborating



Felicia Norton, who made her British debut in *A Bite of the Big Apple*



Water Water – a collaboration between Muna Tseng and Emmanouil Koutsourelis

with Joe Grable and Michael Pugliese of the New Music Ensemble; they provided a score, mainly percussive and filled out the action too. Between them, they symbolized 'various greetings, terms and salutations' ranging from a cheered sportswoman through a cheerleader to someone idly raising a glass with the same ritual word. Not a great dance, but amusing.

The musicians, incidentally, did a solo or group piece of modern music on each programme and they, at least, are actually of sufficient reputation that they could easily have given a British tour on their own account.

I wasn't bowled over by Linda Kohl's group of four dancers, nor by what she gave them to do, but I could hardly begrudge 15 minutes of attention to find out whether or not they had something to offer. And another choreographer, Muna Tseng, most definitely had something worth seeing. Her solo *What's the rush?* used film to point up her implications of humane and mechanistic action. In the ritual for six locally recruited oriental dancers which she prepared in collaboration with Emmanouil Koutsourelis, *Water, Water*, they did just about everything imaginable with glasses of the stuff: playing them, passing them, pouring from one to another, blowing bubbles, and finally even drinking.

A Bite of the Big Apple deserved

Mark Dendy

to be sampled by more than could be bothered to take a taste, and London desperately needs a more enquiring modern-dance audience if our native efforts are to get out of their rut.

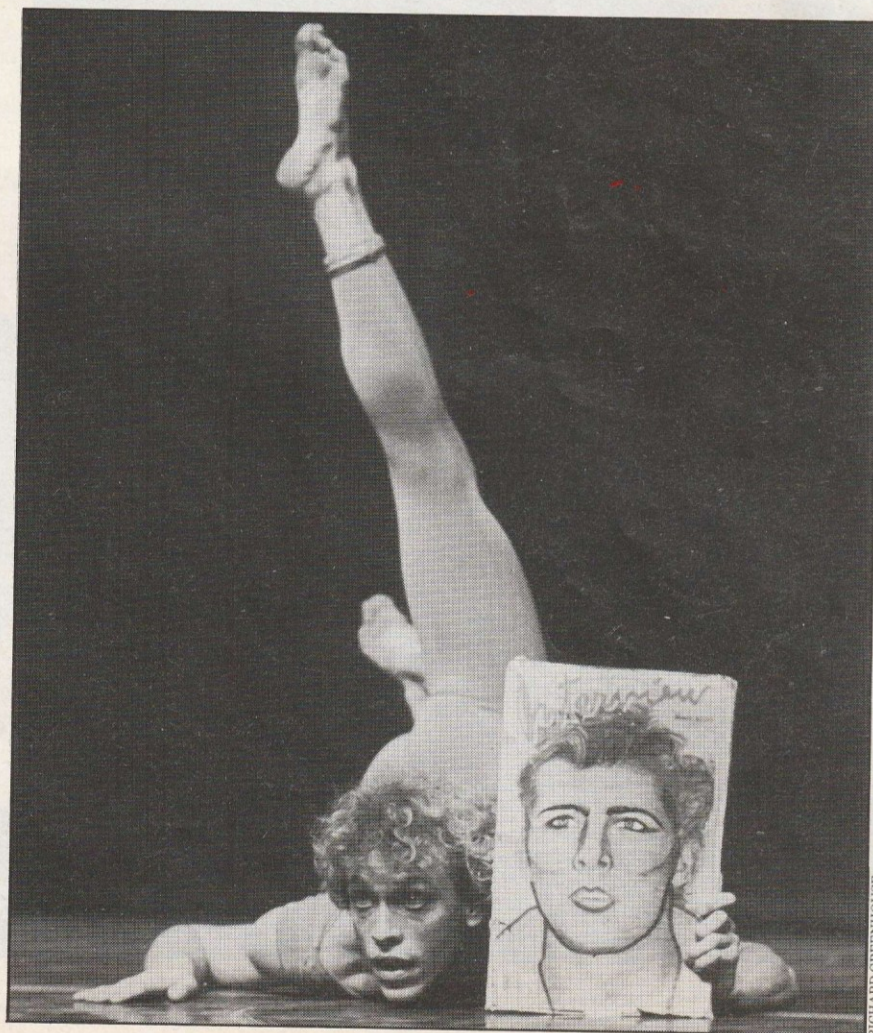
John Percival

Place Series One Susan Macpherson

The Place

DANCERS, or to be specific some of those working in British experimental dance, claim that one of the most fruitful periods of their year is the spring festival organised by Mary Fulkerson at Dartington. They gather at the Devon college to provide a concentrated series of performances and, living and working in the same place for an elongated weekend, the exchange between like-minded artists almost invariably engenders recharged thought.

While some of our new dance may be of questionable merit; I mention



RICHARD GREENHOUSE