

each individual's unique gifts; it seemed that a kick or jump directly incited a reaction in the music. Tyler Guerfine and Aya Okumura stood out for wholehearted and fully fused grasp of Forsythe's electrifying choreography. And Sarah Brodbeck went wild in the finale, her hair flying and body crumpling and thrashing in fascinating contrast to the angular, taut movements of the group.

Richard Siegal's *Oval* is the weakest of the three works; the ring of light encircling the dancers is blinding and distracts from the movement—however intriguing; but the dancers' commitment continued on, unflinching, as though they were metal balls suspended on strings, destined to knock against each other in perpetuity. Vladislav Marinov and Ksenia Ovsyanick were the standouts here: their bodies seemed to become thick, viscous liquid, where every muscle fibre took part in circular, wavelike motion.

With the next step in Staatsballett Berlin's artistic leadership once again unknown, the dancers have found an outlet for uncertainty. Instead of stopping to worry, they step onstage and don't hold back.

Lucy Van Cleef

### **RAMBERT AISHA AND ABHAYA LINBURY THEATRE**

Rambert and De Valois have been on separate tracks for the best part of 100 years. Both legacies have survived and are now thriving. After the world premiere in the Linbury Theatre of *Aisha and Abhaya*, Rambert's latest project, the current director of The Royal Ballet, Kevin O'Hare, celebrated opening up the Royal Opera House by offering hospitality, resources and production support to Rambert in a vastly ambitious venture in collaboration with BBC Films. To give you an instant flavour, it concludes with Grandmother (Angela Wynter) giving her granddaughters, Aisha (Salomé Pressac) and Abhaya (Maëve Berthelot), a reassuring hug as celebratory digital fireworks fill the sky, heaven bound; the end was followed by more creatives on stage than dancers, by about two to one, soaking up the applause. How we got there in this film/dance/film sandwich was not quite so certain or straightforward.

At Rambert's invitation to make a piece about a fairy tale, award-winning film-maker Kibwe Tavares chose to be inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's *Little Match Girl*. He divided her in two and renamed her Aisha and Abhaya, and then divided the story into several distinct sections, Journey, Before, Journey, trading between memory, traditional and modern cultures, a little jewel box serving as a metaphor for precious memories. Thanks to Russian designer Uldus Bakhtiozina, our eponymous heroines are bedecked in mock traditional garb, covered in strings of pearls, topped with mock Slavic headgear framing their faces. They are shipwrecked, but they survive

and end up on a shore, from which they wander into the hinterland, only to discover an all-night rave or an all-embracing indeterminate religious ritual. Curious? On-trend choreographers - Hofesh Schechter, Crystal Pite, and now Sharon Eyal among them – confront the refugee crisis.

By small gradations this cinematic world gives way to Rambert's dancers and to an alien cityscape throbbing with the pulsating energy of clubland Europe. It is the world of Ori Lichtik and Tavares's brother, Gaika, both of whom supply it with its digital soundtrack and its visuals. We were offered earplugs to protect our delicate hearing, but frankly it was an over-protective gesture. The score is base-driven electronica, loud, but not oppressively so. Dark glasses may have been useful to shield the visually challenged against the onslaught of digital images, fired at the audience in an endless display behind the dancers - cleverly and imaginatively done.

Choreographer Sharon Eyal occupies that clubbing world to perfection: raised arms in sculptural gestures, gyrating hips, the rhythmic pulse rippling through the dancers' bodies. The seven dancers, often in unison, adjust each gesture slightly to pursue their own individual journeys, forging alliances, formed and reformed as weight and bodies shift, drifting in and out of each other's worlds and consciousness. The four men, (Daniel Davison, Liam Francis, Juan Gil, Guillaume Quéau) with their chests out (again? I am told it brings in the punters) and the three women (Maëve Berthelot, Edit Domoszlai, Hannah Rudd) Lycra-clad, share a common and powerful movement vocabulary. For over half an hour they inhabit the same stage space, magnificent, yet joyless and endlessly alienated. The sexual come on, teased but not reciprocated, conjuring a kind of emotional cruelty. The little match girl died cold and friendless in Copenhagen's sad streets, two centuries earlier.

But it didn't end there. Somehow Aisha and Abhaya got together with granny and, with a hug, put the world to rights. It was not a narrative but a series of fragments that almost cohered into something meaningful, too often obscured by a multiplicity of gestures.

Robert Penman

### **ST PETERSBURG EIFMAN BALLETT THE PYGMALION EFFECT LATVIAN NATIONAL OPERA, RIGA**

Eifman Ballet's *The Pygmalion Effect* performances in Riga marked the end of their European autumn tour and, so far, one of the highlights of this year's dance season in the Latvian capital. The relationship between acclaimed Russian choreographer Boris Eifman and Riga goes back to his beginnings, when he restaged his first full-length ballet, *Gayane*, in 1976 for the Riga Ballet (nowadays, the Latvian National Ballet). Now he has come with *The Pygmalion Effect*, which premiered earlier this year. This production is a reinterpretation of the



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Rambert in *Aisha and Abhaya*. Photo: Foteini Christofilopoulou. © ROH

Greek myth about Pygmalion, the sculptor who falls in love with his own creation, the statue of a beautiful young girl. But here, Eifman transforms the statue into Leon, a successful ballroom dancer, and the sculptor into a clumsy and poor girl. The performance starts with Eifman displaying two opposite worlds: the slums of the city where Gala (Lyubov Chernykh) comes from, in contrast to the glittery world of Leon (Oleg Vinogradov). To do so, the stage is lit in a continuous back and forth manner, providing information about their background through sudden changes of light. The audience most feel to have already seen the performance, but the ballet has only just begun. In fact, this is one of his greatest merits as a choreographer: he always keeps the audience on edge. Through his endless choreographic innovations, to showcase the power of his talented corps, follow one another. Meanwhile, the storyline is building to initiate the Pygmalion effect between them by transforming the clumsy Andreyeva into a virtuoso

ballroom performer with never-ending long limbs, strongly supported by the elegant Gabyshev, who performed with enviable plasticity.

The second act continued with endless virtuoso combinations displaying impossible lifts and spectacular jumps, truly delightful for the viewer's eyes. By then, the Latvian public, widely educated for any dance show, was completely enthusiastic about the exhibition of the Russian company. The highlight of the performance came when the final transformation took place - Gala became a ballroom star, proving that the Pygmalion effect is very much alive even two millennia after Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Nonetheless, right at the end the story took an unexpected twist, when her rough father (Dimitry Fisher), leading their neighbourhood, claimed Gala back to his side. Still Leon's past follows him, as he cannot forget his previous greedy partner (Alina Petrovskaya). Two clashing worlds separate them forever: a metaphorical portrayal of the social prejudices. Well into his seventies, Eifman has truly

mastered the genre of tragicomedy to demonstrate his formidable creative capacities, after a career which has spanned almost five decades with over fifty ballet productions. Riga's audience will look forward to his next visit. A must-see for the calendar of any dance connoisseurs.

Gonzalo Preciado-Azanza

**TANZTHEATER WUPPERTAL PINA BAUSCH  
BLUEBEARD. WHILE LISTENING TO A TAPE RECORDING OF BÉLA BARTÓK'S OPERA "DUKE BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE" SADLER'S WELLS**

Even by Pina Bausch's standards, this was heavy going. The snappy title ought to have given it away: *Bluebeard*. While listening to a tape recording of Béla Bartók's opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*. To be fair, that's exactly what we got - a man listening to a tape recording of Béla Bartók's opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, so no complaints there. It's a reel-