

JUNE 2009

REVIEW

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*Northern Ballet Theatre*

*'As Time Goes By',  
'Angels in the Architecture',  
'A Simple Man'*

*May 2009  
London, Sadler's Wells*

*by DaveM*

[NBT 'As Time Goes By' reviews](#)

[NBT 'A Simple Man' reviews](#)

[NBT 'Angels in the Architecture' reviews](#)

['Angels in the Architecture' reviews](#)

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Mixed would be my overall reaction to the triple bill of 'As Time Goes By', 'Angels in the Architecture', and 'A Simple Man'.

The first piece, 'As Time Goes By', was a collection of old crooner tunes (including the eponymous title) sung by a lad of 21 going on 63, called Peter Grant, and danced to by 6 women and 5 men, in various duos, and a group of 6 or 10 to a couple of numbers. Nothing wrong with any of it, most pleasant to watch, but overall somewhat unremarkable if not all but instantly forgettable. Still, I've had worse half hours in my life.

The final piece, 'A Simple Man', told of the strife between the painter Lowry and his mother; basically it seems she hated his art and wanted him to be a musician, as far as I could work out. Being a bit of a mummy's boy, he tried surpressing his art, but all around him he found inspiration (heaven knows why, the thought "by 'eck, its grim oop north" kept springing to mind, as the ragamuffin castoffs from a sub-Dickensian Oliver! - less the heart of a Nancy or villainy of a Bill Sykes - went through their paces). Each segment seemed to dissolve/resolve itself into one of his paintings (some of which were projected at the back of the stage) - but as i'm unfamiliar with Lowry's work, I can't really say how effective this was - or even if it WAS the intention, as the original concept was NOT to recreate any of his paintings with a choreographic form. For me, there weren't really enough interesting bits to say I enjoyed it, and whilst the gloom eventually lifted as he found freedom after the trauma of his mother's death, overall, it was a bit of a miss for me.

This was in complete contrast to the middle piece, 'Angels in the Architecture'. I simply adored this. The music by Aaron Copeland - Appalachian Spring - was



most enjoyable (using the theme of 'Tis a gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free' to great effect), and really enhanced and drove the choreography. Loosely based on 'The Shakers' people from the Appalachians (I think! - a bit like a less puritanical Amish as I understood it) and their mindset of 'cleanliness is next to godliness' led them to design the broom that they are most remembered for (think of the broom that Michael Mouse used as the Scorerer's Apprentice in Fantasia). To start the piece, 6 of these brooms were standing free on the stage, and first the girls, then the boys used them as props in a synchronised sextet of duos. These brooms were then hung on a nail (as it were) on the beam at the back of the stage, and used later as pendulums to tease each other. I loved the girls' dresses - they were elegance personified, with what seemed to be acres of spare satin (silk?) within their pleats, that could at times quite literally cover them as they knelt on the floor. The religious symbolism was a key to their lifestyle - preying motifs and cruciforms abounded - but even as an atheist i minded not, so beautiful was it to watch. To the afore mentioned 'Tis simple' tune, chairs were removed from the side rails (nothing is kept on the floor, where it could become dirty), and an marvellous routine performed using the chairs as prisons, props, and even a barrier at the front of the stage. For me, a quite heavenly piece, and i'd love to see it again.



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...jun09/da\_rev\_nbt\_0509.htm

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