

JUNE 2009

REVIEW

ballet.*magazine**Northern Ballet Theatre*

*'Romeo and Juliet',
Mixed Bill: 'As Time Goes By',
'Angels in the Architecture',
'A Simple Man'*

*May 2009
London, Sadler's Wells*

by Bruce Marriott



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I really wish Northern Ballet Theatre (NBT) had opened its short London season with *Romeo and Juliet*. I distantly remembered it with great affection but with a few more R&J's under my belt I feel more than entitled to do a bit of a rave about an absolute peach of a production. The secret is Christopher Gable's direction which includes all the action but cuts the 'clutter' that now so blights, my viewing at least, of Kenneth MacMillan's famous version. Gable's is about 30 minutes shorter and that really concentrates the gut-wrenching drama. That Gable was MacMillan's original Romeo inevitably gave him a lot of stage insight into the story and the 'less means more' approach that resulted. I'm ensnared from the off: as Prokofiev's score opens each act and rolling thunder is heard, you

know great forces are being unleashed and no good will come of it.

NBT are rightly famous for their dramatic approach and while I saw great acting from Keiko Amemori as Juliet and Christopher Hinton-Lewis as Romeo, and also fine straightforward choreography from Massimo Moricone, it's the overall package of plot, sets and *entire* company all fusing brilliantly well together that led to my R&J nirvana. Lez Brotherston's designs set the context with permanent stone towers and walls, all elegantly minimal, and they adapt well to become banquet hall, garden and bedroom without really intruding on the fast-paced action. There is a balcony but it's not so high and indeed Gable/Moricone reverse the famous scene with Juliet below and and Romeo high at the end - all simple and naturally done, as is the final death scene.



In a good telling it was Darren Goldsmith's Tybalt that most dramatically hit home with its utter snarling nastiness and a total contrast with his lead in *A Simple Man* where he is the rather confused painter LS Lowry, seemingly forever under the thumb of his mother. *A Simple Man* is etched on many memories as a late 80s BBC TV broadcast and good to see the current company getting to grips with Gillian Lynn's pacy un-ballet movement. Goldsmith does well in the old Gable role but the original mothers, Moira Shearer and then Lynn Seymour, are hard acts to follow. Mark Godden's *Angels in the Architecture* proved an enjoyable romp about Shakers and to Copland's Appalachian Spring score, so instant brownie points then. I'm not sure if it really said anything about Shakers (in the way that say Christopher Bruce might with such a idea) but it had a different movement vocabulary while still picking up on the dramatic side of the company and sold itself well. Sadly the opening piece of the triple bill, and London visit, didn't sell itself well at all. Ballet lovers across the country have many reasons to thank NBT's choreographing Director, David Nixon, but *As Time Goes By*, to some crooning songs and set in a nightclub, is not one. Choreographically thin and repetitive, at least the singing of rising star Peter Grant provided some reason to stay. With many critics in, it was no place to start and alas for R&J not so many were along later in the week. But it was a good mini-season for the company which in its 40th year is looking strong and set fair to get the most from its new Leeds studios, due to be completed next year, and its first proper home in those 40 years. Great also to see such choreographic diversity.



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