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REVIEW

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*Royal Ballet**'Isadora', 'Dances at a Gathering'**March 2009**London, Covent Garden*© *Jeffery Taylor**Former dancer, Dance Critic and an Arts feature writer for the Sunday Express. Pub 15 03 2009*

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The RB's latest excursion down ballet's memory lane turns out to be more disappointing muddy trudge than enriching wistful wander.

Deborah, widow of choreographic genius, Kenneth MacMillan, has condensed into one act his failed full length work, *Isadora* (1981). Inside a box of black drapes the on stage action is sketchy and episodic. It briefly focuses on Isadora's early career as a pioneer of self expression, her catchy penchant for letting it all hang out soon popular with high society; some of her men, including Edward Gordon Craig (Edward Watson) and Paris Singer (Gary Avis) and three children who all died young. Replacing scenery, a silver screen beams riveting locations, periods and people while actress Nichola McAuliffe's voiceover richly conveys the passions, self deprecating humour and artistic yearnings vividly expressed in Isadora's own writings.

Bouncing along this surface presentation like a stone across a pond is, as Isadora, poor Tamara Rojo one of the best dancer/actors of her generation with absolutely nowhere to go. Of course Rojo convinces us that MacMillan's highly sophisticated and disciplined steps recreate Isadora's famous improvisations, she is sex on

legs on the beach and her early death is suitably melodramatic. But she was robbed of notching up another great in depth role by this patchy, unfocused dancelite hybrid.





Tamara Rojo and Edward Watson as Edward Gordon Craig in *Isadora*
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Jerome Robbins's *Dances at a Gathering* was a hit in 1969 with its pretty, free flowing choreography to a solo piano playing Chopin favourites. The easy going dancers were so relaxed they looked off duty, a sweet innovation in the Swinging Sixties. But today's naked scramble for survival has stripped ballet of its saccharine flim-flam and thrust the art form into the real world where formaldehyde, Anthony Gormley and *Strictly Come Dancing* set the boundaries, even though fossilised ballet art tarts wish they didn't. Superb performances from rapidly improving Yuhui Choe, Johan Kobborg, Leanne Benjamin and Sergei Polunin among the ten performers, failed to lift the 1930s pall of ballet as it used to be. As usual, Benjamin brings style and attitude to her every step, a hint of zing in this pastel hued sherbet, while Kobborg and Bennett Gartside miraculously avoid embarrassment during their dangerously cute duet.

Separately *Isadora* and *Dances at a Gathering* may raise a fond, indulgent smile. Together their message is inescapable - move on.

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