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REVIEW

ballet.*magazine**Royal Ballet**'Isadora', 'Dances at a Gathering'**March 2009**London, Covent Garden**by Paul Williams*[RB 'Isadora' reviews](#)[RB 'Dances at a Gathering' reviews](#)['Dances at a Gathering' reviews](#)[Choe in reviews](#)[Kobborg in reviews](#)[recent RB reviews](#)[more Paul Williams reviews](#)[Discuss this review](#)[\(Open for at least 6 months\)](#)[Gallery of Photographs](#)*As posted on our Postings pages...*

My impressions of this programme.

I did not like Isadora at all I am afraid (well performed though it was - I am not left with the nagging feeling that other castings might make it work).

The biggest criticism I have is that I didn't feel it told me anything about the clearly extraordinary *personality* of Isadora Duncan. It was too

schematic, too focussed on rushing through the big picture, and not having anywhere near enough of the surprising but true human details that make a work a work worth watching.

In turn we were shown her passion for a man who loved his work more than her, her love for a rich man and his money, her grief at death of her children, her infidelity (and the jealousy it causes), her political activism and her death (arguably 59 minutes too late).

But I really did not feel I had any inkling (other than in a History Channel, 30 minute special sort of way) of *who* she was. The whole was never more than the sum of its parts.

In contrast, take any character from any good story ballet, dramatic (Mayerling, R&J, Manon, Onegin ...) classical (Bayadere, Swan Lake ...), romantic (Giselle, Sylphide ...), even comic (Coppelia, Fille ...). With any of these characters, after each performance, we feel we know them. To take but one example, after the last run of Filles, there were postings here contrasting Acosta/Nunez's cider and haystacks Colas and Lise to Kobborg/Cojocar's more chaste and innocent couple. Acosta/Nunez and Kobborg/Cojocar danced the same steps, but the ballet permitted the steps to be an armature for something much more. But I can't



imagine there will be many *different* Isadora's. The scenes she has are too simple, the emotions too strong. The character doesn't have room to breathe. She's never dancing or doing something ordinary for long enough for us to feel (rather than be told) why she is an extraordinary character or dancer. As Michael LL said in an earlier posting:

"I felt I knew much more about the lady herself, and her status as an icon, from the Ashton waltzes"

This is a telling indictment for a ballet presumably intended as a definitive biopic (biobal?).

(On a more trivial note - any thoughts on whether they recycled the Ashton wig, or got another one made?)



Leanne Benjamin in *Dances at a Gathering*

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Much, much more enjoyable for me (and worth the admission price alone, which in my case was necessary) was *Dances at a Gathering*. A similar cast to last year



(or one of last year's permutations anyway). Random thoughts:

- Benjamin was superb. Watching her was like watching the music - a real synaesthetic experience.
- I missed Martin Harvey's cockiness. I though he was excellent in the role last year and I do wish he had resisted Baby's blandishments.
- I felt this year Laura Morera has got the role well and truly cracked. Last year she was just a smidgin too frenetic for my tastes, but this year she seems the mistress of the role. Her and Polunin's duet was a joy of split second timing.
- Kobborg I loved as ever, and especially on the first night when he finished his second solo pirouette b-of-the-bang bang on the music, and swaggered down to the front with a well deserved in-character smirk.
- I liked the blue couple - Raine and Stepanek. I generally enjoy watching them as I find them both quietly elegant dancers with engaging stage personalities, and I felt they really contributed to the performances' atmosphere.
- Choe. The critics are fast falling in love with her and I can sympathise. There is lightness and clarity about her dancing, but with that there is her amazingly soft port de bras and the scale of her movement, especially when moving at speed - she really does draw lines in space. Also, building on her success in The Lesson, I think it's clear she's no mean actress either.
- Philip Gammon played beautifully.
- To state the bleeding obvious, the choreography is a marvel. In a way it's like Serenade - it all seems to waft along so naturally until you sit back and thing how good something must be to be so unobtrusive at showing the music and suggesting character.



All in all, Choe and friends were a much happier memory to take from the theatre than than Isadora's generic posturing.

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