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REVIEW

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Northern Ballet Theatre

*40th Anniversary Mixed Programme:
'La Bayadere - Kingdom of the Shades',
'Angels in the Architecture',
'A Simple Man'*

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Leeds, Grand Theatre*

© *Jeffery Taylor*

*Former dancer, Dance Critic and an Arts feature writer for the
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Last Thursday afternoon in Leeds, Northern Ballet Theatre finally came of age. Cruelly undervalued by both critics and government for nearly half a century, NBT has survived more near fatal financial crunches than any British bank. But in the three works featured in its current Spring UK tour, Kingdom of the Shades from La Bayadere, Angels in the Architecture and A Simple Man, this sterling bunch of dancers throw down their markers to be taken very seriously indeed. Patronising pats on the back for a brave little troupe doing its best no longer apply.

Prolific choreographer, David Nixon, director since 2001, included none of his own highly successful works in the opening celebrations, quite rightly leaving the limelight to his dancers. But it is Nixon's unerring instinct to focus on the essence of what he presents that not only draws in his audiences like a magnet, but produces a stageful of performers oozing artistic confidence.

NBT's success is based on storylines of passion, heroics and freeform steps aimed at the heart, avoiding the straight classical repertoire; until now. Petipa's Imperial Russian 18th century Kingdom of the Shades is a savagely simple display of the classical technique; no prisoners are taken. Yoko Ichino's staging is mathematically severe within which the NBT dancers make no attempt to fake it, they dance what they passionately believe Petipa meant to say, not a spurious



cover up. The result is an enchanting, uncluttered expression of the simple beauty of ballet. How refreshing.

Mark Godden's *Angels in the Architecture* is a tribute to early American dance makers like Agnes de Mille and Martha Graham. Based on the spiritual significance the religious group, the Shakers, place on their domestic paraphernalia, Godden uses Aaron Copland's gorgeous score, *Appalachian Spring*. Relentless dim, grim lighting damps down any celebratory expression, while the dancers' awareness of both who they are and what they are doing makes every step a delight, it ruthlessly exposes choreographic shortcomings.



Darren Goldsmith as Lowry in *A Simple Man*
© Bill Cooper

Darren Goldsmith is startling as the eponymous folk hero in Gillian Lynne's *A Simple Man*, an evocation, tribute and moving picture of Salford born artist LS Lowry. Tall, stringy and an emotional mess, Goldsmith breaks through the tough, angular steps Lynne creates to reflect Lowry's love and lust for his fellow man and woman. A fascinating show made essential viewing by the dancer's irresistible ability to get straight to the bottom line.