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REVIEW

ballet.*magazine**Northern Ballet Theatre*

'A Simple Man', 'La Bayadere - Kingdom of the Shades', 'Angels in the Architecture'

*March 2009
Sheffield, Lyceum*

by Janet McNulty

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It was the end of an era on Saturday night when Steven Wheeler gave his final performance for NBT as "Man in a Quandry" in Simple Man. It is a small but important role in this ballet of Lowry vignettes and Steven, as we have come to expect, brought a wonderful depth of meaning to the role.

At the curtain calls, a presentation was made to Steven and David Nixon gave a speech celebrating Steven's achievements with the company and also saying how much he would be missed. Sheffield is an NBT stronghold where Steven has many fans and their cheers for him were heartfelt.

Very best wishes to Steven for the future.

A Simple Man on Saturday night was the final element of the final performance in the current run of this mixed programme. A variation of this programme (As Time Goes By instead of La Bayadere) is at Sadler's Wells and in Cardiff and I would highly recommend it.

On Saturday afternoon, Julie Charlet was absolutely beautiful as Nikiya in La Bayadere. She looked so ethereal and her dancing was superb. She was strongly partnered by John Hull and their performance was really exciting to watch. In the evening we were treated to another enjoyable performance by Martha Leebolt and David Ward. The three variations were brilliantly danced in both performances and I particularly liked both Ayana Kanda and Christie Duncan in the first variation.

Angels in the Architecture is a deceptively simple work based around Shaker



brooms and chairs. The choreography is eloquent and flowing and this work just draws you in. The two performances I saw on Saturday were a joy to behold. I hope this work will be kept in the repertoire for future seasons.

A Simple Man is an inventive realisation of the life of LS Lowry, highlighting his tortured relationship with his mother and two different girls. It features vignettes based on his paintings such as a street fight, balloon sellers and a funeral procession and has a terrific score by Carl Davies. The dancers of NBT dance it with commitment and conviction and it is a rousing end to the evening. For me, it is Darren Goldsmith as Lowry who most evokes memories of Christopher Gable in the role – he draws a picture of an artist with a remarkable talent but a lonely life on the outside looking in and craving recognition and affection from his mother. Chris Hinton-Lewis, on Saturday afternoon, brought a more whimsical side to the role, an equally valid and exciting portrayal – he really is one of the best actors in a company of strong actors.

The performance on Saturday night was particularly poignant and will live on in my memory for a long time.



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