

Ballet Rambert

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What's on in London

Planner No. 89C-625

Weekly

22 - 29 JUN 1988

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BALLET RAMBERT SEASON (Sadlers Wells)

The Rambert Dance Company's season is offering a rich and diverse repertory. There have been two splendid premieres and a revival of a modern classic.

David Gordon is one of the best known post-modern choreographers in America and he has now created his first work for the Rambert Company, a company to which his wife and partner Valda Setterfield once belonged. Gordon likes puns so the title of his new work, *Mates*, can be read on various levels. (Suggestion for a publicity poster: *Mates* The First Condom Ballet!) Gordon fuses music and words in his score. Part of the text, read by Valda Setterfield in a hushed, sexy voice, sounds like an



RHAPSODY IN BLUE

extract from *Lace* or *Destiny*. Then piano music in the background starts playing one of Liszt's Transcendental Studies which MacMillan used for the final torrid *pas de deux* in *Mayerling*.

There are tangos, adagios, basic ballet steps performed in solos, duets, trios, quartets and, finally, an ensemble. The rippling, alliterative words are punctuated by Setterfield doing a sequence of classroom *battements*. The nutty dis-

junctions are highlighted by one motif – a tripping step that constantly breaks up the action.

Antony MacDonald's costumes have an equally zany quality. Setterfield wears a bow tie, pink and gold waistcoat, striped drawers and black shoes and socks. Halfway through she dons an ornate purple dressing gown, a witty counterpoint to the lush scene of seduction she is reciting in the sound text. *Mates* is enormous fun. It is also a marvel of construction.

The other premiere was Richard Alston's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Alston uses the piano version of Ger-shwin's score, and also the Preludes for Piano composed two years later in 1926.

Lots of choreographers have paid (banal) tributes to Astaire and Rogers but in the central duet for Alexandra Dyer and Mark Baldwin, Alston reminds us that Fred and Ginger weren't just about chiffon, top hat and tails, but about style and class.

Rambert has acquired *Septet*, an early work of Merce Cunningham first performed in 1953. Satie's *Trois Morceaux en Forme de Poire*. The title is a tease, there are only six dancers. It is intriguing to look at the influences on this early work. There is Balanchine, of course. At the end of the *pas de deux*, the girl in white is carried off the stage, shielding her partner's eyes with her hand, a famous Balanchine gesture.

But Cunningham was also a great admirer of Alicia Markova and in that opening pose of the girl in white, one can see Cunningham's tribute to the great ballerina. *Septet* is a beautiful piece, calm, serene but technically very demanding. The adagios require absolute control which the Rambert dancers have not quite mastered but their overall performance was impressive. *Septet* is a magnificent acquisition for the Rambert repertory. (See Dance & Mime) **DEIRDRE McMAHON**