

PREVIEW

The Week's New Movies, Music, Theatre, Books And Art.

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● *Theatre* — *Macdonald's Brave New World* (p36) And ● *Dance Mates* (below)

DANCE



Nostalgia isn't the point. It's more the notion of continuity coupled with a celebration of riches from the past.

Rambert isn't only our most forward-looking dance company, it also happens to be our oldest. Artistic director Richard Alston is intent on bringing both aspects into play during the forthcoming Sadler's Wells season. The five programmes will feature brand new pieces alongside revivals, notably a long overdue return of Antony Tudor's brooding 1937 masterwork, 'Dark Elegies'.

When the inexperienced Tudor turned up on Marie Rambert's doorstep in 1928 he announced he could only come to her classes after 4pm. The domineering Polish-born Rambert insisted she had no time to waste on lazy dancers, so Tudor reluctantly admitted the reason for his late start was because he had to go to work in Smithfields at 5am each morning and felt he needed a bath before trekking across London to Rambert's Notting Hill studio. Continually short of men in the early days, Rambert philosophically shrugged her shoulders and took him on. Two years later, now firmly convinced of his talents, she hired Tudor as company stage manager. That way he was assured of just enough income to turn his back on the meat markets forever.

Soon Rambert was encouraging Tudor to choreograph. The outcome made history. Before emigrating to America in 1939, Tudor created a dozen Rambert ballets. Both 'Lilac Garden' and 'Dark Elegies' have become classics the world over, but haven't been performed by Rambert in years. Now the ritualistic 'Dark Elegies', danced to Mahler's song cycle, 'Kindertotenlieder', is being revived for the first time in nearly a decade.

Another bridge between past and present this season can be seen in the person of Valda Setterfield. An Englishwoman who began with Rambert, she moved to New York some 25 years ago. She danced with Merce Cunningham for nearly a decade and is now a member of the Pick-Up Co, run by her husband, David Gordon. When Alston asked Gordon to make a new work for Rambert he also suggested it would be a marvellous gesture if the elegant, silver-haired Setterfield, one of the true stars of New York's avant-garde dance world, would consider appearing with the company. Happily, she leapt at the chance and next week will be one of the eight dancers in Gordon's 'Mates'.

'Richard's suggestion,' says Setterfield, 'seemed a very logical and natural and charming idea to me.'

'It's nice and sweetly ironic,' adds Gordon, 'for me to be the means of Valda returning to this company. I get a real charge out of watching her rehearsing with that ferocious bust of Rambert up on top of that column looking down on Valda dancing.'

Among the pieces Gordon has devised over the past few seasons is a comedy called 'Murder'. It was made to showcase the superstar talents of American Ballet Theatre's Mikhail Baryshnikov. He was so pleased with the outcome he insisted it be filmed for television. He also requested that Gordon devise a duet where he and Setterfield could talk together. Gordon,

a duet where he and Setterfield could talk together. Gordon, who made his reputation by manipulating strings of words with the same sort of deft finesse he uses with movement, came up with 'Made in USA'. The piece had to be rehearsed on a catch-as-catch-can basis in New York, London and Hollywood.

'In some ways,' says Setterfield, 'Baryshnikov is just like I am. He's a dancer. He goes to class. He's very straightforward. It was curious to be with him here, because I think in New York he has a huge roster of people who do things for him. But here we went to a bank together to cash his travellers' cheques and then, when we went out buying groceries, he turned to me and said "I don't usually do this, you know." Not,' she adds, 'that I thought for a minute that he ever did.'

Setterfield, who is now 53, is a rare bird. She's a sophisticated adult romping in that children's playpen known as the

dance world. 'It's not about what you can't do,' she insists, 'but about what you can. I was never a jumper, anyway. I was never really strong. It was always with rhythm where I achieved anything.'

Gordon, 52, also continues to appear in some of his own works. 'I'm still moping around the stage every once in a while. Valda's still dancing. I'm moping.'

'Mates' is free of moping. Instead it brings on tangos, some Liszt piano music and a Gordon text which he describes as 'written in the style that sells many hundreds of thousands of copies of novels these days. People keep bursting out of their underwear and their manly, manly chests hover over supine bodies and things like that. The writing keeps surfacing through this tango music, suggesting connections, making links.'

The way Gordon keeps things spilling into one another is one of his specialties. Words, movement and music operate in an on-going tumble of displacement which seems to be warning you that the next thing (which is already happening anyway) is going to be even more intriguing. It's a 'three-card trick', a conjurer's shuffle that can never quite be second-guessed. 'I'm making what I think is a sort of contemporary medley by taking any number of disparate pieces of music and turning them into a smörgåsbord. I'm interested in orchestrating this dreamlike thing that keeps emerging out of and referring back to. One kind of action starts to come through another kind of action.'

It's not exactly 'Memories Are Made of This', but as Setterfield notes, 'Rambert's energy permeates that place (she died in 1982, at the age of 94). Her presence is there so thickly for me it's extraordinary.'

Rambert Dance Company season at Sadler's Wells runs June 7-25. See Dance listings for details.



**TRANSATLANTIC
'MATES'**
Valda Setterfield and
David Gordon