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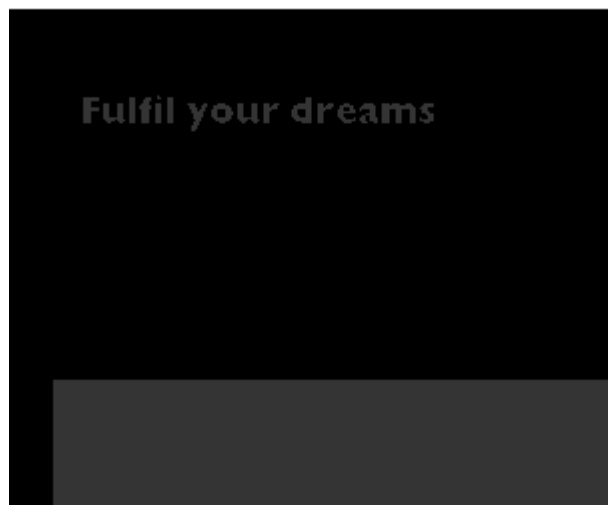
When the Rambert's dancers tried their hand at choreography, a star was born. By Clifford Bishop

Rambert's workshop season of new pieces at The Place gave the company's dancers a chance to show off their choreographic chops. There was a lot that was timid, much that was polite — and a little that had real potential, as well as craft. There was also a sprinkling of the simply perverse. Lucila Alves, in an asymmetric baby-doll nightie, produced a solo that looked like she was auditioning for the Natalie Portman role in *Closer*. In her programme note, the Buenos Aires-born Alves says the piece is about her displaced identity, and asks where her journey will end. On this evidence, *Stringfellows*.

The standout piece was Cameron McMillan's *Kiss My Eyes*, danced to Michael Nyman's *String Quartet No 3*. McMillan has an accomplished, musical sense of organisation — from the beginning, his four pairs of dancers were put through a complex but systematic set of transformations, moving in unison or canon, their figures repeated or inverted, just as a composer would explore a theme. If this sounds dry, McMillan juiced it up with more religious imagery than you'd find in a Vatican garage sale. There were crucifixions, descents from the cross, pietàs and sacred hearts. By the time the last ravished body was draped along the last stoical shoulder, you began to wonder if he is not perhaps a too persistent salesman in the cloth of human misery. Ultimately, though, even this doubt is a testament to his skill — that he has made a resonant, unsettling dance out of what might easily have been so much schlock.

Other budding choreographers were less assured. The silent introductory solos made by Ana Lujan Sanchez for Dane Hurst to perform were fluid, alert and unmannered. *Cartilage*, her showpiece to a new score by Philip Venables, was lumbering in comparison. Apparently inspired by the original Siamese twins, *Chang and Eng*, it provided a few sculptural insights into what life must be like as one long Greco-Roman wrestling match, but lost focus whenever Renaud Wiser and Alexander Whitley extricated themselves from their reluctantly symbiotic embrace. Sanchez also flunked the opportunity to make more use of an auspicious-looking prop — a pair of conjoined jackets that spent most of the dance just being kicked along the floor.

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Martin Joyce got better service out of the long white skirts worn by him and Angela Towler in Divine Influence, bunching them into makeshift nappies, hoisting them into wedding veils or tugging them into Martha Grahamesque cowls. Nevertheless, he could allow himself more ambition. The piece had some neat ideas, but too great a contentment in being merely cute.

Although the evening featured three new compositions, it was, regrettably, the dances to established scores that made the bigger impression. Sanchez at least had a defining vision in Cartilage, however feverish. But Mikaela Polley and Alexander Whitley seemed slightly petrified by the responsibility of choreographing to, respectively, Patrick Nunn's Momenta and Naomi Pinnock's Extraneous. Their dances were studious, efficient, polite and about as memorable as those compliments imply. Nevertheless, this experiment of teaming young choreographers from Rambert with young composers from the Royal Academy of Music should be encouraged. And in the Rambert dancers, tireless and utterly committed, anyone trying out new ideas could not possibly ask for better advocates.

The new Motionhouse show, Perfect, began its spring tour at the Warwick Arts Centre. The choreography of its director, Kevin Finnan, is always highly concept-driven. Sometimes you can almost hear the ideas clunking into place — "A piece about time: let's have lots of sand" — but with its Zen gardens, beach parties, clever use of giant projected hands to mani-pulate the dancers, independent-minded shadows and passages of harnessed flight, this is a warm, beguiling, oddly reassuring work; a Neverland for grown-ups.



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