

# A mesmeric muse

SPRING LOADED  
Queen Elizabeth Hall/The Place

Ham + High  
17 February  
1989

If certain national critics are to be believed then the audience for contemporary dance is in terminal decline. Weeping crocodile tears, they take their seats in the Royal Box.

Such views sit strangely at odds with the Sold Out notices being slapped on the opening dates in the Spring Loaded festival — and not just for the prestige performances at QEH but also for the debut of a relatively new choreographer at The Place. "You may be small, but you're committed" as Place director John Ashford put it to his audience.

Undoubted highlight of Michael Nyman and the Dancers at QEH was a mesmeric performance by Adriana Borriello to a set of *Zoo Caprices* extracted from the soundtrack of *A Zed and Two Noughts*. Beginning as a Doric column on point shoes, Borriello warmed to the muse of a solo violin, shedding classical pretensions along with her costume.

Gradually and hypnotically musician (Alexander Balanescu) and performer spiralled into a kind of cohabitation, Borriello whipping her body into a demonic syncopation with Nyman's austere rhythms which climaxed in a closing sequence, the dancing pattern finally meshed into the musical score, which took the breath away. Borriello is a star.

Also at QEH Lea Anderson's *Flag*, augmented by the gargantuan vocals of Sarah-Jane Morris, grew into something close to modern dance opera. Though both the Cholmondeleys and Featherstonehaughs have been in sharper form, *Flag's* travelogue of national stylings which mix the splash of Olympic swimmers with Mao-style workers and out-of-kilter flamenco is a festival of wit and invention, the least navel-contemplating dance in town.

The same cannot be said of David Massingham, an ex-Adventure in Motion Picture, whose choreography appears to owe a large debt to the complex interlocking of assorted human bodies in biological formations favoured by Siobhan Davies.

Occasionally ingenious but often over-elaborate, Massingham set his disparate bunch of guest-dancers some tricky manoeuvres to accomplish in *Companion Pieces* and *Equator*. Mostly they came off, but the effect was emotionless abstraction.

Much more entertaining was *Scenes From Peyton Place*, a comic collage in which the dancers characterised scenes from the classic Mettaliou soap opera. A frivolous romp among the decaying remains of Constance MacKenzie et al, it gave Michael Fulwell and Paul Douglas the chance to shine in a delightfully seedy camp duet. Dorothy Malone, eat your heart out.

Keith Watson

## Powerful beat

... dance programme, even when based on a single composer's music, is normally built around one group of dancers, but John Ashford had the idea of an evening with the musicians of the Michael Nyman band as the constant factor and different dancers for each item. This attracted a full house on Saturday as an outpost of Ashford's *Spring Loaded* season at The Place.

Nyman's chief attraction for choreographers is presumably his strong rhythm, made even more powerful by his habit of having the instruments amplified. A whole evening of this heavy beat has a row-beating effect. Luckily the varied dance content and the use of an increasing number of performers for each successive item provided contrast.

*Capricci* played on the relationship between two soloists, Alexander Balanescu, violin, playing Nyman's "Zoo Capriccis" and Adriana Borriello dancing her own

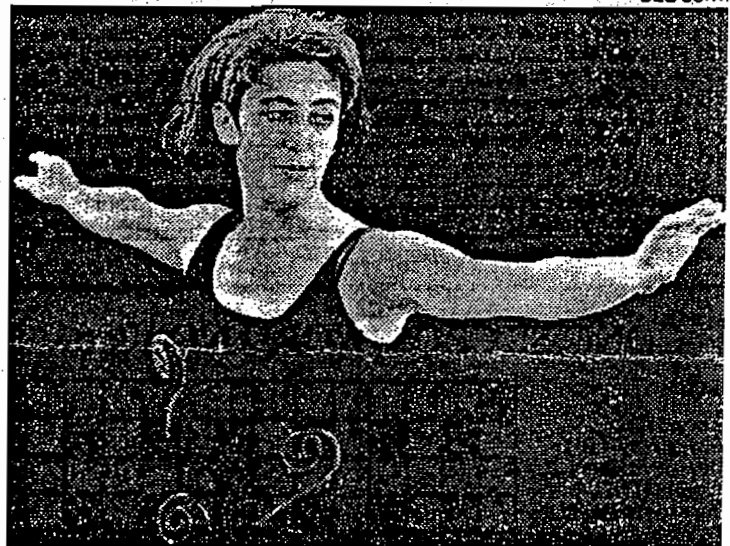
### DANCE

#### Nyman & Dancers Queen Elizabeth Hall

choreography. This ran to 30 minutes: a daunting scale for the musician, even more so for the dancer.

The music seemed like a diabolical force tormenting the dancer. But she held her own resourcefully, if sometimes breathlessly. She began in Paola Nazzaro's ingenious costume, disguised as a classical pillar. That section was danced in point ballet shoes, giving an aggressive but constricted movement.

Changing to bare feet and a short red dress brought her a freedom expressed in syncopated hips and jazzy hands. Finally, putting on heeled ankle boots gave her a greater speed, which enabled



Resourceful: Adriana Borriello danced and choreographed *Capricci*

her eventually to establish an equality with the music.

For *Configurations*, Nyman wrote a string quartet based on the rules and rhythms of South Indian music but in Western modes, to which Shobana Jeyasingh set Bharata Natyam choreography for herself and two colleagues. An int-

cresting, inconclusive interaction. Finally, the full band played for Siobhan Davies's *do they do*, by London Contemporary Dance Theatre: flue vigorous choreography, danced with spirit.

John Percival