

Dance could be a fine thing

At just £5 a show, you can take a chance on Dance Base's creative, thought-provoking programme without bursting the budget



Kelly Apter

IN PREVIOUS years, Dance Base has given Fringe audiences a great deal of quality, but little flexibility. Double- and triple-bills can be hugely entertaining, but if you don't like one – or possibly even two – of the pieces, you're still stuck with them, and paying £11 for the privilege.

This year, there's been quite a radical shake-up. Artistic director Morag Deyes has programmed the same amount of dance, but each piece is allowed to stand in its own right. Not only that, but in the true spirit of the Fringe of yesteryear, each ticket costs just £5. The Dance Base slogan "Give Dance A Chance" says it all – you can turn up every hour, on the hour, pay a fiver and see what you get.

Later in the month, Deyes will unveil a second programme called "And Then Some...", where tickets start from as little as £3. But for now, audiences can pick and mix from ten incredibly diverse shows, which run the gamut of dance from contemporary to ballet, Indian to hip-hop – with a wee bit of tap dancing thrown in.

Nottingham Youth Dance's *Something About Others* is a breath of fresh air. This exciting company, affiliated to New

SOMETHING ABOUT OTHERS

★★★★★

THE WAYSIDE/ RIFF

★★★★★

APPEL/RING CYCLE

★★★★★

FOUND

★★★★★

THIS IS A PICTURE OF A PERSON I DON'T KNOW

★★★★★

THE SIMPLICITY OF GRASPING AIR

★★★★★

DIALOGUE

★★★★★

SELF-INTERRUPTED EXHIBITION

★★★★★

RITES

★★★★★

DILLY DILLY

★★★★★

DANCE BASE (VENUE 22)

English Contemporary Ballet (NECB), has a great deal of talent in its midst, most of whom are already a force to be reckoned with, but in five years' time they'll be flying. The show's success is in no small part down to Jamie Thomson, NECB's resident choreographer. Somebody somewhere needs to give this man a large theatre, full orchestra and his own company to play with, because his talent is world-class. Thomson's energetic yet subtly nuanced choreography demands precision timing and quick movement – all of which the young dancers supply in spades. If *Something About Others* is anything to go by, the future of modern ballet is in safe hands.

Although the new-style Dance Base Fringe programme eschews double/triple-bills, there are a couple of beautifully thought-out exceptions. *The Wayside* and *Riff* co-exist perfectly, largely due to the fascinating idea which lies behind Matthias Sperling's solo, *Riff*. He takes the choreography

styles of William Forsythe, Shobana Jeyasingh and Laila Diallo and imitates them respectfully. The speed of Forsythe, the intricate Indian gestures of Jeyasingh and the delicate contemplative moves of Diallo meld together – with each choreographer's name flashing up on a digital display as he switches between them.

When the work gathers pace, the boundaries between them begin to blur until eventually the three choreographers become one, with Sperling's own movement qualities adding to the mix. It's a truly innovative piece, which

obviously works best if you're familiar with the original choreography – and herein lies the genius of Deyes' programming. Forsythe and Jeyasingh are well known in the dance world – Diallo far less so. So, before Sperling takes to the stage, we see Diallo perform her emotionally resonant solo, *The Wayside*.

The other double-bill on offer, *Appel/Ring Cycle*, is equally well put together, and delivered my favourite 15 minutes of the entire Dance Base programme. Company Decalage fuses b-boying, capoeira and contemporary dance, and its short but oh-so-sweet work *Appel* is an absolute joy to watch. The flexibility and strength of dancers Mickael Marso Riviere and Navala Chaudhari is backed intuitively by musician Jason Kalidas on the bansuri flute and tabla.

Taking it in turns to show their skills, the two eventually

dance together in glorious synchrony. Decalage aims to produce "high-quality work that is accessible to a wide audience" – *Appel* does all that, and more.

With the sound of Kalidas's Asian instruments still ringing in our ears, Shamita Ray takes to the stage to complete the double-bill with *Ring Cycle*. Ray's performance style is all her own, taking elements of contemporary dance and Bharatanatyam and creating something entirely new. While the jazzy, saxophone-heavy score adds yet another dimension to this spirited and enjoyable piece.

Closing the Dance Base programme each day, with suitable magnitude, is *Found*. An ambitious collaborative project featuring dancers Christine Devaney and Michael Sherin, live music from Luke Sutherland and Jer Reid, and a relatively simple but very

effective set by Karen Tennent and video artist Jonathan Charles, it's a show that's the sum of its parts – no one thing is king. Quite what's going on in it is really anyone's guess, but that's part of *Found*'s charm. The ambiguous publicity material states that the work is "based on a story that hasn't been written yet", which only adds to the atmospheric mystery of the piece.

There's nothing ambiguous about Pere Faura, however. His solo show, *This is a Picture of a Person I Don't Know*, tugs at the heartstrings, makes us laugh and entertains in equal measure. Surfing a wave of despondency due to his hitherto unsuccessful love life, Faura seeks solace in screen musicals. Acting out the audition scene from *A Chorus Line*, with its high kicks and jazz-hands, he later moves on to Gene Kelly's tap solo from *Singin' In The Rain* – but none of

this is straightforward. Faura may love old dance films, but his approach to performance is strictly contemporary.

Lindsay John's solo, *The Simplicity of Grasping Air*, is the kind of show that has audiences divided. The Japanese art of Butoh is already an acquired taste, and John's style of it even more so. With Butoh, it's not about "getting it", you just need to go with it. I did, but it didn't take me anywhere (unlike a lot of Butoh I've seen and been deeply moved by). Jane McNally's background image was mesmerising, and John's installation design cleverly linked the set and costume. Clearly this piece will have an effect on some people, but it strikes me that if you're not a Butoh fan and you take a chance on John, you're unlikely to feel inclined to take a chance on anything else in the Dance Base programme.

Much the same could be said

of Fearghus O'Conchúir's *Dialogue*. Given his friendly opening, chatting amiably to the audience, it comes as quite a shock just how alienating the actual work is. Joined by Chinese dancer Li Ke and sound artist Yin Yi, O'Conchúir aims to explore the differences and similarities between them. Which is a nice idea, but there are too many moments when we, the audience, feel surplus to requirements. Most notably when all three performers sit chatting (largely inaudibly) to each other about nothing of any consequence, as if they were in rehearsal rather than faced by an expectant audience. Maybe we should have done the same in response.

It's hard to know what word most aptly describes Iona Kewney's *Self-Interrupted Exhibition*, but "bonkers" comes close. Thirty minutes of migraine-inducing electric guitar courtesy of Glasgow

sound artist Joe Quimby matched by Kewney's wholly unique approach to choreography. As she contorts her body from one bizarre position to the next, it's impossible to take your eyes off her (save for a sneaky glance around the audience to read facial expressions, which ranged in puzzlement from "Wow, I've never seen anything like this before" to "I could have spent that five pounds on a nice glass of pinot noir").

If Kewney works up a sweat with her energetic performance, it's nothing compared with the Company Chameleon boys. Their powerful duet, *Rites*, is filled with punishing moves that give this dynamic piece of dance theatre a testosterone-charged edge. Performers Anthony Missen and Kevin Turner explore the many sides of masculinity – fathers, sons, soldiers, friends – in a piece that

is at turns aggressive, athletic and poignant.

At the other end of the scale is this year's dance show for children, *Dilly Dilly*. Pitched at ages four and up, it is ideal for very young children, with its repetition, vibrant set and engaging performer, Tara Hodgson. Creating a sea of sound with movement, she scrunches dried leaves, squirts water, delivers nonsense rhymes and generally has a good time in her garden.

So it would seem that, overall, Deyes's plan has worked. There are many works here worth taking a chance on, and £5 for the amount of creativity, thoughtfulness and sheer hard work that has been ploughed into them is good value in any currency.

Dance Base's Give Dance A Chance programme runs until 16 August (show times vary). And Then Some runs from 19-22 August.

Clockwise from left: *Dilly Dilly*, *Found*, *Something About Others*, *Rites*. Inset left: *The Wayside* Pictures: Maria Falcone

