

# Review

9/2/00

## Irresistible star brings the house to its feet

**SWAN LAKE** works its magic again. Matthew Bourne's improbable retelling swept me up on my first viewing five years ago, and 10 visits later I still find myself caught, interested, moved by it. If you did not see his fierce, feathered swans, that tormented modern prince, the orgiastic palace party, and the overwhelming end, you have the last chance to do so now.

The widely seen film version disguises the direct theatricality of Bourne's revision of the classical ballet, and his faithfulness to the story. For one thing, his sense of humour is so amiable that the royal and opera-house jokes are amusing even if they came straight out of a cracker. For another, Bourne knows every nuance of Tchaikovsky's score, and his images are not only true to the music but they have a knack of reaching into the watcher's own imagination and churning it up.

For instance, after his humiliation at the grotty Swank Bar (not quite nasty enough), the prince starts seeing swans. Is it his own mad word-association with a Swan Vesta poster nearby, or is the poster a magical pointer into another world? And I have never seen any other *Swan Lake* make such tremendous musical and psychological coherence of Tchaikovsky's great national dances of the party, much aided by Brett Morris's acute conducting.

The male swans, in their feathery breeches and smutty faces, are as watchable as ever. They move beakily, jump aggressively, they are wild creatures to adore but treat with caution — which makes the music-hall hilarity of the four cygnets quite irresistible.

Adam Cooper's incarnation of the mighty lead swan and his disgustingly desirable *doppelgänger* in black leather brought the audience to its feet. What a star he is (and yet the role makes stars of other casts too). As the swan he has the alien magnetism of some great, unknowable beast who deigns to befriend a needy human. As the gum-chewing sadist who seduces the Prince, the Queen (vivid Isabel Mortimer) and all the female guests, he is (sigh) unarguably evil.

### Dance

Swan Lake  
AMP/DOMINION THEATRE  
Rumbadelica  
SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE, ECL

Ben Wright made the prince a stoical Prince Andrew lookalike, whose crack-up was unexpected and childish, and who danced with the delight of a free man among the swans. As for the so-called gayness of this *Swan Lake*, the intimacy between the prince and the swan is something much denser than sexual curiosity. It's more like a half-comprehended longing to be different from oneself. Modern references but classical truths: I can't really believe Bourne's *Swan Lake* will not be performed decades from now. It is unforgettable theatre.

A quick commendation for *Rumbadelica*, a display of

Picture: DEE CONWAY



Evil: Adam Cooper (left)

Cuban dancing at Sadler's Wells. If any country's history can be shown by its folk dances alone, it is Cuba. Here are comic, poignant contrasts: uptight Spanish salon dances, devilishly tricky Latin rumbas, dark, charismatic African ritual dances. Some of the dancing virtually gives you a slipped disc just to watch, so tangled are the rhythms pulsing in the bodies. The hip bone must be connected to the thigh bone, but sometimes I doubted my own eyes.

Tickets: *Swan Lake* (until March 11) 0870 606 3456, Telegraph Box Office 0870 160 7000; *Rumbadelica* (until Saturday) 020 7863 8000

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