Goodbye trail-blazer

13/4/00

THE SUDDEN death of Jeremy James last week at the age of 38 has cast a pall of grief over the British modern dance world. Royal Ballet School-trained, he became first a classical soloist, then a charismatic modern dancer, notably with Rambert, DV8 and Siobhan Davies.

As a choreographer, he headed straight out on his own, singularly inventive path. Commissioned by Rambert and, this year, by the Royal Ballet, James seemed to be rising as he deserved, despite his life being blighted by his beloved wife's death a year ago.

On the other hand, the Arts Council of England had recently, appallingly, decided to cut all James's funding. Yet his potential blazed through his work — the recent triple bill that I admired three weeks ago, and *My Big Pants*, the 1997 work performed by his company at the weekend as part of a mixed Spring Loaded programme.

My Big Pants fields four women and a man in huge combat trousers, a favourite James uniform. Squares of light appear beside or over them (Lucy Carter is responsible), while the dancers do something that's half witty fidget, half turbo-charged breakdance.

Tammy Arjona, Lee Boggess, Stine Nilsen and Sonja Peedo abandoned themselves to their material like masters. James's last pieces were revealing a powerful feeling for structure, and *My Big Pants* showed how early he also invented his own energy-stoking vocabulary. He's a very great loss.

The Linbury Studio evening was a good one.

Dance

Spring Loaded triple bill
LINBURY STUDIO, ROH

Rosemary Lee
THE PLACE, WC1

Henri Oguike, a former Richard Alston exponent, diplayed a keen response to a Shostakovich piano trio; *Fix*, from prodigiously skilled young soloist Akram Khan, was a display case of mental and physical brilliance. Watch his space.

Oguike's movement vocabulary is more limited — soft, big and restrained, like Alston. His four female dancers were not *premier cru*, and moreover hideously dressed. However, the best parts of *A Moment of Give* flew along Shostakovich's folk-derived tunes with strong rhythmic life, and made me pay attention to the three capable musicians.

In comparison with such craft, the so-called "performance art" of Rosemary Lee, an Arts Council darling, is a dismal experience. At the Place she made an evening of two solos last almost two hours.

The first (by Graeme Miller) was a bathetic portrayal of a loopy schoolteacher scribbling on a blackboard and muttering for 45 minutes — truly. The second (by Sue MacLennan) was a briefly more amusing exercise in talking about her daily life and making her body do suitably illustrative things. Lee is quite likeable, but it wore off under the onslaught of weak text and unambitious movement. It is not worth setting an evening of one's life aside for this.

Spring Loaded information: 020 7387 0031

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