tance. In the character of the dotty younger sister, Eleanora, however, Strindberg has unsuspectingly

same coin.

Tickets: 0171-638 8891

CHARLES SPENCER

27/4/95

Oddly charming

DANCE
Lindsay Kemp
Sadler's Wells

ONCE upon a time there was Cinderella, but she got her prince. Female virtue, first abused, triumphs — a lesson in morality from the bad old days.

But what, asks Lindsay Kemp in his new *Cinderella, a Gothic Operetta*, if once upon a time a baby was seen as a destructive force, the cause of her mother's death in childbirth, and so was shunned by her bereft father, and brutalised by her jealous older sisters?

What if Cinderella is no milksop doormat, but a beaten dog, lying in her own filth, inarticulate, starved of food and human contact?

What if the Prince, too, is not a pattern of patient young bachelorhood, but ageing, feeble-minded — and gay?

I start with the theme rather than the fabulously cobbled-together scenery and extraordinary costumes, because the knitting of real NSPCC horror story and panto fairy story is so masterly.

Cinderella is not only an outcast — she is the white child of a mixed marriage that has produced two black older sisters. So racial prejudice gets an airing as well as snobbery and homophobia.

This gives Kemp a wonderful setting — a steamy Caribbean colony where ample obeah women clash with uptight European males, though they are not necessarily dressed as males.

Look at the stage and you see a wildly bubbling cauldron of extravagances stirred together, Gothic arches carved with voodoo symbols, jungle sounds mixed up with operatic coloratura. Crazy, as usual with Kemp. But somehow it all mishmashes together, every ingredient making you laugh and shiver.

Kemp himself plays the disintegrating Prince, shambling, pathetic, with an idiotic grin so winning that you forget he is the figurehead for whom all this havoc is being wreaked.

Cinderella, a haunting invention of ashen skeletal menace by Nuria Moreno, behaves as repellently as you would expect of such a damaged being, and yet you can't help pitying her.

The ending — "they all lived happily after" — turns out to be true, after a fashion. And the necessary lesson in morality is true, too: that without love, everyone's the loser.

Tickets: 0171-713 6000

ISMENE BROWN

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