

start with a generous dose of misery as we meet a bride and groom (Helen Baxendale and Jonathan Cullen) preparing for their wedding. The bride is terminally ill. We

from a worthless acquaintance, a wife-beating husband (Reece Dinsdale on his most unpleasant form). In a third scene, the woman priest

from the se lightening day gives the chara sembl for party. The gloom ar chatter a gourmet by the lu ert Jone designs.

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thurs 23 March 75
Reeling from drink

MATTHEW Bourne loves to modernise the Romantic masterpieces, in tongue-in-cheek style, but

with at heart a serious respect. His *Nutcracker* was a great success, and later this year he plans *Swan Lake*. Now his highly entertaining 1994 version of *La Sylphide*, renamed *Highland Fling*, is being revived by his company, Adventures in Motion Pictures.

La Sylphide, made in 1836, introduced sylphs into ballet. They dominated scenarios for nearly a century, before Balanchine and women's liberation sidelined them. Now the classics are the box office's backbone, usually in cosy productions that blunt the teeth of the fairy tales; Bourne puts back the bite.

Bourne transplants the story to a Glasgow tenement estate. Today's answer to the leisured Romantic hero is jobless layabout James, whose dreams are fuelled by McEwans and cocaine, and who goes head-butting at the disco rather than hunting swans. We first meet James (Scott Ambler, as appealing as a soiled Hugh Grant) stumbling into a urinal, out of his skull with drugs, hallu-

BALLET

Highland Fling
Donmar Warehouse

cinating about a sylph. His vision of loveliness is understandably skewed — her dress is tat-

tered, her eyes are black and bruised, her arms filthy and clinging, but her wings are delicious.

The sylph from hell sets out to flummox James's marriage to wifey little Effie by luring him into jumping out of the highrise after her.

Maxine Fone's sylph is wonderfully malevolent, hands clawed, nostrils flared, and I had high hopes for a good gory shredding for our oafish hero. Sadly, Bourne sticks to the story, and it's the sylph who gets shredded.

Lez Brotherson's designs are brilliant — James's flat screams tartan from every surface, the "forest glade" is an evocative car dump — and the cast of six are confidently theatrical individuals. The mix of elementary ballet and drunken reels does not always rise to the occasion, but the war between dreams and reality resonates pungently. Whether it's tutus or kilts, Bourne says mischievously, *plus ça change*.

Tickets: 071-369 1732

ISMENE BROWN