

KO MUROBUSHI

Quicksilver, The Place

Gravity is pitiless and death lingering in Ko Murobushi's butoh contribution to Dance Umbrella, *Quicksilver*, a spellbinding exercise in suffering and restraint.

Masked in gauze, muted and alone, Murobushi's only company on-stage is the dullest glow from above and the unnerving hiss of an open valve. His limited gestures are exceedingly slow and concentrated - as if he is considering each airborne atom that collides with his tormented body as life expires.

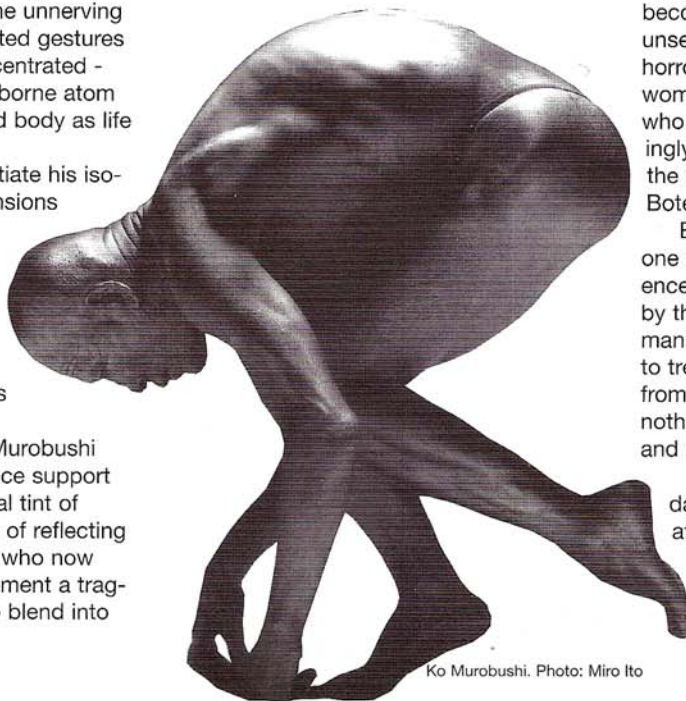
Impotent attempts to negotiate his isolation create anguished suspensions and unexpected moments of horizontality when Murobushi falls flat on his back. The result is a shared sense of tension that engulfs both performer and spectator, and the yearning for catharsis becomes increasingly unbearable.

Vanishing into blackness, Murobushi returns naked except for a dance support and skin of silver. This unnatural tint of flesh has the remarkable effect of reflecting light and allowing Murobushi - who now resembles from moment to moment a tragic deity or festering corpse - to blend into his stark surroundings.

In the shadow of a staged eclipse, Murobushi's aging body is revealed to be powerful and fragile all at once. Shifting gradually downstage, his twists and trembles expose taut, unyielding muscle wrapped with membranous skin barely able to withhold organs. Soon his relentless shudders reach such cruel intensity there is a very real risk Murobushi will paint the stage with his own vomit.

Suddenly there is a metamorphosis and the former prisoner of darkness is at once a knuckle-walking beast of elegance and consequence. Escaping to a small pile of sand, Murobushi beats his bald head against the floorboards, thrusting grains in every direction as he rears and arches his exposed vertebrae.

The ending is abrupt and ambiguous, robbing you of any requisite relief. Nevertheless, *Quicksilver* has already proved a beguiling, almost sacred meditation performed by an artist with matchless curiosity for the body and its capacity for patient exploitation and worship. M.R.



Ko Murobushi. Photo: Miro Ito

ALIAS COMPAGNIE

I Want to Go Home, THE PLACE

Enhanced lighting could make the first half of Alias Compagnie's offering, *I Want to Go Home*, salvageable. The latter half is a write-off.

It is only during the early parts of this sometimes humorous, sometimes sadistic dream-vision that Guilherme Botelho's quirky choreography and physical comedy succeed in resisting a decline into repetitious shouting and falling over.

Botelho's primary motif is the expanding-contracting body, which is splendidly demonstrated during the opening moments by a slim, attractive woman in a red dress who traverses the stage as her body swells and compresses like an accordion gathering then expelling air. All the while she is eyeballed by an ominous school of built-to-scale sharks that make up the only scenery.

A man in a latex mask follows, his facial features one moment defined, the next indiscernible as his suffocated breaths become increasingly desperate. It is an unsettling image worthy of any Hollywood horror flick that, when combined with a woman literally fished from the audience who stumbles and slips behind her agonisingly hooked lip, becomes an indication of the disquieting brutality that underscores Botelho's apparitions.

Botelho's dancers hit, bite and bully one another to exhausting effect - a preference that deteriorates into abject silliness by the middle of the show. Even one mild-mannered performer who vainly attempts to treat each of his peers using everything from physiotherapy and kinesiology to hypnotherapy erupts into an explosive physical and vocal rant by the closing scene.

With only aggression as motivation, dancers have little on which to hinge an affecting performance and are left to fend for themselves beneath a rarely changing lighting white-wash that is less-than-atmospheric. M.R.

PHILIPPE DECOUFLÉ

Sombrero

Sadler's Wells Theatre

Sombrero illustrates that 'decoufferies' (the neologism used by Philippe Decouflé aficionadas to describe the French choreographer's highly imaginative performance techniques) are a mixed bag of tricks.

A group of comically dressed dancers in sombreros make their way slowly through the auditorium before taking to the stage to tell us to let the outside world "cease to exist". They go on to ask where shadows go at night and whether said shadows have chromosomes before a

pair of dancers, painted jet-black, take horizontal positions by their feet, effectively becoming shadows themselves. A witty idea to open an evening of systematic witticisms that at times, wit not withstanding, tire.

Decouflé's work resembles that of fellow Frenchman Philippe Genty. However, while Genty is a master of illusion, manipulating the physical stage to surprise and delight onlookers, Decouflé is a digital wizard who twists video technology to defeat limitation. The Decouflé effect is bold but slightly academic and finds itself at odds with the choreography that is, for the most part, baggy and shapeless. The result is a work that could be accused of gimmickry were it not pardoned for its polished execution.

From early on *Sombrero* startles with the creation of white shadows, bewilders when those shadows seem to adopt minds of their own, and amuses when the shadows become victims of snarling vampires and other movie monsters.

Later Decouflé uses live projection to invert the body, achieving chests on backs and legs that bend every which way except the way they should. This reverie afforded by technology turns simple solos into wide-screen cinematic events that fill the stage with leaping light and disengaged dancing anatomy in filmic close-up.

The score stands on its own, using synthesised ticks, taps and bangs fused with live piano to create a dynamic and moody soundscape that is dreamlike one moment, nightmarish the next.

Sombrero is on the whole a worthy treat from a gifted stage magician, however, once you work out how Decouflé does it, the otherworldly innocence is lost and all that remains is mild choreography of tumbles and turns.

Malcolm Rock

DUTCH NATIONAL BALLET

Workshop Programme

Muziektheater Studio

Amsterdam seemingly has the right conditions

for propagation of choreographers so the Workshop programme of the dancers' own choreography always makes interesting viewing. From the ten pieces on offer, all were worth watching. It is also good to see corps dancers moving into prominent roles where their talents are more visible. Notable throughout was the high standard of design; even simple practice clothes were chosen with an eye for cut and colour.

Daniela Cardim contributed three works. Her love duet built on a flowering succession of lifts was sensitive and sincere. Similar qualities surfaced in her solo expressively danced by Peter Leung. But her closing number, *baticum*, was the winner. An interesting choice of music in a finely constructed piece in the neo-classical style, it made wonderful use of movement in double work, solos and ensemble. Following a powerful men's section, it just got better and better. Nicolas Rapaic and Claire Philippart contributed the intriguing, pas de deux, for the tall lean shapes of Giovana Magnani and Grace Hanley. A keen sense of line and spacing enhanced the depth and varied textures of the choreography under effectively self-conscious lighting. I also particularly liked Sebastian Nichita's spiky urban duo performed with hard passion by Michele Jimenez and Eddy Nichita.

Maggie Foyer

BERLIN STAATSBALLET

Shut Up and Dance!

Berghain, Berlin

Two years ago, Berlin's Staatsballett initiated a project for its troops. *Shut Up and Dance!* was invented as a showcase for dancers with no established directorial credentials to chance their arms on short choreographic works.

The result this year unrolled on 27 June in a Gormenghastian pile in Friedrichshain, a rubbly but increasingly trendy quarter of east Berlin: Berghain, a club that usually throbs to the sounds of house and trance. The auditorium was converted from the usual disco space with raked seating swooping down to an open

Dutch National Ballet Workshop Programme. Photo: Angela Sterling

