



Kaori Ito in *Au Revoir Parapluie*. Photo: Richard Haughton

**JAMES THIÉRRÉE**  
***Au Revoir Parapluie***  
**Sadler's Wells**

James Thiérrée moves like no other, a fact that colours both his individual physical performance and his decisions as director of surprising stage spectacles. *Au Revoir Parapluie* - his latest gift to wide-eyed audiences - spins, floats and explodes its way into the heart by revelling in darkness and delight in equal parts and taking full advantage of Thiérrée's personal milieu as the progeny of nomadic circus artists.

Backed by a spirited and stubborn troupe of multi-disciplined performers (dancing singers and acrobatic dancers), Thiérrée opens his scalp in order to share the unusual images that shape his distinctive mind.

Throughout the action a mass of rope takes centre-stage and is at various times suspended, spun, climbed over, hidden behind and dropped into a hefty pile. This primitively romantic industrial vision is complemented by hovering hooks that Thiérrée, with precise timing, uses to swing his way to the proscenium apex and save his damsel.

What remains endlessly fascinating about the work of Thiérrée and his touring French peers (who most recently in London were Philippe Decouflé and Philippe Genty) is the ultimate realisation that anything goes. If two performers find a way to wind their limbs into a great grasshopper, they put it in the show. Should a singer decide her solo is best sung dressed as a slug, the idea is blessed. To the naïve observer the editing shears have seemingly gone astray during rehearsals - and a lucky thing too because what results is an unforgettable adventure into a rarely achieved theatrical world.

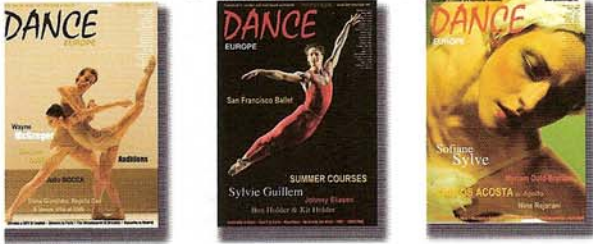
On top of his broader visual exploration, however, Thiérrée offers moments of simple, unadulterated dance. Kaori Ito is the star in this regard thanks to her frisky footwork and eye-watering flexibility. Magnus Jakobsson adds bouncing physical comedy as a continually concussed jack-of-all-trades whose efforts, first as a repairman and later a garden-variety magician, go amusingly awry.

Thiérrée himself appears in a state of constant moonwalk. His playful, inexhaustible energy means his feet barely touch the ground and his self-imposed licence to frolic means he is never offstage long. He is the loveable ringmaster of this show that ends where he began - beneath the pitched canopy of a circus tent.

Malcolm Rock

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## TANJA LIEDTKE

**Construct**  
**Southbank Centre**

Life's sometimes liberating, sometimes alarmingly inflexible architecture is exposed by Tanja Liedtke's witty new work *Construct*, which premiered at London's Southbank Centre. With dancers Kristina Chan and Paul White, Liedtke uses cordless drills, electrical tape, jagged gestures and humour to reveal the personal and public structures we adopt to maintain comfort and ward off chaos.

*Construct* showcases Liedtke's theatrical inventiveness and her capacity to weave moments of literal narrative within what is essentially a collection of abstract scenes about human relationships. On a set evoking a building site Liedtke and Chan assume stiff dispositions before giving in to gravity, leaving White to single-handedly bolster his rigid-bodied co-stars using only his robust form and a variety of ingenious juggling manoeuvres. His seemingly futile attempts to administer a more appropriate verticality cause him to break a sweat, but never his gleeful determination, warming the audience for the dynamic pas de trios to follow. Overalls and loose-fitting singlets prove suitably simple costume for bodies whose shapes grow and collapse only to recover ready to crumble once more.

Next dancers use wooden planks to illustrate a pitched roof and chimney under which several cheeky rendezvous occur. The same planks are later used to mime a shotgun and build a fence. Nearer the finale Chan is seen in distress balancing half-a-dozen planks within bended knees, between thighs and on the crook of her neck.

Liedtke has a remarkable control of scale, bridging scenes of aggressive space-hungry contortions with intimate portraits using only skipping fingers. An isolating spotlight, for example, draws focus centre-stage and we are treated to a voyeuristic back-ballet of naked spines and muscular shoulders. She even finds time to explore the absurdities of home-buying and off-plan houses whose generic appearance and plastic furnishings have become so popular with working class families moving to the ever-expanding periphery of Australian cities.

*Construct* is a compact work that combines bold choreography with gentle jest to show how passion causes our blind adoption of systems and structures that lead to our inevitable entrapment.

Malcolm Rock

## THE ROYAL BALLET

**Swan Lake**  
**Royal Opera House**

Sarah Lamb is tiny - size OO at a guess - and yet she carves her way through the exhausting role of Odette/Odile with such sublime ease that you want to sigh at the sheer pleasure of watching her. Her exquisite legs, porcelain no less, appear to savour every technical hurdle, whether it's a steely balance or a series of double fouettés immaculately engineered, while her expressive arms sketch the air dreamily, or extend to protect Siegfried from the evil Rothbart.

If only, though, Rothbart could look a wee bit scary. Encased in a cumbersome outfit, Alastair Marriott suggests a departed Womble poorly reconstructed by a taxidermist. Not, of course, the dancer's fault but, if this production by Anthony Dowell is to enjoy another 905 performances, is it too much to ask for a more realistic adversary?

While Viacheslav Samodurov was down to dance Siegfried, his indisposition gave us Ivan Putrov instead. Physically, Lamb and Putrov are compatible and dovetail well, even if the emotions don't exactly tumble off the stage. Now fully recovered from the serious injury that kept him out of action for a year, Putrov is dancing better than ever, executing double, airbound tricks with a newfound, seamless grace. Unfortunately, though, his acting still has a way to go; his facial expression too often resembles a European tourist in a Japanese train station.

In Act I, a relaxed trio, Bethany Keating, Laura Morera and Zachary Faruque, calmly danced a technically sound pas de trois, and the corps delivered their dances with spirit despite the loss of one maypole ribbon. The problem, though, with including Steven McRae in any ensemble is that he makes everyone else look as if they are still getting to grips with the steps. McRae, however, did get his chance to show off his brilliant form in the Neapolitan and, with partner Natasha Oughtred, won an indecent share of the evening's applause.

Emma Manning