
Royal Ballet triple bill

Royal Opera House, London

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Judith Mackrell

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For the past couple of seasons, the Royal has tended towards a nostalgia-fest of anniversary celebrations and classic revivals. But on Friday, two new works premiered by Christopher Wheeldon and Wayne McGregor made this company the most exciting place to be.

Advance reports made a fuss over McGregor's *Chroma*, which was to feature three songs by the White Stripes. In fact, it is Joby Talbot's orchestration of these songs, along with his own music, that has the audience pinned to their seats. John Pawson's designs pare the stage down to a pristine, glowing cube, within which the music seems to ricochet, causing the dancers to fight for their lives to try to find a point of stasis. From the opening section, in which Alina Cojocaru and Edward Watson batten around each other in a duet, through to the finale, the tension between chaos and minimalism is extreme.

Christopher Wheeldon's choreography is shaped by an older academic tradition than McGregor's, but in *DGV* (*Danse à Grande Vitesse*) he is no less inventive. This enormous work for 26 dancers is set to a score that Michael Nyman composed for the inaugural run of the French *TGV*. Wheeldon plays brilliantly with dynamic and scale, setting a tranced duet for Darcey Bussell and Gary Avis to the fastest music, so that the couple seem suspended in a hurtling capsule. Against Jean-Marc Puissant's industrial set, this sense of an endless collective voyage makes the dancers appear both poignantly human and, fleetingly, immortal.

Between these two, Balanchine's *Four Temperaments* might be in danger of looking staid - but this 1946 ballet has an indestructible modernity. There is only one flaw in this triple bill: it is scheduled for just four more performances.

• In rep until November 29. Box office: 020-7304 4000.