

## Royal Ballet at Covent Garden, London WC2



*Tryst* performed by the Royal Ballet Melissa Hamilton Eric Underwood Alastair Muir

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**Debra Craine**

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The Royal Ballet season is ending in style, with a terrific triple bill that unites two outstanding 21st-century creations with one of the most luminous ballets of the 20th century. *Chroma* is Wayne McGregor's greatest hit; *Tryst* is Christopher Wheeldon at his most impressive; and *Symphony in C* is, well, essential George Balanchine. What's not to like? I only hope that the reason this bill wasn't sold out at its first performance was that noon on a blissfully hot Saturday isn't the right time to lure dance fans into a dark theatre. If ever a mixed bill felt as if it belonged in the night-time, this was it.

When McGregor made *Chroma* in 2006 he had no idea that it would lead to a job as resident choreographer of the Royal Ballet, but his undulating, highly articulated and freakishly flexible style proved an instant success with audiences. More than three years later *Chroma* is still an awesome prospect, partly because John Pawson's soaring white-box set takes the breath away, as does Lucy Carter's lighting, and partly because Joby Talbot's score, which incorporates music by the White Stripes with his own compositions, is a wondrous blend of the strident and the serene. And I still credit the Royal Ballet's dancers, most especially Sarah Lamb and Edward Watson, with giving *Chroma* more sense of shape than McGregor perhaps intended.

*Tryst* is almost ten years old but retains all its power. This work (on pointe, unlike *Chroma*) is a neo-classical adventure tinged with dark mystery (rather like the secretive music by James MacMillan, who here conducts) that gives its large ensemble an air of magical otherness. At its heart is the obligatory Wheeldon pas de deux, usually steamy and always intricate. At this performance it was danced by Melissa Hamilton and Eric Underwood. She is still in the corps de ballet, he is a soloist, but in the modern repertoire they are fast becoming the company's go-to couple. They both have a highly developed sense of sumptuous sensuousness in their dancing; now they have to take more emotional risks.

The programme ends on a high with Balanchine's *Symphony in C*, his white tutu extravaganza from 1947. Marianela Nuñez wore a patina of wounded romance in the second movement adagio, while Sergei Polunin proved that he can really jump in the third. If you can't make it to the Opera House before June 11, take note. The June 10 performance will be shown on Big Screens throughout the country. Either way, this programme is an absolute must see.

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