

Berta, hovers on the periphery, in a role pregnant with possibilities that never develops choreographically. Ricardo Cervera's Tirrenio is an amphibious master of cloak manipulation, dancing up a storm, and looks interestingly androgynous. The wedding celebrations are hard work. José Martín did his best, giving a spirited performance against heavy odds.

The backdrops are exquisitely painted but the production has the quaintness of a Pollock's toy theatre as scrim chunter up and down, boats keel on creaky rollers, the wind machine fluffs yards of chiffon in imitation of billowing waves and all of this leaves precious little space for dancing. It is probably time for this production to sink gracefully beneath the waves.

Maggie Foyer

#### ESTONIAN NATIONAL BALLET

##### *Shannon Rose*

##### Estonia Opera House

The Estonian National Ballet already has a fine example of contemporary ballet theatre with Luciano Cannito's *Cassandra* and now they have added a second with their recent premiere of *Shannon Rose* by Yuri Vámos. The Hungarian choreographer created this ballet nine years ago for Bayerisches Staatsballett, basing it on the film *Ryan's Daughter* and setting it to an assemblage of music by Sibelius.

The tragic story of Rose, a romantic dreamer, portrays her marriage to a friendly, but dull, school teacher and an amour fou with a wounded English officer, against the charged, political backdrop of an Irish village rebelling against English occupation. Expressionist sets by Michael Scott employ broad sweeps of red paint to create a tense atmosphere, enhanced by forbidding lighting by Klaus Gärditz. The narrative is clear, but the demands of the story dictate that the first half has a number of short scenes, sometimes with insufficient time to fully make their mark before we shift to the next.

Vámos uses a mix of ballet and contemporary dance vocabulary with only the romantic Rose on pointe. In contrast to the heroine, the earthy villagers make their first appearance with legs swinging wide, their vitality and passionate hatred for the English captured in their jagged steps. Vámos told dancers rehearsing a duet: "I don't want *Sleeping Beauty* – it's a beautiful ballet, but not what I want." The wedding night celebration features sensual choreography for the corps, culminating with pairs of villagers clashing stools together in an imaginative sexual metaphor. From this group, Daniel Kirspuu as the Head of the Rebels is a great mover and Heidi Kopti, as his wife, attacks her role with fiery abandon.

Marina Chirkova, as Rose, is the character that makes the longest journey from bright girl to dreamy young woman and, finally, obsessed lover of her English officer. She is a fine actress and her emotionally charged dancing embodies the essence of the ballet. Vladimir Arhangelski plays the schoolmaster who initially resists Rose, but eventually succumbs, only to disappoint her romantic ideals. Even with make-up to age him, the handsome Arhangelski remains a heart-throb and one friend told me she would trade places with Rose any day. Nevertheless, his portrayal of the cuckolded husband is convincing and, in the second half, his anguished solos provide an excellent counter-balance to the illicit love duets, accompanied by violin solos exquisitely played by Andrus Haav.

In previous productions, Linnar Looris has made an impact with his jetés and strong stage

presence. However, as the English Officer he dances with a precision I haven't seen before; his duets with Chirkova send sparks flying and the final tragic scenes are full of pathos. Vámos has clearly inspired this young dancer to new heights and I understand that all the dancers were pleased to have the opportunity to work with this creator of powerful dance theatre. *Shannon Rose* will doubtless become a regular feature in the Estonian National Ballet's programming and should help to give the company the international recognition it deserves.

Stuart Sweeney

#### THE CURVE FOUNDATION

##### *Signals/Savalliana/Poison/Cervantes/Violet*

##### Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh

Ross Cooper is nothing if not ambitious. The Edinburgh-based dancer/choreographer runs a Ford Fiesta-sized company with BMW-size designs. The Curve Foundation has been on the go since 1998, staging sleek, technically challenging contemporary dance with an itinerant group of performers and limited funds. Now, with a new residency at Musselburgh's Brunton Theatre, Curve has a permanent base – and new-found confidence to boot.

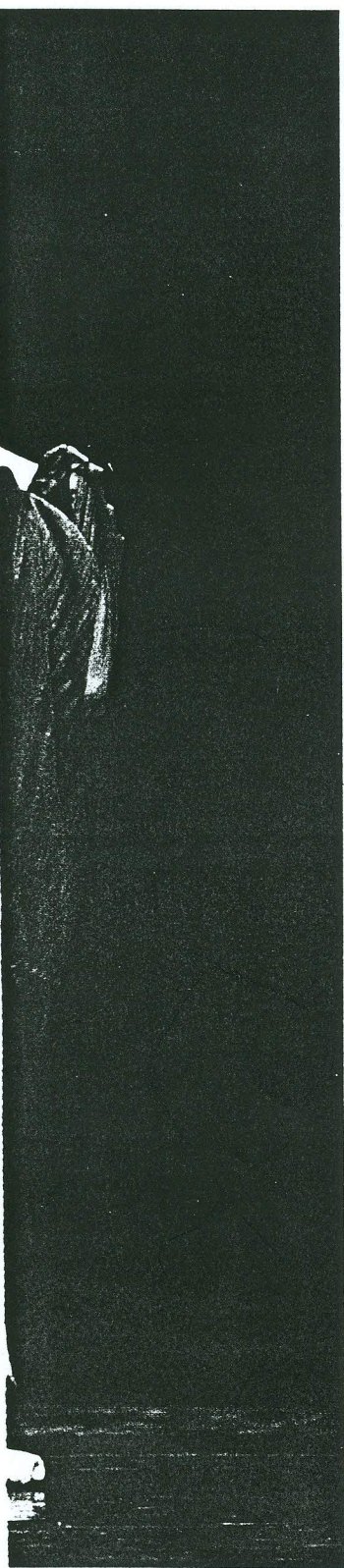
Young, lithe and hungry, the company's seven international dancers (some new faces, others, like Soraya Ham, more familiar) are invigorating: attacking this new touring programme with an energy that borders on reckless.

At the Brunton (the touring programme varies from venue to venue), the bill is one that would not look amiss on a mature company like Rambert – with pieces that include Merce Cunningham's *Signals* (Scottish premiere); two works by Portuguese rising star Rui Lopes Graça – *Savalliana* (world premiere) and *Poison* (UK premiere); Rambert dancer/choreographer's Ana Luján Sanchez's *Cervantes* (Scottish premiere); plus Henri Oguike's 2002 *Violet*. It's a dazzling roster of tricky and vastly different works. And they pull it off, just.

*Signals* (a big coup for a company this size) is the biggest test – and there are visible wobbles in some sections. But once they find their legs, the essence of this work – signals passed between dancers deciding the order of steps – is captured in a way that puts you in mind of how Cunningham's original company must have looked.

Luján Sanchez's work (which opens the bill at Musselburgh) is a simple, soundless piece of limb-bending abstract dance that puts the dancer, Christophe Carpentier, and his solid physicality centre-stage. At seven minutes long, it sets the tone: this is a celebration of pure dance.

Lopes Graça gives us a solo, *Savalliana* – featuring the leggy, vixen-like Soraya Ham – and an exuberant full-company work, *Poison*. His work is original, and of-the-moment, the perfect complement to Cunningham's vin-



Persson

the role of Ondine. Here Ashton and Rojo are in agreement. It is a great role for Rojo is quite simply, magnificent. She has many dancers who combine excellent technique, to this Rojo adds her own power, passion and vulnerability. Her character is a wayward and mercurial sprite. Wonderment fills her world whether she is in her shadow or toying with a man's heart. She can even squeeze blood out of the petals which apart from some languid lifts keep returning to endless kisses and hugs on pointe.

Richard Cope is not able to bring much to the role, offers so little but looks magnificent. Elizabeth McGorian, an imperious