



[Ghost Dances - Rambert](#)

at Lowry Theatre

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) September 2017

The **Rambert Dance Company**, formerly Ballet Rambert, surely need no introduction; as one of the most famous and successful contemporary ballet / dance companies in the world, drawing dancers from all corners of our globe to work with them, yet still remaining something of a British institution, and regular visitors to Salford's ***Lowry Theatre.***

This evening's programme consisted of three approximately 30 minute pieces of totally contrasting nature, the third and final one being the **Ghost Dances** of the title.

Before that however, we witnessed a hugely narrative-driven piece, which took as its starting point Dehmel's poem of the same title, and using music by Arnold Schoenberg. A minimalist set consisting simply of one wooden pillar, and stark, evocative lighting; the story which the dancers told was clear, simple and beautifully measured. The principal dancers here were Miguel Altunaga and Simone Damburg Wurtz, who were given some respite in the central section when their younger alter-egos of Liam Francis and Hannah Rudd took over.

Choreographer **Kim Brandstrup** utilised an ensemble of black-clothed dancers who both mirrored and exemplified the narrative in a way only dance can, and I adored the almost animal-like grace and nimbleness of Francis.

The second piece of the evening, Symbiosis, was receiving its World Premiere performance, and was much less cohesive in terms of story and understandability. Reading the programme notes it tells me that the dance is about the behavioural patterns of modern city dwellers and how we react and coexist in an ever-developing population of technophiles. I can see this in the piece now, in retrospect, but I didn't get that from it when watching. The costumes were strange and almost futuristic - everyone wearing a lilac-based patterned swimsuit with a rather strange but striking metallic grid to the rear of the stage which went through more coloured lighting changes than I thought possible.

It was visually interesting and some of the ensemble choreographer was quite astounding; the dancers moving frenetically seemingly non-stop. However, when it came to the parts when only a couple or so dancers were involved it appeared that their timings were slightly out with one dancer moving a split second after the first. It was impossible to know whether this was intended or not. What I did find exciting in this piece though was that movement, music and light never seemed to be quite in harmony with each other - almost as if they were vying with each other for superiority.

And so finally to the title piece, **Ghost Dances**. Choreographed by **Christopher Bruce** we are back to a narrative-driven piece of dance theatre which was again stark and moody. Drawing heavily from the ancient traditions and customs of South America, including their superstitions and reverence of the dead, this was a beautifully crafted piece. Three masked skeleton dancers prance around the living in a piece which has dark political undertones too.

What made this piece for me though was the addition or inclusion of genuine South American music played on their own instruments. The piece starts with nothing but wind, but when the music does come in, it is complementing the piece in a way western musical sounds could not. A solo pan pipe, a drum, a charango (type of guitar), and even singing, all coming together to set the time, place and mood of the piece. Perfect.

Of course in all cases the dancing was utterly magical. However there were two stand out dancers in this evening's performance. I am not able to (nor would I want to) try and quantify

why these two stood out more than the others. Maybe it was just symbiotic? But they were **Liam Francis** and **Hannah Rudd**.

One other thing which struck me about this evening, was the audience. It was a very young, majority school girl, based audience, which was most heart-warming and pleasing. The future of this artform is certainly not in jeopardy. A most enjoyable evening in the hands of dancers and a company very much at the top of their game.