

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## BalletBoyz: Deluxe

Maxine Doyle and Xie Xin

BalletBoyz and Sadler's Wells

BBC4 and iPlayer

27 March–24 June 2020

The double bill *Deluxe* gives BalletBoyz the opportunity to show their range progressing from an examination of aggressive male culture to pastoral tranquillity.

The six members of BalletBoyz perform under their own names rather than take on the roles of characters in a story. In the opening dance *Bradley 4:18*, they represent aspects of a single character. Based on lyrics by Kate Tempest, the dance examines why Bradley, an apparently affluent person, awakes from a troubled sleep at 4:18 in the morning.

Unusually for dancers, the troupe perform while suited and booted. Although they represent different aspects of Bradley, certain features reoccur in each solo giving hints as to his nature. The repeated use of 'jazz hands' suggests a superficially flamboyant character while the black eye shows a willingness to indulge in violence. Choreographer Maxine Doyle explores both characteristics to the maximum.

*Bradley 4:18* comprises a series of solos, duets and full-cast performances. One of the solos could have been lifted out of the local disco as the dancer preens and struts around the stage like a peacock. Another dancer is agitated and unsatisfied, rapidly barking out the need to gratify his hunger. The duets bring to mind drunks staggering home intoxicated and as likely to hurt each other accidentally as help complete the journey.

There is an overall tension as the dancers slouch around hands in pockets as if looking for trouble. It creates the uneasy sense of an internal conflict ready to spill out. There is an atmosphere of sullen regret but not necessarily repentance as if feeling ill after over-indulging rather than being ready to apologise for misbehaviour. The underlying mood of violence becomes more overt as the dance moves to a conclusion with the full cast behaving like the Jets and the Sharks from *West Side Story*. The final dramatic leap that concludes the dance is ambiguous; as much a gesture of futility or despair as one of triumph.

Xie Xin's *Ripple* shifts the mood from conflict to serenity. There is a ritualised, contemplative atmosphere suitable for religious or spiritual ceremonies. Like monks, the cast wear loose-fitting clothes made of natural fibres. The peaceful atmosphere makes it very easy to relax as you watch the dancers go through their paces; it actually opens and closes with what looks very like one dancer giving another a massage.

The choreography is organic and flowing reflecting nature. Hands and arms move like waves or rain splashing into water. There is a strong sense of the dancers being connected—the movements of a soloist cause the other members of the troupe to move away like ripples in a pond. The dancers catch and carry, rather than confront, each other.

Moving from violence to peace is a fine way to capture the achievements of BalletBoyz on screen.

**Reviewer:** [David Cunningham](#)