

# British Theatre Guide

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

## Death Trap

Ben Duke

Rambert

Newcastle Theatre Royal

24–25 April 2024

It feels like a long time since Rambert visited Newcastle, and this two-day visit, coming after an international tour, brings *Death Trap*—a darkly funny double bill that spans the turbulence of love, loss, life and death through two quite remarkable pieces by Ben Dukes of Lost Dog.

Ben Duke says, “the work I make is always inspired by and made with the performers and it is a privilege to find myself in a room with these exceptional artists. Their diversity of background means that they bring such a richness of experience into the space, and it is their talent and generosity that really make this work.”

Rambert is the oldest dance company in the UK, founded by Polish Jew Marie Rambert, and one of the finest and most diverse companies globally. *Death Trap* is the overarching title for the two works *Cerberus*, created in 2022, and *Goat* from 2017.

*Cerberus*, according to Greek mythology, is a multi-headed dog that guards the gates of the Underworld to prevent the dead from leaving. We never see this dog, nor is it ever referred to, so is this just a humorous reference to Ben Dukes’s own company Lost Dog?

*Cerberus* references the Orpheus myth to tackle love and loss, opening with the disembodied voice of dancer Aishwarya (Raut) asking us to not take photos and so on. However, she continues into something quite different and funny—the audience laughed straight away. From there, we are taken into a wild mixture of dance, text, imagery, confusion, life, love and loss. Full of quite extraordinary imagery, beautifully and bizarrely costumed by Eleanor Bull, stage right is ‘birth’ and stage left ‘death’. Inventive, skillful lighting by Jackie Shemesh clarifies and heightens this. Ropes create further suggestive images.

Lastly, the music, supervised by Yshani Perinpanayagam, an unusual mix of contemporary music with, at midpoint, a Monteverdi solo song, is all performed live with the singer, female drummer and guitarist onstage. The dancing throughout is absolutely superb.

The second work, *Goat*, also plays on myth or, in this case, ritual, reminding me of spring rites and animal sacrifice. This offbeat work is inspired by the music of Nina Simone and is a multilayered exploration of the contrast between what we might see on TV and what the reality actually is; again, Duke references other (dance) works. It is witty—a sparkling group dance brought applause—and ultimately deeply moving, as are Simone’s songs. There are many messages here, including what sacrifice means.

What is remarkable about Rambert is not merely its diversity but the strong ensemble feel and the sense that every person on and off stage is important. The dancers are magnificent and are also actor-performers, often using text; their stage presence is very special. Everyone will feel differently

about *Death Trap*, which is the point; there are so many layers, so much fun, so much fabulous dancing, rich imagery and emotion.

*Death Trap* is a hit, and it's good to see Rambert looking so utterly brilliant!

**Reviewer:** [Dora Frankel](#)