

British Theatre Guide

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

Varmints

Based on the book by Helen Ward and Marc Craste
East London Dance, Sadler's Wells and Stratford Circus
Lilian Baylis Studio
17–18 May 2013

This delightful dance piece, devised by the company with director Sally Cookson and choreographer Wilkie Branson, is aimed at young children but I am sure the scattering of adults in the audience enjoyed it just as much as the school parties that packed the theatre for its first performance.

It is a simple allegory that presents the encroachment of the city and industry on the natural environment with its peace and tranquillity. As the bulldozers and the concrete jungle advance, one of the country creatures saves a single plant shoot from destruction and, nurturing it, manages to reclaim the world for nature.

It is a story you can read in many ways, imaginatively presented to show the intriguing life of nature's creatures, machines eating up the countryside and the struggle to save the environment though an inventive dance language that combines street dance-style floor work with tumbling rolls and modern dance twists that suggest both humans and a whole new species or many.

With choreographer Branson as the prime protector, joined by Mariana Camiloti, Femi Oyewole and Letitia Simpson as both other creatures and doubling as grey-clad developer destroyers, this is an easily accessible piece of theatre.

It has an expressive and atmospheric score by Benji Bower that plays a huge part in creating its dramatic impact and a design by Holly Waddington that makes bold use of pairs of wheels and transforms from countryside to city and industrial landscape and then to the return of nature through the use of Yoav Segal's animated projections.

Varmints will be touring to The Old Market. Brighton 20-22 May. Epic Studios, Norwich and Norwich Festival, 24-25 May, Northcott, Exeter 28 May Gulbenkian Theatre, Canterbury 1 June, Warwick arts Centre 4-5 June, Leicester Curve 7 June, Pavilion Dance, Bournemouth 7 June, Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury 14 June, Aberystwyth Arts Centre 16 June, Stratford circus 20-22 June.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)