

THE LIST

André Gingras - Rambert Dance Company

The List
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Kelly Apter



Take it to the limit

Rambert Dance Company is known for its beautiful technique but choreographer, André Gingras wasn't afraid to rough things up a little, as he tells Kelly Apter

If you've ever watched children charge around a soft play centre, you'll know how joyful, liberating and downright fun it looks. If only we could shrink ourselves small enough to join in. Well, the dancers at Rambert don't need to, because Canadian choreographer, André Gingras has given them a cushioned world all of their own.

Created in 2007, but playing in Edinburgh for the first time this October, *Anatomica #3* is a remarkable piece of work that owes as much to the world of gymnastics as it does contemporary dance. Using a set comprised of layer upon layer of mattresses, built high upon a steeply raked ramp, the dance is fuelled by athletic energy and raw exuberance. Dancers leap, tumble and fall dramatically from great heights – hardly what you'd expect from a company that starts most days with a classical ballet class.

'The Rambert dancers speak many languages,' says Gingras. 'Yes, they have a great classical training as a base, but many of them come from, or have embraced, other disciplines. So it was really

a pleasure to just let them cut loose.' That said, Gingras still had to keep a lid on things, because, as all soft play attendees know, it's all fun and games until somebody gets hurt.

'I felt like the guard at the playground sometimes,' laughs Gingras. 'Having to say "whoa there!" to the dancers. I encouraged them to go a little bit beyond their limits, but I also had to take responsibility for their safety. Because that ramp is very high, and they have other performances to do and a career that they want to continue with.'

But there's more to Anatomica #3, and Gingras, than choreographed hi-jinks. Inspired by media representations of the human body, he makes us question the idea of perfection. Dancers stand at the front of the stage, pulling up their tops to reveal taut stomachs, or stretch backwards to demonstrate incredible flexibility. During a 'competition' to see who can stretch their leg the highest, however, not everyone stays balanced – which is exactly what Gingras had in mind.

'We want to believe the dancers are these magical creatures who can do anything,' says Gingras. 'But for me it's very important that you see them also as human beings with failures. So I insist that every night a few of them go so far that they push themselves over.'

The closing work in a triple-bill featuring Mark Baldwin's stunning new piece, Eternal Light, and Siobhan Davies' popular Carnival of the Animals, Anatomica #3 works first and foremost as an entertainment. Close behind, however, is its ability to provoke thought. Not that Gingras is trying to tell us something – even when he sends 18 dancers out on stage dressed as the Queen. He's leaving that part to us.

'We have a pretty intelligent audience out there,' says Gingras. 'So I don't think it's my place to make statements about these things and be didactic. I feel my role as an artist is to put what I see around me into a theatrical context and then let the audience decide.'

Rambert Dance Company, Edinburgh Festival Theatre, Wed 29–Fri 31 Oct.