



Leap of faith

How a Rolling Stones hit is helping to revitalise British dance

by June Richards

It is a classic backstage scene. Scantly clad dancers attempt an exotic array of loosening-up exercises in cramped conditions, while black-suited musicians warm up with a cacophony of notes. Amid the controlled chaos, baton in hand, stands Mark Stevenson, a slight, dark-haired figure dressed in a Jasper Conran suit. His calm exterior masks an excess of nervous energy as he discusses a last-minute musical alteration.

At 37, this former cellist is being hailed as a new Simon Rattle. It's a reputation based on his increasingly adventurous work in concerts, recordings and award-winning educational projects. Already internationally renowned as a guest conductor, he is now making a different kind of mark as an innovator with London Musici, the 25-strong chamber ensemble he formed in 1988.

At the start of 1994 they were appointed house orchestra to the relaunched Rambert Dance Company, with Stevenson as musical director. Now, a year on, he has proved himself a pioneer in music for dance, bringing a variety of little-known classical works – and even rock music by the Rolling Stones – to the stage for the first time. Dance audiences from Swindon to San Francisco will be able to judge for themselves as the Rambert company begins a four-month

relaunch tour, opening at Leeds this Tuesday. Stevenson approaches his role with a combination of energetic enthusiasm and pure passion. "A lot of our musical heritage comes from dance," he says, "and it's my aim to bring the two closer together – as, for example, Stravinsky did. "Many well-informed people have warned me to 'be careful' – and I realise dance can restrict conducting, but I'm prepared to take that risk." He has an admirable ally in Christopher Bruce,

'I realise that dance can restrict a conductor, but I'm prepared to take the risk'

a former Rambert dancer and now its choreographer and artistic director. One of their most innovative creations is a piece choreographed by Bruce to the Rolling Stones' *Little Red Rooster*. "I'd love Mick Jagger to do a concert with us," says Stevenson.

More than anything he is determined to bridge the gap between contemporary and classical

dance. The music for another of Bruce's works, *Crossing*, is by Henryk Gorecki, the recently "discovered" Polish composer.

A particular concern is winning over the young. "We really need to reach out to wider audiences, and encourage children to take an active part," says Stevenson.

A pharmaceuticals company is backing a series of children's workshops he is organising all over Britain. And he is involved in an ambitious programme for 14-21-year-olds with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

"To make a success out of something you have to be obsessed with it," he says, "and that's how I see music for dance."

Going on the road with the Rambert has many attractions for Stevenson. "The important thing is that you get to know and understand your audiences. I can also list all the best curry houses up and down the country..."

Rambert Dance Company tour: Leeds (Jan 31-Feb 4), Oxford (Feb 7-11), Northampton (Feb 14-18), Brighton (March 1-4), Canterbury (March 7-11), Norwich (April 12), San Francisco (May 8), Swindon (May 17-20), Ashton-under-Lyne (May 23/24).

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANTHONY CRICKMAY; SIMON BUCKLEY

RAMBERT



Arts Council funded

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SUMMER TOUR 1994

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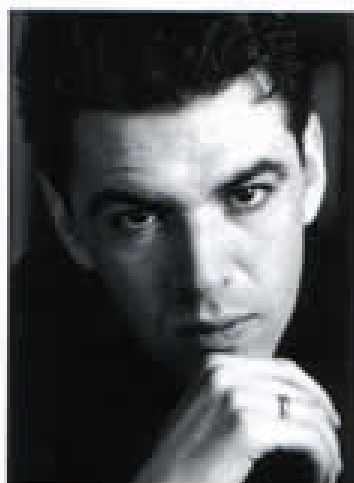
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WEDNESDAY 20TH APRIL 1994 AT 7.30PM
ST JOHN'S SMITH SQUARE, SW1

Conductor: Mark Stephenson Alto: Vyatcheslav Kagan-Paley
Choreographer and Dancer: Sara Matthews Reciter: Daniel Massey

Shostakovich: arr. Barshai: Chamber Symphony Opus 110a

Galina Ustvolskaja: Symphony No. 5 "Amen"

Interval 20 minutes

Bach: Aria "Vergnügte Ruh, Beliebte Seelenlust" from Cantata BWV 170

Bach: Cantata BWV 169 "Gott soll allein mein Hertz er haben"

Giulio Caccini: Ave Maria



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This concert is promoted by London Music!*

Programme L1

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