

Report from New York

by Mary Cargill

The Birmingham Royal Ballet could have taken programming lessons from Leigh

Witchel's chamber company, **Dance As Ever**, which performed a varied and interesting program at the Pace Downtown Theater in September. The company (five dancers plus Peter Boal guesting from the New York City Ballet) performed a program that ranged from classical to romantic to comic. The program opened with *Quodlibet*, a classical exercise with an elegant grace to music by Mozart and Weyse. The choreography was well structured and varied, if a little too long.

The heart of the program was a solo for Peter Boal to songs from *A Shropshire Lad* composed by George Butterworth. Dressed as a soldier from World War I, Boal danced through the meditative songs as if he himself were a memory. There was no literal portrayal of the words, no pretend cherry tree, no self-conscious acting; the choreography flowed beside the songs in a subtle, moving, and imaginative counterpoint. It was an extraordinarily moving piece, especially the elegiac last song "Is My Team Ploughing", where the effective lighting (by Jeffrey Salzberg) seemed both to box the dancer in and to elevate him above all human suffering.

The Elevator, which closed the program, was a complete change of pace, a very funny finale which combined elevator music and parodies of classical dancing. Again, it was a bit too long, as if the choreographer wanted to include every joke he could come up with, but the individual jokes were very funny indeed. The shades from *La Bayadere* made their famous entry through an elevator door and ended up in grass skirts dancing to "Bali Hai"; the wilis from *Giselle* danced (extremely musically) to "I enjoy being a girl". The comedy was unforced and the jokes weren't punched. I especially enjoyed Mary Carpenter and Robert McFarland miscommunicating their mime, she doing *Giselle* and he the *Nutcracker* Prince, both performing with a sweet and reasonable earnestness and conviction, which was so much funnier than the self-conscious and almost desperate appeal to the audience by the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

