

Shoes

Marianka Swain jumps feet first into Sadler's Wells' shoe-centric show



From pointe shoes to taps and trainers to Cuban heels, footwear is a vital part of the dance world, so *Shoes* would seem to be a perfect match with Sadler's Wells. However, this isn't just the domain of dancers, or of dance shoes. The flamboyant revue, the latest offering from Richard Thomas, creator of *Jerry Springer: The Opera*, covers everything from flip flops to flippers and designer brands to fetish, through original songs as well as routines from a range of choreographers.

The show clatters along at an exhilarating pace, changing setting and style every few minutes. I would have loved to linger longer in a few of the intriguing scenarios, so that we could really get under the skin (or leather) of the

theme. A few numbers are one-note, with the amusing lyrics driving the action rather than emotional development occurring through the dancing.

The tone is generally light-hearted, and some comic pieces, such as principal choreographer Stephen Mear's Imelda Marcos defence of her shoe collection and Aletta Collins' wise "Health and Safety" lecture on high heels, work extremely well. However, it would have been interesting to have had more variation in tone, perhaps exploring in greater depth how the look and movement that footwear creates affects us internally.

Most satisfying were the longer pieces, among which was the glorious retro world of Mear's "Flip Flop Paradigm", featuring dancers in hot-pink swimwear

making impressively athletic use of giant beach balls and a stiletto slide, and the curse of bridal shoes upon a Jerry Springer-like dysfunctional family in Mear's and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's "Old Shoes", with its slick use of set.

Kate Prince's hip hop "Sneaker Addict" series was wonderfully realised, with unusual music choice and endearing puppetry contributing to its accessibility and richness. "Footish Fetish" used inspired costuming to reinforce its story and frank sensuality, and Prince's "Hush Puppies", an absorbing, atmospheric contemporary number about infidelity, will certainly make me question the motives of those wearing such stealthy shoes in future.

The company of singers and dancers are all talented chameleons, and it was enjoyable to experience a range of styles in one show, including tap, jazz, contemporary and hip hop (sadly, no ballroom, even in the perhaps falsely advertised "Violently Come Dancing"). Three former "So You Think You Can Dance" contestants, Mandy Montanez, Drew McOnie and Chloe Campbell, put their best foot forward and proved that they can indeed dance, creating some stand-out moments in a varied and vivid production. ●

Following its two-week world premiere at Sadler's Wells, *Shoes* moves to the Peacock Theatre for a five-week run from February 8 to March 13, 2011. Tickets for the spring 2011 performances are now on sale.