

DANCE

By Jeffery Taylor



THE NUTCRACKER ★★☆☆☆

Orchard Theatre, Dartford, Kent
(Box office 01322 220000; run ended)

TO THE ONES I LOVE ★★☆☆☆

Compagnie Thor, Barbican Theatre, London EC2
(Box office 0845 120 7500; run ended)

A PART FROM the disturbing illusion that Santa Claus had his head on back to front during the opening party scene, Moscow City Ballet's seasonal jolly is exactly that. On the tiny Orchard stage, MCB gave a full-bodied presentation of the world's favourite classical work, with Alevtina Lapshina as Clara, the little girl falling for a Nutcracker doll who turns into the real thing, the dashing Talgat Kozhabayev.

The dancers are elegant, superbly rehearsed and very savvy when it comes to too much scenery and too little stage. Gennadi Batalov, a mature and smooth dancer, is Godfather Drosselmeyer, wisely orchestrating Clara's blossoming. The two ensemble pieces, Snowflakes and Waltz Of The Flowers, are a delightful triumph, though the final great love duet proved to be a bit of a battle between Lapshina and Kozhabayev. Shortage of rehearsal time, always a

headache in a touring company, caused a wobble or two but the couple finished with a dazzling flourish and brought the house down.

As a young dancer, one of the first lessons in stage craft is how to dance with your back. Brussels-based Compagnie Thor's director/choreographer, Thierry Smits, graphically demonstrates the art in the first few minutes of his hour-long piece. Nine shirtless men sit with backs to the audience and sharply define JS Bach's complex music. The work develops into another beautifully rehearsed performance, a nine-part fugue of constant movement, strong, flexible and full of grace.

The setting is a white stage with six mobile blocks occasionally flooded with acerbic primary colour washes. Smits's choreography creates a perpetuum mobile through which run themes of mood and feeling, never dominating or fighting Bach's music. It is a purely tribal, masculine environment, but by the end I couldn't help feeling something was missing.



ELEGANT AND SAVVY:
Alevtina Lapshina finds her prince in Talgat Kozhabayev