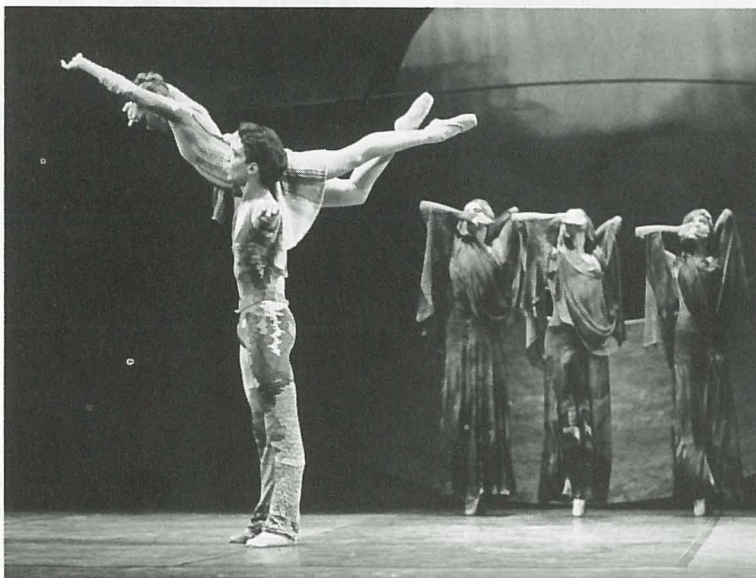


Mike Alfreds' version of Carlo Goldoni's trilogy *Country Mania* at the Olivier. Sets, costumes and lighting by Paul Dart. Photo: John Haynes.



Graham Lustig's *The Edge of Silence* by the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet. Design by Nadine Baylis. Lighting by John B Read. Photo: Leslie E. Spatt.



Altogether more economical, but equally attractive and dramatically rather more stimulating, design was to be found at the National Theatre's Olivier auditorium in Mike Alfreds' marathon adaptation of Goldoni's trilogy, *Country Mania*. For this production Alfreds used the very able young designer, Paul Dart, an old hand on their productions for Shared Experience, and, more recently, responsible with Alfreds for the highly successful staging of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* at the Cottesloe. Dart's use of moving, revolving screens to evoke Italian 18th century middle-class residences in both town and country, indoors and out, was most astute. For once on the unwieldy Olivier stage a lightweight setting felt genuinely theatrical and managed to convey both dramatic presence and a sense of intimacy. Dart's costumes were equally successful and showed a highly developed grasp of the vagaries of both fashion and class, as well as looking as if they belonged to their wearers. As he was also responsible for lighting the show, which he did with skill and sensitivity, he can look back on a triple success in the National's main auditorium, despite the woefully thin audiences it drew: they were deterred, I fear, by the production's nearly five hour length.

During the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet season at Sadler's Wells Theatre there were nightly appeals towards raising the million pounds that are needed to widen the stage and improve its facilities. The appeal was timely inasmuch as it is said that unless the stage is extended SWRB is likely to move its base to Birmingham. Certainly the company need a larger stage if it is to continue to present such grandiose pageants as Michael Corder's *Gloriana*, given its London premiere at the Wells during the season. In Philip Prowse's monumental black and gold setting, surmounted by a heavy gilded grille containing an astrolabe, and dominated by a central throne set at the top of a precipitate flight of stairs, space was seriously at a premium. This was aggravated by Prowse's costumes, which were on a similar scale and so cumbersome that the dancers needed more room than usual in which to move — they were scarcely called on to dance.

Whether we actually need this kind of work from the company I rather doubt, either at Sadlers Wells, in Birmingham, or anywhere else. Such a touring dance company seems far better served by such works as David Bintley's witty and compact *Allegri Diversi*, even if Terry Bartlett's rather confused backdrop is hardly an adornment, or by Graham Lustig's dramatic, if over portentous, *The Edge of Silence*, designed with her habitual skill, dramatic grasp, and economy by Nadine Baylis. Here there was an impeccably scaled, genuinely dramatic fixed setting, strong lighting by John B. Read, and those admirable knitted costumes that Ms Baylis uses so effectively to accommodate the movement of dancers. The whole concept fits the work and the company, and is in need of no seven-figure stage extensions to make it more viable.