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Reviews roundup: Darcey Bussell's Farewell

Marking her retirement from 20 years in professional ballet, Darcey Bussell's Farewell at Sadler's Wells left critics wanting more from 'Britain's Ballerina'

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Parting glances: Darcey Bussell and Jonathan Cope in Tryst. Photographer: Tristram Kenton

The Guardian's [Judith Mackrell](#) described Darcey Bussell's valedictory show - which is actually followed by another "final" performance in Song of the Earth - as "a swansong that contrives to be sweet, funny, sentimental, even a little bit rock'n'roll." The Daily Telegraph's Sarah Crompton found herself similarly touched by "an evening beyond praise or blame, a kind of public leaving card for a much-loved colleague," enhanced by the involvement as

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producers and performers of Ballet Boyz William Trevitt and Michael Nunn, both of whom have known Bussell since childhood. The pair lent their signature to the programme by interspersing the live performances with video footage of Bussell past and present - in rehearsal, performance and interview.

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The Evening Standard's Sarah Frater lamented what she saw as the major drawback of this format, writing that "the real problem is that it eats into valuable dance time. At just two hours including an interval, there's only space for six short ballets, a tiny number when you consider the dozens Bussell has danced. Not including a Sleeping Beauty extract, or a Balanchine ballet, feel especially big gaps."

William Forsythe's In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated is the first of the live dances, and sees Bussell partnered by Roberto Bolle in a performance described as a "sizzling duet" by Allen Robertson of the Times. But Robertson found the pair's second dance of the evening, from Frederick Ashton's Sylvia, "less successful". Sarah Crompton also found the

Ashton piece "glittering but less convincing" by comparison, and the Independent's Zoe Anderson noted that "Bussell is harder-pressed in the duet from Ashton's Sylvia ... She gets through the darting footwork, but it leaves her little room to expand." The Stage's Jon Percival was of a different mind. For him, "Bussell came off best in the duet from Sylvia, handsomely partnered by Roberto Bolle."

The return of Jonathan Cope, coaxed from retirement to partner Bussell in Christopher Wheeldon's *Tryst*, met with an enthusiastic reception from Allen Robertson, who saw it as "an indication of the loyalty Bussell generates ... This is Bussell at her streamlined best and it's a treat to see the two of them reunited one last time." Zoe Anderson was enthralled by the pair: "They fold and unfold into each other; individual steps have less impact than the sight of these dancers flowing from shape to shape."

For Judith Mackrell, the second half of the evening, an ensemble performance of Kenneth MacMillan's *Winter Dreams*, put the evening "into a slower gear" but others were impressed by the delivery of a "fantastic cast" (Sarah Crompton) on "top form" (Allen Robertson). Mackrell conceded that "it does, however, put Bussell on stage with a core of her Royal Ballet friends ... and in doing so underlines the fact that, however famous she became, she remained a company ballerina." Yet it was precisely this "company" element that Zoe Anderson, by contrast, found a little lacking: "it might have been nice to have a dance or two from her co-stars."

One thing is beyond contention, though. Bussell's retirement comes at the height of her abilities. In a Guardian blog, [Martin Kettle](#) wrote that it was "awful to think this is the last time we'll see that graceful glamour on the dance stage" but recognised that "knowing when to quit has to be the last, most difficult and most poignant decision for any public figure". Bussell, wisely, has left audiences and critics wanting more.

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