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OPTIK at SADLER'S WELLS

If I were to try to define what Optik is about I might say 'being', and in doing so would land up in the mire of complexity that is properly representative of this extraordinary production by Barry Edwards. For though it has echoes of the sixties when early postmodernists were doing away with theatricality, what it tackles is first our perception of theatre and then of reality. It is alternately boring and brilliant. It is repetitive, then as the performers speed up with physical expression that is a manifestation of an inner state of being, it bounces with a resonance that affects both mind and body. Though we may yawn and look at our watches, we are also gripped by the marking out of spatial territory, by volume and density, by the play on shape, rhythm and progression, or regression. Trying to analyse the movement's detail becomes irrelevant, for the concern is with bigger ideas and bigger questioning.

The eye and ear are constantly alerted to an across the arts experience. But we are required to empty our minds of the day outside and the niceties of theatricalisation, and the performers are drained of personality, and their movement separated from content. The musician with his wild percussive forays and adventures in rhythm and tone looks normal, but the three performers are determinedly cut off - but from what ? And what effect does this have on the audience ? It shows how passively we watch theatre, for at one point the walkers escaped from the central performing area (and the Lilian Baylis Theatre turned into a finely lit large studio, enhanced by metal sculptures, is so much nicer than as a theatre with raked seats) yet everyone remained mindlessly watching the space, too polite to protest. When later we spied the performers through an upper window walking in the street, in the manner of sleepwalkers, it seemed inordinately funny. But then our customary focusing had been given such a jolt.