

**TV REVIEW**  
**JOE JOSEPH**

YOU can't say television doesn't make you sit back and wonder. Take *The West Wing*, which returned to Channel 4 last night. How is it that a gang of scriptwriters in Hollywood can draft more coherent, more impressive, more inspiring campaign-trail speeches than veteran political speechwriters who have years of specialist Washington experience?

For instance, can you imagine Martin Sheen's Josiah Bartlet being asked if he'd have gone to war against Saddam if Saddam had refused to disarm and replying, as John Kerry did, "You bet we might have!"? Is it likely that one of Jed Bartlet's advisers could have persuaded his boss to quip, as Kerry did, that the "W" in George W. Bush stands for "Wrong", thereby allowing wags to snigger that this may be so, but Americans still don't know what "John Kerry" stands for?

Scriptwriters working on *The West Wing* also have the knack of making politics seem exciting, occasionally even high-minded, when we know that in reality politics is a world inhabited by people such as Clare Short and Ken Livingstone and Al Gore and Dick Cheney, none of whom you'd trust to organise your

# Pride

MARILYN KINGWILL



**Dance**  
**Grim[m] Desires**

*Wapping Project, El*

★★★★☆

**Debra Craine**

MARESA VON STOCKERT is the latest in a long line of choreographers to be fascinated by fairytales. But the German-born, British-based dance-maker has gone beyond the mere interpretation of individual stories. She has taken five familiar tales and woven them into a single, connected narrative which unfolds so cleverly and with such dry humour that it presents one of the most engaging contemporary dance events of the year.

The show is staged at the Wapping Project, a disused Victorian power station that combines a restaurant with one of the more imaginative performing spaces in London. Von Stockert's production, *Grim[m] Desires*, was commissioned (with the help of the Jerwood charitable foundation) for the unique space of its Boiler House, a mesmerisingly atmospheric room with high tiled walls, elevated windows and eerie lighting.

Last year, von Stockert created the immensely amusing *La Sardina* for the Wapping Project, but it was a mere morsel compared with this three-course meal. Running at just

under two hours (with interval) *Grim[m] Desires* is a fantastical theatrical excursion into gothic horror, sly wit and mischievous social comment.

The Brothers Grimm provide four of her tales (*The Frog King*, *Rapunzel*, *Snow White* and *Cinderella*) while Charles Perreault contributes *Bluebeard*. Von Stockert's text (narrated wonderfully by Russell Rasey) offers a wacky rewrite of the traditional narrative. The Frog ends up squashed like a pancake; Rapunzel becomes a poster girl for short hair; Prince Charming is a raging foot fetishist. The links between them are outrageously apt: Rapunzel is the wicked stepmother of Snow White, who marries the serial killer Bluebeard.

Von Stockert's meticulous choreography both illustrates and abstracts her storytelling. Her language combines a rough and tumble physicality with a kind of magical illusion, seen to best effect when the dancers (in harness) scale the walls in beautiful, scary aerial displays that punctuate key emotional moments.

Her wacky imagination is also brought to bear on objects — a glitter ball, shoes, spoons, enormous clumps of hair — which take on alternative meanings as well as being outright jokes. The six performers are excellent. You have until October 9 to see it. Box office: 020-8544 7434