



Davina Givan, Tiia Ourila and Tanya Richam-Odoi of the Phoenix Dance Theatre in action.

Phoenix Dance Theatre

West Yorkshire Playhouse,
Leeds

Stephanie Ferguson

THE Phoenix has landed. The 04 tour got off to a sizzling start with a quartet of highly individual and contrasting pieces from Henri Oguike, Rui Horta, Maresa von Stockert and artistic director Darshan Singh Bhuller, who has almost returned to Leeds on a white horse to put the company back up where it

belongs. Like its mythical namesake, Phoenix has had numerous incarnations over the past 23 years.

From all-male, high octane, action leading the way for black British dance, to a rather mixed bag of fortune, it's risen splendidly from the flames to become an impressive international company with works by some of the world's best contemporary choreographers.

There was a party atmosphere as the dancers slid from pure abstract to wild bursts of action via lyrical intertwinings to quirky fun. Danced with a backdrop of living flames, Oguike's *Signal* drew on the stealth, control and wonderful physicality of the new line-up, every muscle in tune with the martial beat of the Japanese Taiko drums, traditionally used in battle.

Oguike is always inventive, and here we had shuddering shoulders, Sumo-style stance, controlled power, giving way to little tripping Geisha steps, in a changing landscape of moods and combinations.

Bhuller's reworked *Source 2* was stunning, a sensual duet danced next to a screen of projected water images and a collage of Anthony Crickmay's famous *Crickpix* of the dancers in action.

Lit in the best possible taste, Lisa Welham, from Goole, and Brazilian Yann Seabra created wonderful human sculptures, bodies tenderly enfolded.

Earlier, gently undulating to the sound of distant water, they were all heat and lust, suppressed desire which explodes in exciting lifts and couplings.

In contrast, von Stockert's

Polystyrene Dreams was jokey and wonderfully timed, with robotic workers in a surreal toy factory wheeling in on office chairs to the strains of Richard Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*.

As the Tannoy reminds them: "A toy is just for Christmas not for life", they get on the production line, checking dinky cars and packing baby dolls into boxes.

Teeming with inventive gestures and moves, the dancers whirl and waltz on their chairs in a weird take on *Come Dancing* or roll and prance on bubble wrap, eventually parcelling up a colleague in a major malfunction. Sheer genius.

■ Until Saturday, then at York Theatre Royal, March 8-10.