

52 WEDNESDAY, 10 MARCH, 1999

REVIEWS

EVENING STANDARD

A drag on the way to Baghdad

Sadler's Wells, which is hosting Green Candle's *On the Road to Baghdad*, a community project, clearly sees itself as a part of the Islington community and is giving residents and others access for £3.50. Its good intentions, however, raise questions about community dance as a performing art. I smell fingers burning.

The stage has been expanded and adapted with seating all round, but the director Fergus Early has made no innovative use of this space — apart from ordering characters to be hoisted about acrobatically on wires.

A man is lowered, hanging lifeless from a hangman's noose. A bloke on a rope is shocking, arriving as he does out of the blue.

The story is drawn from a novel

Green Candle Dance Company X
Sadler's Wells

ANNE SACKS

by the Turkish-American writer Gamel Gum and presented with no dramatic tension by cardboard characters in a long and indulgent panto.

It tells of Huru (Emma Cater) from Istanbul, who stutters and has a small waist and is therefore unsuitable for marriage. Well, it is 1500.

Education is her destiny and we are bored wretched by her plodding adventures on the road to Baghdad.

She encounters robbers, thieves, a dictator and other stereotypes who reinforce the

image of Arabs as brutes. Dancers are not trained as actors and should not try to act, especially if they speak with cutglass accents that place a Turkish theme in an English drawing-room drama.

Jacky Lansley, a pioneer of British post-modern dance, has reinvented herself as a prima donna with a plum in each cheek.

The non-professional performers are more than extras, to be fair, and have fairly lengthy sequences of dance.

However, there is no sense that they are actually enjoying themselves and none of the energy that is transmitted when performers are having fun. And it did drag. I left after two hours as a protest.

●Until 14 March. Box office: 0171-836 8000.



Bouncing towards Baghdad: Jacky Lansley and Emma Cater

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 Evening Standard

Moving in mysterious ways

RICHARD Redman's millennial-cult fiction might seem insultingly simplistic were it not utterly hilarious. Billed as a timely examination of extreme religious groups, *Sadhana* turns out to be an unintentionally funny blend of cliché and bathos which barely gets its ankles wet in the murky waters of cult behaviour. The title, by the way, is a term for a journey towards God, and Redman's research seems to have stopped after he found it in a religious encyclopedia.

Welshman Jamie Griffiths (a wooden Mark Dight) is an ideal cult convert, haunted by his mother's hellfire beliefs, and prone to manic depression. We know this because the first scene features young Jamie being frightened by a ranting evangelist pastor, and a later scene shows his comically

Sadhana X
Finborough Theatre, SW10

NICK CURTIS

stereotyped parents praying that he's taking his medication, because depression is "an actual illness, like mumps". This combination of cardboard characters and laboured chunks of exposition is a signature of Redman's work: Jamie's parents could hardly be more caricatured if they were carved out of leeks. The members of *The Children of Light*, under whose spell Jamie falls after being shown a rather boring slide show, are no more convincing. A mixture of the Moonies, Scientologists and the millennial suicide cults, the details of their sinister activities are left as vague as their beliefs. The

rank-and-file are grinning simpletons, and the woefully uncharismatic leader (Ben Weinberger) appoints Jamie as his deputy and marries him off to his recruiter, Zoe (Elizabeth Conboy), with wildly improbable haste. This arranged match leads to a delicious sex scene which suggests that fanatics can orgasm purely by praying together wearing socks (him) and red satin underwear (her). So *that's* what *Oh Come All Ye Faithful* really means.

Such accidental laughs are all that *Sadhana* has to offer. Redman directs a dull cast very stily, and his tabloid-style take on religious cults borders on the offensive. Even making allowances for the fact that its production opened without previews, I fear that *True & False* Theatre knows not what it does. Or how to do it.
●Until 3 April. Box office: 0171 373 3042.

The Art of romance lingers

JAZZMEN of Art Farmer's stature deserve a higher rating than this, but although there are moments when everything knits into place as of old, time is beginning to tell on the celebrated American trumpeter.

This summer he'll be 71 years old, and demanding years they have been. The man from Council Bluffs, Iowa, has worked with the very best.

He's stood shoulder to shoulder with Charlie Parker in Los Angeles, Clifford Brown and Quincy Jones in Paris. Gerry Mulligan, Art Blakey and Benny Golson in New York. That's a CV and a half.

Yet top-class jazz, like boxing, is a young man's game and all the experience in the world cannot disguise the gradual erosion of reflexes and stamina,

Art Farmer/Stam Tracey Trio ○
Pizza Express Jazz Club

JACK MASSARIK

especially on an instrument as unforgiving as the trumpet — or, in Art's case, the flumpet.

A custom-made hybrid of trumpet and flugelhorn, it is designed to enhance his lustrous ballad tone. Romantic numbers like *I Can't Get Started* (which he stylishly starts at the bridge) have long been Art's forte and they still serve him well.

His backing trio this fortnight is led by pianist Stan Tracey, an even older performer at 72, but wearing significantly better. Tearaway tempos, for one thing, have never held any terrors for Stan. Following the canny

example of his idol, Thelonious Monk, he makes no attempt at right-hand pyrotechnics, but slips smartly into block-chord mode instead.

It's an unambitious ploy, but does have advantages. Two-fisted chordwork sounds richer than a speed merchant using left hand only, and it also creates space for bass and drums, something eagerly seized upon by Andrew Cleydert and Clark Tracey. On fast numbers, like *Moose the Mooche* and *Just the Way You Look Tonight*, these younger guns hold everything together.

●Box office: 0171 439 8722

Ratings: ○ — adequate
★ good, ★★ very good,
★★★ outstanding, X poor