

Diversions make right moves

DIVERSIONS, the flagship dance group from Cardiff, has been a popular visitor to Ireland for many years. Now, for the first time, it comes on tour as the National Dance Company Wales, with work by cutting-edge international choreographers. Their double bill will comprise *Veil of Stars* by Andonis Foniadakis, his debut work with the company, and *Romance in Verse*, a new commission from Netherlands-based choreographer Itzik Galili.

The tour opens at the Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray tomorrow, moving on to Cork, Navan, and Wexford, before continuing on through England, Wales, the Channel Islands and Switzerland.

"We've been established for 26 years now, creating contemporary dance in Wales and bringing it out to the rest of Europe and the world," explains artistic director Ann Sholem. "We wanted to reflect that we are now representing Wales on the international scene in our name as well as in our work."

Indeed, the current tour follows the company's hugely successful two week tour of south west China, taking contemporary dance to audiences in Chongqing, Chengdu and Kunming. Interestingly, or perhaps intuitively, for that tour, the company chose to perform a specially created piece, *Hinterlands*, introducing Chinese audiences to the landscapes and atmosphere of rural Wales.

"I've been taken to the beautiful Welsh scenery not through images, but through the movements created by the dancers and atmosphere from the music," enthused one student from Chongqing University, adding: "I've dreamt about Wales because of its beautiful countryside, and today I've experienced it through dance."

In Ireland we don't really need an introduction to rural landscapes, and

**Jo Kerrigan
talks to artistic
director Ann
Sholem who
says we should
sit back and
enjoy modern
dance
productions**

the programme for this tour is excitingly modern. *Veil of Stars* is Greek choreographer Andonis Foniadakis' debut with the company. "It positively engulfs the stage and absorbs the audience utterly," observes Sholem. "We've performed it in three venues already and the response was amazing. It's physically really powerful and strong, especially for people who are less familiar with dance — they love the sensation and the music." The second half of the programme comes from Itzik Galili, a choreographer at the top of his game, who has just been nominated for an Olivier, reveals Sholem. His latest piece, *Romance in Verse*, utilises composer Steve Reich's *Six Marimbas* as well as a new score commissioned from Percos-



sa. "It is great to have him working with us again as he has become a firm favourite wherever we tour. The new work is captivating and exhilarating and we are really looking forward to seeing how Irish audiences take to it."

One of the perceived problems for modern dance — as indeed for modern art — is the audience's feeling that it should understand and be able to explain what it is seeing. No need, according to Sholem. In fact the important point, she stresses, is not to over-intellectualise it. "Instead of worrying what it's about, sit back, relax and see what happens."

At its heart, she explains, dance is about making moving patterns using the human body to communicate with an audience.

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"While classical ballet uses a strict and established notation of movements, modern dance allows dancers the freedom to use a much wider range, thereby liberating the piece from telling a precise story. There doesn't have to be a narrative; it can be to evoke an emotion, create a mood or atmosphere."

Sometimes, she observes, you hear someone who has seen just one piece say they don't like dance, rather than saying they didn't like that particular piece — rather as if they were dismissing all

books because they read one that wasn't to their taste. There is no right or wrong way to look at dance, she insists. It is simply a more effective medium for getting the message across than dialogue.

The National Dance Company of Wales particularly love coming to Ireland, says Sholem, and have a great rapport with the audiences here. "We usually have question and answer sessions after the show which are great fun, and allow us to get to know people better."

The National Dance Company of Wales tour details: Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray, tomorrow, Friday, 8 pm. 01 272 4030; www.mermaidartscentre.ie; Cork Opera House Feb 28, 8 pm. 021 427 0022; www.corkoperahouse.ie; Solstice Arts Centre, Navan, March 4, 8 pm. 046 909 2300; www.solsticeartscentre.com/booking.php; Wexford Opera House, March 6, 8 pm. 053 912 2144; www.wexfordoperahouse.ie