

Welsh dancers hailed as a choreographer's dream

National Dance Company Wales has just represented the UK at the STEPS festival in Switzerland. The company's media consultant, **Mike Smith**, reflects on its great success and what it will mean

THERE is nothing like the sound of stamping feet and cries of bravo to make an internationally touring company feel they are dancing on air.

So the enthusiastic response at the closing performances by National Dance Company Wales in Zurich at the end of a six city, seven performance tour across Switzerland was as welcome as a post-tour party.

I had been keeping up with the progress of the tour thanks to blogging by artistic director Ann Sholem from the moment she, the 10 dancers, rehearsal director and three-man technical team arrived in Luzern after having to travel by road and boat to Switzerland thanks to that ash cloud.

Sholem is no stranger to taking on a challenge for the company. Last year she agreed to a brave new strategy that involved leaving the name Diversions behind after 25 years.

With record-breaking ticket sales for the company's spring tour in the UK, the next challenge was to present its dance – and dancers – as the sole company from the UK taking part in the prestigious STEPS dance festival along with 11 world leading dance companies.

By the time I joined the company in Zurich they had performed right across the country, including Bern, Luzern, Baden, Delemont and Chiasso. I'd received blogs from the team which talked of strong audience reaction – and even good weather and a bit of boating on the Swiss lakes.

Those blogs not only demonstrated the efficiency of the Swiss hosts, the beauty of the country, the enthusiasm of the audiences to the NDCWales' three different dances – Veil of Stars by Adonis Foniadakis, Form by Stijn Celis and Lunatic by Nigel Charnock – being



EXCELLENCE: Lunatic by Nigel Charnock

presented in different combinations, but also the company's reaction to being in a nation so committed to dance.

International touring is vital to develop dance in Wales.

As Sholem commented: "Seeing other companies perform in such a festival allows me to compare and assess our work in a global market. For our resources we achieve extraordinary things although we have less than others in regard to numbers of dancers and production quality. The company is now in demand and enjoys the opportunity to take the excellent work created in Wales to venues across Europe and further afield."

International touring also gives opportunities to see how things are done elsewhere, so in the afternoons, Sholem and her strategy team locked themselves into meetings. With fresh experiences and influences from another successful international tour plans are now well advanced on a new autumn programme of events at the company's home, the Dance House at Wales Millennium Centre.

So was the trip to Switzerland a success for Wales?

In the words of one Swiss critic: "It must be a choreographer's dream to land with these fine dancers."