

Dance Holding Space

Clore Studio, ROH

★★★★☆

Allen Robertson

EXPERIENCE and longevity are the bulwarks of Jacky Lansley's *Holding Space*. Produced by ROH2 as part of an ongoing programme of new works, it ranks as one of the most satisfying and professionally realised pieces yet to be premiered in

the Clore Studio at the Royal Opera House.

Holding Space pretends to strip movement back to its basics; but Lansley has sculpted its mundane transparencies with a subtle mastery that belies its non-emphatic surfaces. Movement echoes movement, gesture mirrors gesture, sections circle round to start over again with different dancers taking up the torch.

Especially during the first half of her hour-long creation, Lansley's sense of low-keyed simplicity exudes a quiet

confidence and tender humour.

Lansley is a wayward child of the Royal Ballet. In the late 1960s she decamped from Covent Garden to help to give birth to London's contemporary dance scene. She became a driving force behind X6, a long-defunct collective situated in the derelict Docklands.

It's probably serendipitous that *Holding Space* has a cast of six. However it is no accident that two of them are Lansley's contemporaries. Fergus Early (her husband) left the Royal about the same time as Lansley

and was another founding member of X6. Sandra Conley, still a part of the Royal Ballet, now spends much of her time playing Juliet's Nurse, various Queen Mothers and suchlike. Here, both of them wear a lifetime of stage experience with understated gravitas. Early, in particular, performs with an easy and straightforward directness.

Holding Space is in four sections. Lansley calls them "chapters", which may be why her building-block gestures surreptitiously manage to worm their

way towards emotion. The music for three of the sections is drawn from Schubert's late sonatas played from the sidelines by Philip Gammon, who has been with the Royal Ballet since 1964. The third chapter, *Lacuna*, is in silence. The finale, *Studio us*, is a gentle comedy.

All six dancers don black hats, the women add lipstick, the men suit coats, and black draperies are pulled across the white expanses of the studio. Time and again, singly or in groups, the dancers dash forwards with open-armed, big-

sell smiles, only to realise that they've forgotten what they were about to convey. Puzzled by this, they give it another try, only to fail again.

Movements from the other sections begin to creep back in, now tinted with personality. This shift into characters isn't always completely satisfactory, yet the understated expertise of *Holding Space* proves that Lansley belongs in the company of more widely known radicals such as Rosemary Butcher, Jonathan Burrows and David Gordon.