

curtain up



Dancers in a scene from Rambert Dance Company's *Eternal Light*

## Eternal Light

Composer Howard Goodall, known for fronting his classical music shows on TV and radio, makes his dance debut with a requiem for Rambert Dance Company. **Lalayn Baluch** reports

*Eternal Light*, which opens Rambert Dance Company's autumn tour this week, marks Howard Goodall's first foray into dance.

While Goodall is best known for presenting music-based TV and radio programmes, his theme tunes for TV hits such as *Blackadder*, *The Vicar of Dibley* and *Red Dwarf*, as well as musical theatre pieces such as *The Hired Man*, this new collaborative venture is a shift in direction for the composer.

Commissioned by Rambert's associate orchestra London Musici to celebrate its 20th anniversary, *Eternal Light* is Goodall's first requiem. It will accompany a contemporary dance piece by Rambert artistic director Mark Baldwin and will be performed live by the orchestra, alongside a different choir in each venue.

For Goodall, the collaborative

process of composing *Eternal Light* has been a unique experience. He tells *The Stage*: "As a composer, you create something on your own and then you deliver it. In dance, although a choreographer comes with a set of ideas, they discover the piece as they rehearse it. The timing is very different. The CD was made in April, before they had gone through the rehearsal process, so it would be ready at the same time as the tour. That was a big challenge, because if the company found it was the wrong speed, there would have been a mismatch. We took a huge risk, but it was all right."

Goodall worked closely with Baldwin to find a concept for a 21st-century requiem. Unlike traditional forms of the musical piece which focus on "hell and damnation", his work explores different ideas of loss through eight self-contained move-

ments within the larger work.

In a bid to modernise the requiem, he has also combined religious and secular texts, from the 13th-century hymn *Dies Irae*, traditionally associated with the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass, to John McCrae's 1915 poem *In Flanders Field*.

He explained that he created each work in stages, to ensure that Baldwin's choreography would fit around it, and gave the company's creative team as much say as they needed.

"Having written the movements, the choreographer and music director said there was something missing, and that I should create something fast. So I wrote two smaller movements and created a chant at a high speed from the *Book of Revelations*," Goodall added.

"Suddenly it locked into place, there was a real rise and fall that there hadn't been before – it was a really useful addition. When I write a piece of music, I know what it is going to sound like, in my head it is like the CD, so you are never really surprised. I can't imagine what a dance looks like, I can't shape it in my head – so it was a very strange experience." *Eternal Light* opens at the *Lowry* in Salford on September 25

## Composer Strouse hopes to revive Annie musical in West End

by Matthew Hemley

Broadway composer Charles Strouse has revealed plans are afoot to revive his musical *Annie* in the West End.

Strouse told *The Stage* he is meeting with producers of a current UK touring version to discuss the possibility of bringing it to London. He is due to go to Cheltenham Everyman Theatre to see a performance of the show, produced by Chris Moreno and directed by Chris Colby, and consider whether it should make the transfer in 2009. If it does, it will be the first time *Annie* has been seen in the West End since 1998, when Lesley Joseph played the role of Miss Hannigan in a version at the Victoria Palace Theatre.

Strouse said: "Hopefully it will come back to the West End again. That is what I think its future will be – in London."

*Annie*, composed by Strouse, with lyrics by Martin Charnin, opened at the Alvin Theatre on Broadway on April 21, 1977, and closed in 1983 after more than 2,000 performances. A film version was released in 1982 and the musical has enjoyed numerous outings in the West End and several tours. The current production stars Ruth Madoc as Miss Hannigan.

A spokesman for Josef Weinberger, the company controlling the stage rights, said: "The authors of musicals reserve the right to allow a production to be brought into town and usually will view the production before making that decision. The producers have not committed to bringing the show in, but were merely enquiring if rights would be available for a limited season in London." He said a proposal had been made for a "limited Christmas run" in 2009, but nothing was confirmed.

## R4 and Graeae team up for Hunchback

BBC Radio 4 has teamed up with disabled-led theatre company Graeae on an innovative new production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, which will feature a deaf actor in the title role.

The two-part adaptation of the Victor Hugo story has been penned by Alex Bulmer, a blind writer who is literary manager of Graeae. She has collaborated with *Shameless* writer Jack Thorne on the show, which will see Quasimodo played by David Bower, a deaf actor who appeared as Hugh Grant's character's younger brother in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

Polly Thomas, who is directing the production alongside Susan Roberts and whose idea it was to adapt the book, said not many people realised Hugo's original character of Quasimodo was deaf as well as physically disabled.

It will be broadcast on November 30 and December 7 at 3pm.

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