

Dance

David Hughes

Linbury Theatre, London

Judith Mackrell

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The Guardian

David Hughes's cv is dominated, formidably, by choreographers, with Christopher Bruce, Wayne McGregor and Robert Cohan being just three of the many headlining names who have contributed to his solo repertory. But in performance it is Hughes who awes, rather than the list of his collaborators. This stocky, bullet-headed dancer has an astonishing range - so delicately articulate, so fluid, so massively forceful that it sometimes feels as if there were a crowd on stage rather than one lone performer.

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But surviving as a soloist is tough, and this year Hughes has set up his own small company. While maintaining his old repertory (superb pieces by Siobhan Davies and Javier de Frutos are in the current programme), he will now be commissioning ensemble works. Impressively, he has the choreographer Rafael Bonachela setting the standard.

Freeze Frame is set to a crazed contrast of sounds, from 13th-century Marin Codax to Nine Inch Nails; it is held together by its evolving dynamic. All of Bonachela's trademark moves are present: arms like unsheathed blades; high, pouncing leg work; duets that tangle, splinter and coil argumentatively. Yet Bonachela draws his thread of logic tight through them, so that even as the work's energy contracts and expands extravagantly, it is heading somewhere. Impressively, too, Bonachela has made a genuine ensemble piece, in which the group's three other dancers never become a chorus for their director.

Almost inevitably, though, Hughes's own debut work, *In Company*, fails to spread itself so evenly. This sweet-tempered setting of Vivaldi is pleasingly constructed but its style looks generic, except when Hughes himself is dancing. Only then do the subtle musicality and muscular largesse of his language come into focus. He's not the first to discover that it's hard to take the soloist out of the choreographer.

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