

Arts reviews

DANCE

Rain

SADLER'S WELLS, ONLINE

★★★★★

The latest Sadler's Wells Digital Stage offering is a real treat for contemporary dance fans: leading choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's signature work, performed by her company, Rosas, at the venue in 2017.

Rain is De Keersmaeker's abstract movement response to Steve Reich's minimalist *Music for 18 Musicians*, and you could almost watch the piece on mute, such is the extent to which her company embodies Reich's pulsating composition.

Her piece builds over 70 minutes. At first, the dancers walk, run, cluster, observe. Gradually, particular movements and formations take on more significance through repetition, and new patterns emerge.

There's a fascinating combination of absolute, controlled precision and boundless expression. Lines are drawn on the stage, as

if for an esoteric sport, and, throughout, the dancers follow set trajectories and create sharply drawn geometric shapes.

Yet there's also a glorious sense of abandon, and space for quirkiness. It's witty, impish, and invites the viewer to play: we can share in the dancers' joyful collaboration, their teasing trades of skips and kicks or mirrored lines. There's a childlike curiosity, and knowing references like a catwalk model-esque stop and pose.

The swinging arms and tilting movement – falling forward or tumbling back – suggest feather-light entities buffeted by the wind. It takes enormous skill to give this impression of artless acquiescence, especially in such strict coordination with others.

There's also impressive athleticism, stamina and technique on display, but no grandstanding or hierarchy. Nevertheless, it's thrilling to watch a buoyant grand jeté explode seemingly out of nowhere, or just to get lost in the slinky spirals and slides.

It does evoke the titular



rain: solo drops, storm clusters, gathering, racing, linking and dispersing. There's variety within that idea, including partnerships and trios. In human terms, it feels like a community, full of ever-changing individuals and connections.

Dries van Noten's soft, airy costumes beautifully emphasise the freedom of movement. The colours shift, neutral shades coming into rose-pink bloom and then frosting over in silvery greys. Jan Versweyveld's lighting also suggests changeable

weather – from downpour to burst of sunshine – and his beaded curtain creates a shimmering climax.

This is a wonderfully accessible piece – and you can even learn it at home,

Rain is witty and impish, inviting the viewer to play

SADLER'S WELLS

thanks to De Keersmaeker's online tutorials. It's the perfect gesture to accompany this euphoric celebration of the collective.

sadlerswells.com
MARIANKA SWAIN

THEATRE

Drawing the Line

HAMPSTEAD THEATRE, ONLINE

★★★★★

Howard Brenton's political drama, which played at Hampstead Theatre in 2013, tells the extraordinary story of the Partition of India. Featuring battling ideologies, gross colonial arrogance and an extramarital affair, it's surprisingly gripping theatre.

In 1947, lawyer-turned-bureaucrat Cyril Radcliffe is tasked by the Prime Minister Clement Attlee to divide this vast nation into the new states of India and Pakistan. Never mind that Radcliffe has never been to India and knows "bugger all" about it – nor, indeed, cartography.

It's a clever decision to make this unknown but vital player our way in, rather than a more focus-pulling subject like Gandhi. The latter does make an appearance, emphatically rejecting the border – a "vivisection" of his multi-faith country. In contrast, pragmatic Hindu leader Jawaharlal Nehru sees this as the only viable route to an independent, democratic India. Fighting him for territory is the Muslim League's Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Perhaps the most astonishing factor is the romance between Nehru and Edwina, wife of the final

Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten – and the suggestion that this rushed timetable is a result of Mountbatten wanting to get his wife away from India, and her lover.

Radcliffe is a cricket metaphor-spouting Briton felled by Delhi belly, whose desire to do his duty is hopelessly naïve. Mountbatten callously sets an "acceptable" mortality level at 100,000; the death toll, of course, has far exceeded that. Tom Beard harrowingly conveys Radcliffe's mental collapse as he realises that a bloodbath is coming. It's a warning from

history of the consequences of Britain ploughing into a complicated project with nothing but a misplaced sense of imperial superiority.

There are excellent performances, Howard Davies' elegant production stresses Radcliffe's claustrophobia, and Mike Walker's sound design hints at gathering riots just beyond the doors of Viceroy House – a powder keg that erupts in a final image demonstrating the terrible legacy of this one line on a map.

hampsteadtheatre.com
MARIANKA SWAIN
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Tom Beard and Abigail Cruttenden as Cyril and Antonia Radcliffe



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