

## DANCE

# Fred and Ginger get in the ring

*There's more than fancy footwork to the appeal of Trick Boxing*

**JANN PARRY**

**TRICK BOXING** Blue Elephant Theatre, London SE5  
**SINNER** Queen Elizabeth Hall, London SE1  
**CULLBERG BALLET** Brighton Dome

THE HUGE advantage physical theatre has over dance is that it can grab the attention, in words if necessary, before we have time to wonder what we're watching.

I was instantly engaged by *Trick Boxing*, not least because the dress rehearsal was staged specially for me. The two jet-lagged performers from Minneapolis, Brian Sostek and Megan McClellan, had postponed their first night but did the show anyway when I asked to come. It's as snappy and sweet as

the apples Sostek's cash-strapped hero is trying to sell at the start.

He's an immigrant Russian hustled into becoming a boxer, Dancing Danny David, during the Depression. A guileless featherweight, he's destined to be a fall guy until lucky lady McClellan steps in to save him. Sostek does the talking, cramming in plot and characters in quick-fire succession, transforming his physique as fast as his speech patterns. McClellan's Bella is his sparring partner, equipped with gloves, dimples and fancy footwork; from her, he learns how to swing on the dance floor as well as in the ring.

Danny is lost for words when he tries to describe her, which is as it should be. The Fred and Ginger of the prize-fight circuit, they're champions when they dance

together. Danny's Russian grandfather, he tells Bella, invented a Happy Watch that makes time instead of just telling it: time can wait while we enjoy ourselves. At just under an hour, *Trick Boxing* (until 22 May) is a happy watch indeed.

*Sinner*, billed as a self-destructive solo for two, launches a new company formed by Rob Tannion and Liam Steel. Ex-members of Lloyd Newson's DV8 Physical Theatre, they're working a familiar seam: men's inhumanity to men. Newson digs deeper. *Sinner* opens arrestingly enough with timid virgin Steel entering a gay pub with a holdall. He's soon picked up by practised tempter Tannion, his alter ego. Their duets exchanging weights and identities are well danced, until the turgid text takes over.

The presumed motive for the nail-bombing of a Soho pub is hammered out: inadequate nobody who wants to be somebody blows up his kit-bag instead of acknowledging his sexual urges. The piece is undermined by its failure to acknowledge the universal terror of the bomber with the bag or body-belt.



**Brian Sostek and Megan McClellan in *Trick Boxing*.**

But Steel and Tannion at least have something they want to say. Johan Inger, the new director of Cullberg Ballet, seems to be making dances to keep the Swedish

**THE DUETS IN SINNER ARE WELL DANCED, BUT THEN THE TURGID TEXT TAKES OVER**

company busy. When it appeared at last year's Edinburgh Festival, Mats Ek's work still dominated the bill. Inger is now aiming to redefine the Cullberg aesthetic by moving further from narrative. Time drags as we wait to find out where his choreography is taking us.

The latest piece, *Within Now*, purports to be a journey from past to future, appropriately set to Steve Reich's *Different Trains*. A couple in black-and-white checks struggle to support each other, giving way to a chorus in orange; the particular replaced by the generic. Lots of chugging in circles, going nowhere.

Earlier works, *Walking Mad* and *Out of Breath*, are tauter. Inger can do distraught, sending his not-quite characters up walls and through trap doors. While the sets are nicely enigmatic, the choreography loses meaning, barely relating to its music. He can't cope with movement for its own sake, and the company loses its way when he tries.