

THE COURIER

Friday, September 26, 2003

French connection

CHOREOGRAPHER AND dancer Annabelle Bonnery is bringing a continental flavour to this season's performances by the Scottish Dance Theatre.

HELEN BROWN found out about this new artistic version of the Auld Alliance.

APPROPRIATELY FOR people who work with the international language of dance, French-born Annabelle Bonnery met Englishwoman Janet Smith, director of the Scottish Dance Theatre, during a residency in Copenhagen!

The result was an invitation from Janet for Annabelle to teach dance classes here in Dundee, at the company's base at the Rep theatre—a viewing of the French dancer's work on video further convinced Janet that she was the right person to create a completely new dance piece for members of the Scottish group.

With *On The Edge* now on stage and about to begin the autumn tour, it's been an interesting exercise for both dancers and choreographer.

Having made work for duos and trios, Annabelle decided that a quartet would be the best form for her new venture, but such is the enthusiasm and versatility of the resident dancers that two very different end products have been created from the same basic ingredients.

"It's very much not a case of a first cast and a second cast—the results are very different in character and style and that's why it's so rich and satisfying for me, as the person who started with the original idea.

"I've always worked in a very collaborative way. This company is a very good one, they give so much and are so open and receptive that it's a pleasure to work with them. I ask and they make it work!

"With this quartet, it has been amazing for me to see how the dancers have developed their own way, how they have interpreted what I was thinking and given it their own stamp. I like that very much and I want to keep the differences even when the steps are the same.

"Of course, this ideal situation would be for

people to come along and see both versions."

The company, working out of its base at Dundee Rep—the building of a new £1 million studio there started this month—has established a growing reputation for creativity and innovation, as well as acclaim from audiences for its witty, thoughtful and thoroughly accessible programmes of contemporary dance.

The autumn tour will feature not only work by Annabelle but also by Rui Horta and Peter Durrell award winners Beth Cassani and Victor Quijada.

Annabelle has enjoyed an international career, as well as founding and running her own company, L'Ane a belles, with collaborator François Deneulin. She has guested as teacher, dancer and choreographer in Grenoble, Sweden and Copenhagen, as well as in Spain, Portugal and Germany.

She trained from a young age in both ballet and contemporary dance techniques. "Francois and I work together very much in a collaborative way—he is not a dancer but he contributes a great deal to the drama and theatricality of the pieces we make and gives us the chance to use video in our projects. For the work here in Scotland, we are not using video, but there are ideas going on just now for future work that will include both video and singing.

"For myself, the most important aspect of the choreography is not steps as such but to develop a way of moving, building round different individuals and groups, to put over the meaning and the feel of what we want to communicate. Contrast is something that interests me very much—fast and slow, lyrical and dramatic—to get to the heart of what the dancer and I want to say to the audience.

Another project currently on the go is a

new work for six dancers from her own company. "I like to work with smaller numbers. I have done larger group pieces for seven or even nine people and it's very interesting—I've learned a lot from it and it feeds into other things I do.

"But it's also difficult to pin things down, to get things done!"

As well as undertaking one or two projects each year for the company, Annabelle also works with children and continues to dance herself. "I think it's good for a choreographer to do that because you understand how a dancer interprets your ideas. I came to choreography through dance, through trying to find my own way, but it is also a very rich experience to learn from other people."

With her wide experience throughout Europe and into the Far East, Annabelle has a rare overview of how dance is made and received all over the world. The language of dance and movement may be universal but there are still individual and local quirks that make it interesting.

"In Europe, I think audiences are much more in tune with contemporary dance—and I know the interest is growing here in Britain and in Scotland with companies like this one. In Japan, audiences are very aware of what you present, but they are not quite so receptive, there is more holding back. But dance has no borders, it can communicate easily and if one work makes an impression, there is always a strong chance that someone will come back for more.

"Dancers and choreographers should travel, it's nice to see new aspects in each country and make connections that work.

"In the Rui Horta company for example, which I worked with a lot, there are six dancers and six different nationalities from Italian and Korean to people from France and Luxembourg. They bring their own



culture and background, their own experience of life and dance.

Dance, according to Annabelle, never stands still—once a piece is made and even after it has been performed, it goes on changing and developing, affected by new audiences, new dancers, different venues, even the weather! Judge for yourself when

On *The Edge* takes to the stage.

● Scottish Dance Theatre performs at Dundee Rep tonight and tomorrow at 8 pm, then travels in October to Glasgow, Musselburgh, Pitlochry and Aberdeen, with a trip on October 4 to the International Dance Festival of Thessaloniki in Greece.