

## Dance

### Dog Without Feathers

#### Queen Elizabeth Hall

★★★★☆

There is anger at the heart of Deborah Colker's *Dog Without Feathers*. That's clear from the first moment a dancer explodes on to the stage of the Queen Elizabeth Hall, letting rip a storm of dust. Already the scene has been set by striking black and white film footage, projected on to a huge screen at the back of the stage, of a young boy stomping through the mud in a Brazilian backwater. Poverty and climate change, these are the twin scourges that Colker is highlighting with her visceral creation, which seems to have arisen from

the muddy earth of Brazil's despair.

The 70-minute show is inspired by the poem *Cão Sem Plumas*, written in 1950 by the Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo Neto (whose words you hear in English in voiceover) and set along the banks of the Capibaribe River in the northeastern Brazilian state of Pernambuco. Colker and the dancers spent nearly a month tracing the river to the sea and interacting with the people who live there. Indeed, some of the most powerful images in the production are in the film, where you see dancers rolling over acres of parched riverbed or perching in dead trees. This is, remarkably, that rare dance-film hybrid in which the two art forms exist as equal partners instead of rivals for our attention.

*Dog Without Feathers* begins with a rain dance and travels to sugar cane fields and mangrove swamps, visiting grim favelas and local inhabitants along the way. Herons, that most graceful of birds, are represented by mud-covered ballerinas prancing on pointe; aloof, indifferent to the suffering around them.

Throughout, Cláudio Assis's film illustrates a landscape blighted by

environmental damage and demeaning poverty. The patchwork score is a mix of samba, mangue beat, jongo and kuduro — the shout of an aching heart.

Colker's movement language is tribal, ritualistic, animalistic and ferociously graceful. The 14 dancers, so lithe and muscular, crawl across the stage like crabs, sink into the weight of heavy slime or erupt into tightly knit formations to express their defiant humanity in one hulking unified image.

At times the movement feels too repetitive — a case of overstating the obvious — but what brings us round is the strength of the impressive performances and the urgency of Colker's heartfelt ambition to use dance to highlight the inequity of life in her native Brazil.

**Debra Craine**

**Box office: 020 3879 9555, to tomorrow**



MARILYN KINGWILL



**Dance and film are equal partners in Deborah Colker's visceral production**