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CandoCo Dance Company challenge a basic assumption
— in order to dance you must have legs

Dancers who can do

Sophie Constanti

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DAVID TOOLE of CandoCo Dance Company disproves two widely accepted and generally uncontested theories. First, that a dancer is not ready for the professional stage until he or she has clocked up years of training and, second — and most extraordinarily — that in order to dance one must have legs. Toole, a postman until he joined CandoCo in 1992, is an astonishing performer.

Supporting himself on both of his enormous hands, he launches his body in any and every direction with a combination of force, speed and control which makes CandoCo's five able-bodied dancers look almost wimpish.

No one watching *To Please The Desert* — Jodi Falk's duet for Toole and Kuldip Singh-Barmi at the

Queen Elizabeth Hall at the weekend — would describe Toole as physically challenged. From the first quiet moments of the work's opening solo, in which he gives the illusion of growing slowly out of the ground, one arm helping to elevate his torso, the other unfolding upwards in a gesture of simple poignant beauty, Toole succeeds in shattering our preconceptions.

Our fixed views on the limitations of the disabled are suddenly, disconcertingly and thrillingly invalidated. Toole travels across the stage at breakneck speed, fearlessly partners Singh-Barmi in Falk's pas de deux of mutual give and take, catches his fellow performers and, letting his body swing and levitate to magical effect, emerges as the virtuoso of the troupe.

In Emilyn Claid's *Back To Front With Sideshows*, he also reveals a droll and devilish sense of humour, putting the other characters —

especially Singh-Barmi's frolicking molester — in their places with a disapproving look and wagging finger. (Toole's fixed, open, assertive stare is one of the most haunting and memorable aspects of his personality as a dancer.)

Next to Falk's choreography, *Back To Front With Sideshows*, is the most successful piece on a programme of four works. Perhaps this is because Claid does not try to impose any code of conduct upon the six performers. Jon French (a wheelchair user) and Toole are subject to as much unwanted attention and sexual harassment as the other dancers. And all of them fight unashamedly and amusingly for a kind of despotic, ultimately worthless oneupmanship. The result is bawdy, likeably silly anarchism.

Less liberating is Siobhan Davies's *Between The National And The Bristol*, which takes its title from a score by Gavin Bryars, played live by The Smith Quartet. For CandoCo, Davies reproduces the lush phrases of movement which fills the works she makes for her own company. Here they add up to a work which is curiously repressed, and unsatisfyingly polite in tone and manner, maybe — ironically — just too perfect in its integration of CandoCo's dancers.

CandoCo are on a national tour until March 23. Information on 081-694 0903.