

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Sarah Crompton, "NYDC x Oona Doherty: Wall review - a riveting take on British identity,"
The Guardian, July 21, 2024

The Guardian

The Observer Oona Doherty

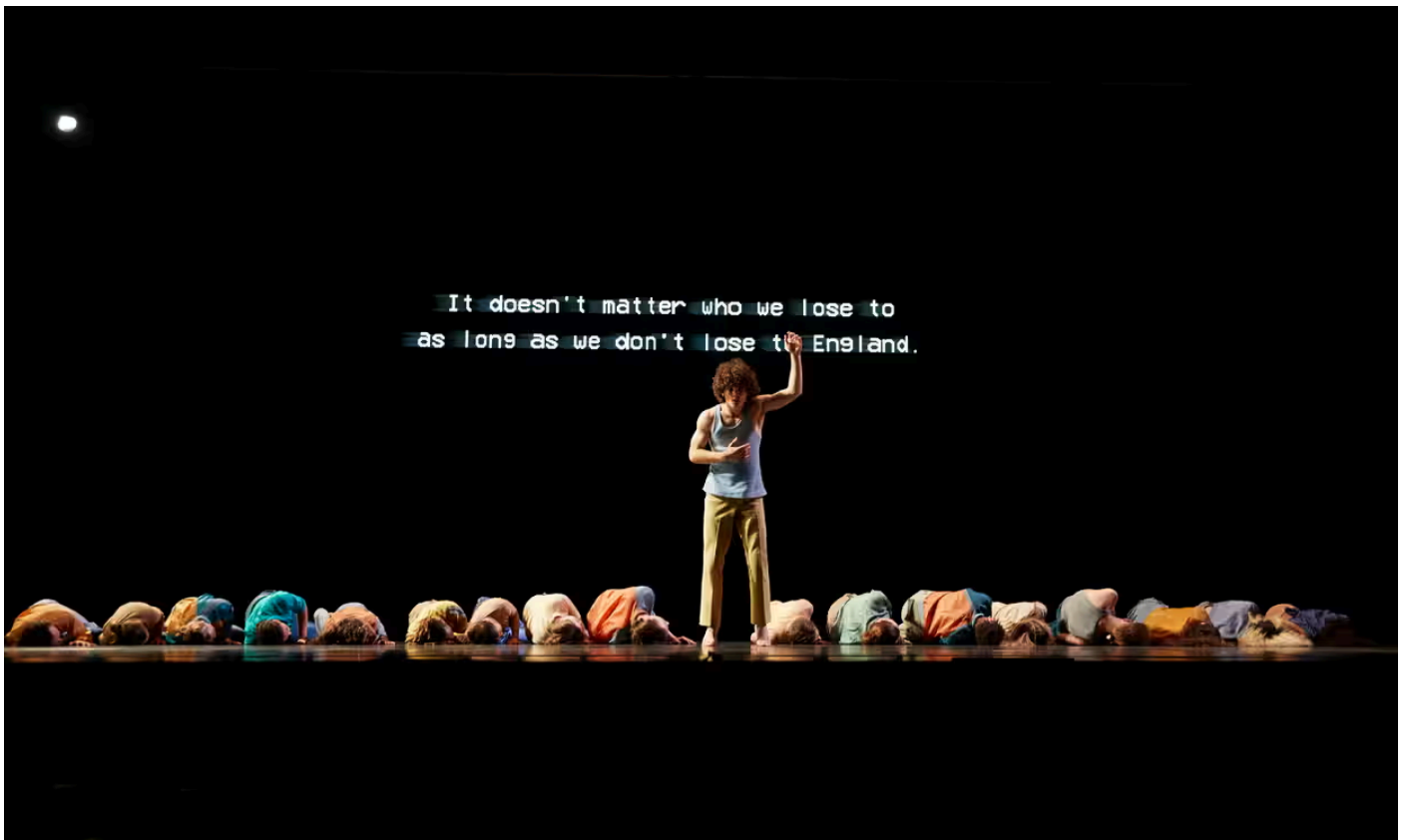
Review

NYDC x Oona Doherty: Wall review - a riveting take on British identity



Sadler's Wells, London

Doherty choreographs England's flagship youth dance company in expressive solos, fragmented motion and beautiful tableaux that go by in a flash



📷 'Sometimes frantic, sometimes calm'... Wall. Photograph: Manuel Vason

Sarah Crompton

Sun 21 Jul 2024 05.00 EDT

There's a brilliantly simple idea that powers the [National Youth Dance Company](#). You put an exceptional choreographer in charge of a group of talented young people, aged 16-24, in the school holidays over a year and see what happens. The results are always fascinating.

Following in the footsteps of dance-makers such as Wayne McGregor, Alesandra Seutin and Russell Maliphant, this year's guest artistic director is the Belfast-based [Oona Doherty](#), and the greatest tribute to [Wall](#) is that it ends too quickly. Just as it draws you into its intensely personal palimpsest of what it is to be British, it's suddenly over.

The style is set before any movement begins, through the score by Mark Leckey, Luca Truffarelli and Shamos (Shane Connolly), inspired by the Big Audio Dynamite track [Union, Jack](#). As the 32 dancers (some of whom stay with the company for two years) sit in three groups on a dimly lit stage, quotations flash on the video screen above them: "All for One"; "You Men of Might"; "Your Country Needs You".

Later, snatches of conversations with the performers and their families are quoted, building a picture from the 60s to the present, full of defining memories of the music that fills so many lives, joys amid the everyday. A Jamiroquai concert. A trip to see the Beatles.

The movement is similarly fragmented, slo-mo detail building to beautifully lit group tableaux, or breaking out into expressive solos, sometimes frantic, sometimes calm. At moments, a number of couples dance together, not quite in harmony, each summoning individuality from within the group. In one extended passage a line of dancers repeatedly fling themselves to the floor, moving gradually forwards from the back of the stage as they crash down on to their hands and scramble back to their feet. They then vary the movement, a chorus line of ragged breathing and precise determination. It's vivid, powerful, slightly obscure. An hour passes in a moment. Riveting.

Wall is touring to [Bold Tendencies, London](#), [Latitude festival, Suffolk](#), and [Curve, Leicester](#), until 29 July