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The Newspaper Edition

Britain

July 02, 2004

Parliamentary Sketch

Lift and spin: dancing to the music of Tim

BY ANN TRENEMAN

THE day began with a clarion call from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee for the Government to develop a national dance strategy.

"I don't think the Government fully appreciates dance," said the Labour MP Frank Doran. I could not believe my ears. For this is the Government that gave us spin and is not spin just another word for pirouette? Get serious, pliés! (Sorry about that: it won't happen again for at least a paragraph.)

The committee's report was produced at a press conference that was followed by a dance performance in the atrium of Portcullis House, the £234 million office building that is linked to Parliament. At the press conference, three male MPs who looked about as supple as lumps of concrete gave heartfelt speeches about how important dance was to Britain. It seems that dance is not just dance but a way to improve our health, reduce the crime rate and increase social inclusiveness.

The event was, against all odds, almost touching. The man whose nameplate now says "Rt Hon Sir Gerald Kaufman" said with something bordering on happiness that it was the committee's best-attended press conference since the one on HMS Cavalier in 1998. Emboldened by this, he began to share. "I am a passionate admirer of what I would call the Broadway form of dance," enthused Sir Gerald.

And, indeed, it was almost showtime. In the atrium, a woman with a bun was handing out dance leaflets to four burly security men, one of whom was carrying a very large gun. They looked at it suspiciously. The leaflet said the "breathtaking atrium" was a natural theatre for dance and that Sadler's Wells Random Dance Company would be celebrating the "complex technology of the body through the inspirational filter of the building".

As you do.

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The performance was to take place around the atrium's two rectangular pools. These look lovely and smooth, and are flanked by 12 fig trees that have been hired at £148,000 for five years to provide MPs with some of the most expensive shade in Britain.

Nine of the thinnest people ever seen at Westminster appeared by the pools. They were bare except for black short-type underpants and white sleeveless T-shirts. The women also had tiny skirts with white fluffy bits stuck to them. The men had fluffy bits stuck to their backs. The leaflet said the costumes had been designed by Ursula Bombshell. MPs stopped to stare, shocked to see so much fluff on open display as it is always hidden here.

It is thought that this was the first specially choreographed dance at Westminster. If so, let's hope it is not the last. There were splits and lifts and general running to and fro. It was the greatest show of exhibitionism that I have seen since, well, since the chamber the day before.

To the chamber then for Education Questions. Everyone was in boring old suits with no visible fluff. Tim Collins, the Tories' new education spokesman, said that he wanted to be friends with the Labour front bench. A shadow passed quickly over the faces of Charles Clarke and his education team.

"We are genuinely willing on this side of the House, despite our differences on other education matters, to work with you," said Mr Collins with great earnestness. The Labour front bench used its legendary discipline not to stick out their tongues at him.

It seems the Tories want to help Labour draw up a new school curriculum for 14 to 19-year-olds. The idea is to make it so interesting that no one will play truant. Well, if there is one place that knows about truancy it is Westminster. I do hope they do not make dancing on the head of a pin compulsory for all.

Commentary: Poor bloody infantry still key to victory
Graphic: British troops in Northern Ireland and around the world