



John Belushi . . . spoilt fat slob or genius of comic anarchy?

yet find industrial action in the schools. From being mainly comedy — though always reflecting the chalk face of staff-room life — the latest series is tackling some of the real educational issues of the day.

Writer Jim Eldridge is right in thinking that many of the Baker notions are pretty funny anyway. But he has set himself problems in dealing with complicated issues in half-hour playlets. Sad, really, that the eccentric absurdities of the processes of "opting out" couldn't be given a full airing. Will those King Street parents continue their campaign?

Eldridge doesn't seem too keen on parents. Could he be a teacher? And there's no doubt about his views on education. The brief snatch of dialogue between the parent devoted to the school that's for closure and the head of the school saved this week from the chop, made a stronger political point than

most documentaries. Furthermore, you can always tell when some educational notion is a baddie — the dread music mistress, Mrs Rudd, will be supporting it. King Street Juniors is required listening for anyone in schooling; I hope that these serious issues won't put off listeners seeking a giggle — the performances and the jokes are still sharp enough.

Accounts of earlier conflicts in Smith of Aliwal (Radio 4, Thursday), a portrait of one of those 19th century Empire-builders whose self-satisfied courageous and obdurate personalities set modern teeth on edge. In the days when an army career really did mean killing people round the world, Harry Smith was posted to Europe, South America, India and Africa.

In Spain, he picked up a young wife — as chronicled, more soppily, by Georgette Heyer. In India, he defeated the Sikhs. In South Africa, Smith didn't do

too well as a statesman, but left his name all over the place. Well-researched by David Bean, and presented by him in a laid-back style that implied he wasn't too fond of his subject.

Last week's *The Peace Of Pocahontas* was far more sympathetic towards its subject, the Algonquin princess whose partiality for Englishmen, as well as her peaceable nature, accounted for the lull in the struggle between her people and the new settlers in Virginia. Compiled from contemporary sources by Morag Hood, the feature counterpointed the contrasting attitudes of the honourable original inhabitants and their lying and brutal invaders.

Pocahontas, herself, sweetly played by Sylvestra Le Touzel, rescued one Englishman, was kidnapped by another, married a third, converted to Christianity, had a son, visited London, was feted at court and died, poor girl, at 22. A baddies v. goodies,

The Belgians are getting into a lather about choreographer Mark Morris. They're lucky to have him, says Sophie Constanti

Tripping the hype fantastic

Dance

CONTROVERSY has been the order of the day since American choreographer Mark Morris and his company of 24 dancers took up residence at the Théâtre de la Monnaie last autumn.

For the Belgians, Morris's third production — *Mythologies* — is simply an excuse for another bout of petty disagreement between French and Flemish factions, whose comments revolve more around Morris's nationality than his talents as a choreographer.

"Mark Morris, go home," post-premiere advice from *Le Soir*, was countered the following day by the Flemish press requesting that "Mark Morris, stay".

Meanwhile, British and American critics return from Brussels unanimous in their praise for the artist confronted by a generation of dance fans not only weaned on Maurice Béjart's kitsch for 20 years but determined that his memory shall live on.

Mythologies takes its title from Roland Barthes's book of essays on the semiology of popular culture: Morris has chosen Soap-powders and Detergents, Striptease and The World of Wrestling for the three sections of a full-length work in which he reveals an acute understanding of Barthes's detached and lucid observations.

In translating these essays to readable dance theatre, Morris stamps each section of the trilogy with his own impressions of the commercially inspired fantasies and legends to which we subscribe.

In Soap-powders and Detergents, for instance, he muses on the "whiter than white" theme of so many washing powder advertisements. To Herschel Garfein's libretto — a copywriter's tuneful text for brand names Fab, Lava and Era — the dancers bring alive the industry's penchant for soft focus imagery whereby tackling the family wash becomes an almost romantic activity.

The arm and leg movements of a floorbound corps de ballet suggest

the phoney whirr and tumble of a collection of front-loading machines; a housewife, ghoulishly mummified with a pair of sheets, reclaims her preferred powder in spite of the familiar offers of money.

A single dancer running across the stage in Isadora Duncan fashion, with sheet billowing in the wind, alludes to the ideological purity of early modern dance.

In Striptease each of the eight dancers is, as Barthes puts it, "An object in disguise".

Rob Besserer is a hedonistic cowboy, Kraig Patterson a transvestite devil woman, Tina Fehlandt the obligatory leather-and-chain fetishist, Donald Mouton a phallic-inches-obsessed Orton lookalike, and Morris himself, as dope addict, alcoholic and pervert all rolled into one, manages to defy any attempt at stereotyping.

In the final parade of naked bodies, Morris continues the tradition of the strip show as something that always promises more than it delivers. By making that the whole point of the exercise, each artificial gesture of frenzied lust becomes more hilarious than the one before.

Here, it seems, is a choreographer with an eye for the countless obscenities surrounding us and an ability to drag them out of the gutter without once offending his audience.

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