





REVIEWS

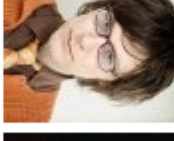
Review.


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 It opened with a lone dance under a square light, moving with a single board of flexible wood.
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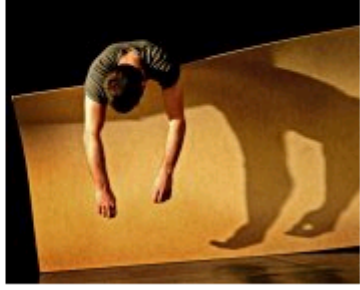
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LATEST REVIEW

Review.



Structure and Sadness - Lucy Guerin Inc
 Genre: Dance
 Date: 20 October 2006
 ReviewedBy: Mark

Structure and Sadness opened with a lone dance under a square light, moving with a single board of flexible wood. I found myself marveling how a trained body can make such simple movements beautiful to watch. The dancer had clearly trained *with* the wood - he was in a real sense dancing with it, conforming his movements to its flexibility, shape and weight.

The theme of human bodies relating to objects continued throughout the choreography. In its most dramatic form, the 6 dancers spent the first half of the show constructing a precarious, abstract wooden edifice which looked a combination between a house of cards and a domino display. It was fascinating to watch the dancers construct it, and it made me reflect on how watching people do manual work is such a universal past-time: why else do companies provide wooden viewing portals at construction sites? Each time the dancers added another layer to the construction or began to dance next to it, I feared that a small mistake would bring the whole thing down. And then, midway

through the performance, the inevitable collapse came.

Structure and Sadness had its world premiere in the Malthouse Theatre from 19-21 October as part of the 2006 Melbourne International Arts Festival. It had been devised by choreographer/director Lucy Guerin and the dancers over a 20 month development period, which included input by composer Gerald Mai and lighting design by the Bluebottle team (which were both excellent in the finished piece).

Structure and Sadness took as its theme the collapse of Melbourne's Westgate bridge in 1970, an accident which killed and injured many local workers. The piece was in many ways a simple one (its title is exquisitely apt), which was its real strength. Accidental tragedies like the Westgate collapse, and those inflicted by humans in Kuta Beach, Bali and the Twin Towers, New York, are too often followed by hyperbole, exhaustive analysis and fruitless speculation. Somehow all that "coverage" turns the simple depth of grief into something quite different, and we can become simultaneously numbed and frightened as a result. Guerin's work gave me the basics of this tragedy: human bodies; man-made constructions which are at the same time hard and unforgiving, yet precarious and fragile; and the emptiness of a sudden, irreversible loss. The result was at the same time moving and exciting and I don't think I will look at the Westgate bridge in the same way again.

And then there was the dancing itself. I noticed that 5 out of 6 of the dancers trained at the Victorian College of the Arts, and many of them have worked with local group Chunky Move. There is a distinct "Melbourne" modern dance style which, to me, is characterized by treating the body as a cross between some sort of machine and a rag doll. In the past I have, at times, found this style to be slightly predictable, but in this case I found that it suited the piece perfectly, and the whole group seemed very grounded in the Guerin's physical vocabulary.

This isn't to say the piece didn't have its weaknesses. At one point, sound clips from radio coverage of the actual event was played. Although this imparted useful information, the intrusion of overt emotion from the newscaster was somewhat jarring. I also found presentation of the grief of the workers' wives somewhat literal and sentimentalized. But nonetheless, an impressive show. Bravo!

And thanks to the cast, crew and Malthouse for putting on a relaxed, informative Q&A session following the show.

PS: Guerin's next piece will be seen very shortly as part of *Chasmisa 4°C/Setting* at the Malthouse, October 25-28.

Review by [Mark Tregonning](#)



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