

Metro Arts & Culture

You used to play it on daggy family holidays. Now ping-pong is a hit with the cool crowd. **Caroline Clements** looks at the revival of tennis' dorky brother.

A couple of Sundays ago, five-piece Gold Coast band Operator Please won an Aria award for their hit song titled *Just a Song About Ping Pong*. And while it is "just a song", turns out they're not the only ones with ping-pong fever. This became apparent to me when I began a new job recently at a graphic design studio where the job criteria included ping-pong. I weighed things up – though I was eager to get the job, I was not confident of my ping-pong skills. I hoped I had the balls, so to speak. The office pong table spoke for itself: these guys are serious about their pong, like many others they are packed full of pride for a game that is fast superseding the daggy old pool table.

Recently, ping-pong has been enjoying a resurgence in popularity. Somehow this geeky indoor mini tennis has become hip. While it used to be played in people's basements, today the ping-pong table is the social meeting point, the centre of attention; the winner is the hero. It has created a subculture that has combined hip with social consciousness and artistic aesthetic. Ping-pong has made sporty look cool to a bunch that wouldn't be caught dead in a football jersey.

Ping-pong events are now being held all over Melbourne, many of them in pubs. A couple of weeks ago I went to a party where the dear pong heads I work with held a night in the dark basement of a pub. They coated the edge of the table, the balls, the bats, the balls and some of the walls in glow-in-the-dark paint, turned on the lights and pong was on!



French Prix d'auteur and a 1994 choreographic fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts.

Originally from Adelaide, Guerin moved to New York in 1989 for seven years before returning to Australia to make her base in Melbourne.

In 2005, *The New Yorker* magazine's dance writer, Joan Acocella, wrote that she wished Guerin would move back to New York. But Guerin says conditions made it too hard for her to work there. She was unable to get funding to pay her dancers properly, which meant that rehearsal time was limited.

She says New York suited her when she was young when there was a lot she wanted to express. "Now I need more time to explore new directions. Funding is better in Australia, although it doesn't compare with Europe."

She says contemporary dance is thriving in Australia and she is happy that the Melbourne Festival director, Kristy Edmunds, is committed to the art form. She says support for the arts in Victoria is much stronger than in Sydney. "People see the arts as part of the community's identity, which is why dance is so strong in Melbourne."

Guerin is looking to take time

off next year and travel around Europe to catch up on new developments in dance. But then she wants to come back and work on two new pieces.

These include a work that would reunite her with the *Tense Dave* team from 2003 — theatre director Michael Kantor and her partner and Chunky Move director, Gideon Obarzanek.

But there is another ambition. "I'm keen to see a purpose-built theatre for dance developed in Melbourne," she says.

Aether opens at the Malthouse Theatre at 7.30pm tomorrow until Saturday. Book on 9685 5111.

Lucy Guerin (seated) with dancers Stephanie Lake (left) and Harriet Ritchie.

PICTURE: ROB BANKS

The Age, Metro – Wednesday 28 November
Robin Usher interview with Lucy Guerin with photo

A/PR/15