DANCE
Aether
By Lucy Guerin. Lucy Guerin Inc. North
Melbourne Town Hall, March 15. Tickets:
March 27.

THERE'S an irony about Lucy Guerin's use of archaic spelling for the
title of her new dance work, Aether.
It elicits connotations of pure air, stars
and eternity from classical or romantic
literature and metaphysics.

But there is little room for romanticis-
ing here as Guerin plunges her audience
into an entirely contemporary world
informed by modern astronomy and
bombarded by information of every kind.
The ensuing overload is not a mere
syndrome but an epidemic.

What seems an innocuous beginning —
five dancers sitting among shreds of
newspaper, folding it into pellets and
strange shapes — is soon disturbed by
sensations of invasion and disorientation.

This is first manifested in Michaela
French's motion graphics: faded, lolly-
coloured text and circuit boards against a
pale acid-green ground. With sudden
shifts in Gerald Mair's sound score, the
dancers rise and articulate swift connec-
tions with their arms across their torsos
— like brain synapses — and execute
complex, multi-dimensional trajectories
to the ends of their limbs.

In the audience, eyes dart from text to
bodies, to single words, while the text
mushrooms and spills across the space, in
tune with noisy, mechanical sound, colo-
ouring the dancers' bodies.

And just when you think you can't
handle any more — the electronic im-
agery soon loses theatrical value — enter
lighting artist Keith Tucker. His wonder-
ful projected light throws a soft glow over
the space and a long band of light at the
back, as dancers settle into ingeniously
crafted duets, using small points, like
fingertips or shoulders, to connect.

Crackly excerpts from La Traviata help
to highlight the body's desire, and ca-
pacity, to make a direct personal impact
—not replicating strings of information
— although isolation, futility and diffi-
culties appear too.

At this point Guerin and the dancers
reach into startling new territory, com-
bining wordless vocalising — open-throated,
muffled, high pitched whimpering — and a
mix of robotic gestures and rubbery facial
expressions to generate Aether's most
compelling section. Dancers control one
another with economical robotic gestures
— folding, twisting, lifting and dumping in
many wacky ways.

Guerin's humour is delicious here, but it's
underscored with sadness. Anthony Hamil-
ton is a loser among a bunch of youngsters.
They stare at him dispassionately as he
launches into an extravagant aria of
frustration for body and voice, trying to be
noticed, understood. It is a masterly, sad-
dering dance of desperation, a stand-out
among the stunning finesse and daring
displayed by such a champion as Byron
Perry, and by Kirstie McCracken, Kyle
Kremer Pothoven and Lee Serle.

Lee Christofis