

Dancing that goes to a dark place

By Anthony Venutolo

September 18, 2009, 4:34PM

NEW YORK -- Partway through "Corridor," a dance theater work that Australian choreographer **Lucy Guerin** presented Wednesday at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, we hear a song about a woman steaming in a shower. She feels her consciousness begin to peel away, and audience members watching the show may feel the same. Guerin asks so many provocative questions in this archly conceptual piece performed by her company, Lucy Guerin Inc., that it's as if she's shampooing your head, fingers massaging deeper and deeper into the scalp until suddenly she's actually in your brain. If Guerin's next piece is as stimulating, viewers may suffer permanent damage. She doesn't care. Hoping to build critical momentum, her company will present another work, "Structure and Sadness," at Dance Theater Workshop, Oct. 1 to 3.

The first thing to note about "Corridor" is the space. Spectators sit in two rows facing one another across an aisle. The "stage" is this narrow tongue of linoleum in between, stretching from one side of the large room to the other. Of course, it's a metaphor -- the theater is supposed to be a pathway carrying viewers magically into a different world. But here the corridor doesn't seem to lead anywhere. At first, mirrored panels block each end like stoppers. A string of low-hanging lamp shades compresses the space from above.

This unconventional arrangement challenges Guerin to make attenuated patterns, spreading her six dancers along the aisle, or jamming them together to clog it. The layout magnifies our perceptions of nearness and distance, and frequently makes it impossible to see everything at once.

Movements run the gamut, from micro-tremors and deliberately placed fingers to spastic convulsions and cheerleader kicks. These contemporary dancers even employ balletic chasses and glissades - the aisle is long, and those steps do travel. The dance vocabulary seems less important, though, than the text.

Some commentary suggests an image, as when Kyle Kremerskothen says of Harriet Ritchie: "She's trying to claw something out of her stomach." Even more important, when Lee Serle takes a microphone, he gives the others "Simon says" instructions: "I wish you would pray to me." He delivers these commands from the far end of the aisle. By the end of the dance, this long-distance relationship begins to seem metaphysical, as his voice booms out of the darkness giving God-like orders impossible to fulfill: "Put an end to world hunger. .â€....â€.... Make sure old people are never lonely."

By then, the dance has grown raucous and intense, with the glass panels rolling back and forth down the aisle, trapping dancers in

compartments, slicing the corridor like a vein or pressing its human contents toward one end as if the corridor were a giant syringe. The lights go funny, too, with giant cursors passing along the outside scanning us. All this activity reflects a heightened level of emotion, as the dancers worry aloud about the way their bodies look, and whether they're getting sick. Isolated in the corridor, talking to no one in particular, Byron Perry has a meltdown.

Ultimately the shut-off corridor is a private space: a place for wishes, fantasies and fears and, in the darkness, an existential No Man's Land.

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