

## GRACE NOTES



**Lucy Guerin**  
Choreographer

### **What's the worst thing a reviewer has said about your work?**

A reviewer of *Zero* [a 1999 commission for Chunky Move] said: "It crassly invites speculation that they are mimicking the jerky, restricted movements of the physically disabled and the postures of the mentally disturbed."

### **From where do you derive your creative inspiration?**

I find it very interesting to try to realise abstract ideas in dance. But I also find visual inspirations very important, like the way something looks, or the mood or emotions it provokes. So a film or a design or an exhibition, or maybe a landscape, often sets me off searching.

### **How do you overcome creative block?**

I write notes or go to see other work, or I try to forget about the work for a while, and I also invite my peers to come and take a look at what I've done up to that point and try to get some feedback.

### **Was there a particular experience that set you on your path as an artist?**

Not one defining moment. I had that little girl's dream of becoming a dancer and I somehow – probably from my mother – got this idea that being an artist was very special.

### **If you had not become a choreographer, what might you have done?**

I always wanted to be a writer, actually, but I do find sitting alone at the computer for long periods quite maddening.

### **What's the most difficult production you've worked on?**

I went to New York and did a duet for Mikhail Baryshnikov [in 1999]. I put a lot of pressure on myself because he's a very famous man. At the dress rehearsal I realised that the lighting and the set element were really terrible and spoiled the piece, and so I had to ask the designer to change it.

### **Which piece have you most enjoyed working on and why?**

*The Ends of Things*, which I did for the Melbourne Festival in 2000. It was just a very satisfying piece to work on because it had a very clear structure and I worked on a mix of character development and abstract dance.

### **What is the difference between choreographing dancers and actors, as you did for *The Aunt's Story*?**

You can't just ask actors to move like you can with dancers; they have to really know why their character would be doing that. I'm used to dancers just doing what I say, then finding the sense after, so it was back-to-front for me.

### **You are known for your use of humour in dance – how do you do it?**

It just kind of arrives if a dancer makes a mistake or your own sense of humour just presents itself. It's spontaneous. But when I first started choreographing, I had a quirky sort of style and people often found it quite funny. I never really intended it to be and I used to get a bit annoyed, but I realised that it was a really strong way to communicate with people.

### **What are the particular challenges you face in choreographing your new work, *Melt*?**

I've given myself a very simple subject matter in this piece and it's extremes of temperature, and so the main challenge I'm facing at the moment is to make this into an interesting piece of theatre. I think I've made some interesting sections but to get them to add up to something greater than its parts is a particular challenge.

### **What do you like and dislike about yourself?**

I'm fundamentally a happy person and I feel very lucky, so I quite like that about myself. I have a tendency to get overwhelmed by an accumulation of small details and I'll crawl under the doona and lie in a fetal position, which is a bit of an overreaction. I buckle under sometimes. And I also bite my nails and I don't maintain enough outside interests. I can go on endlessly about the dislikes, but I think that's enough.

### **What's the meaning of life?**

I don't believe that we're put here for a higher purpose, so I think that we have to create our own meaning – and we need to find an interpretation of life that sustains us, whatever that may be. And for me acceptance of others is one of the most difficult but one of the most important keys to our existence.

Anne Lim

The Lucy Guerin Company premieres *Melt* at Chunky Move Studios, Melbourne, from next Thursday. *The Aunt's Story* opens in Brisbane on the same day. *Melt* and *The Ends of Things* tour to the US as part of the US National Dance Project next March.