



Cool Moves

JONATHAN MARSHALL talks to **LUCY GUERIN** about her latest dance work, **MELT**. It's all about "the relationship between temperature and temperament," she says.

Choreographer Lucy Guerin has established a reputation for herself as a master of minimalistic abstraction, with works like *Heavy* (1998), which dealt with sleep states. Her dance has a kind of devilish funk; of bodies turning into and out of themselves according to a subliminal logic which can nevertheless be very affective. Guerin has also explored explicitly dramatic scenarios through her work - notably with *The Ends Of Things* (2000), which followed a series of endings initiated by an introverted, shy man. Her latest production - *Melt* - is therefore in some sense a return to this earlier, somewhat more abstract approach, using, in Lucy's words: "the relationship between temperature and temperament as a starting point for the movement".

Guerin explains that she is "rebellious somewhat" against the linear, narrative ambience she adhered to for *The Ends Of Things*. "I felt like that show really made sense," she relates. "It was closely structured and it didn't have any loose ends. In terms of what was going on, everything was there for a purpose and a reason." The sense of some kind of implicit logic unfolding within the choreography has always been a strong element within Guerin's work, of dancers aligning themselves with respect to each other according to rules scored in the physics of planetary bodies or some other unseen force.

Lucy does however observe that, "often I find that when I'm making a work, I craft a number of sections. Once they are put together though, this *other* amazing thing might happen. So it's really not just about those elements being strung together, but that they make up a greater whole - especially in terms of the tone or mood of the piece. And that's really exciting, to find something that I wasn't expecting unfolding within the studio. So I've left a bit more room for that in this production." For all of the apparent precision and geometric logic of Guerin's choreography, it remains rich in evoking the sense that something more has been set into play, shifting from deadpan comedy to weirdly affective distance, gentle rhythms and more. There is always

room for audiences to bring their own concerns and feelings to the work and so interpret it in their own fashion.

Guerin observes that this has influenced her in her selection of music (composed for *Melt* by sparse, atmospheric glitch-funk master Franc Tétaz). "I have tended to choose that kind of music because it allows the emotionality of the dance to influence it," Guerin explains, "rather than the other way around. If you present an audience with something sparse and simple, then they will bring their own emotions to it. That's not to say that I don't want to direct what those emotions might be. Personally though, I find that if I am bombarded with overtly dramatic or hysterical dancing or music, it leaves me as an audience member with nothing to do. I can acknowledge what the dance is about, but that's all really. Whereas if something is more subtle, I can go looking." Lucy may therefore use ideas like states of temperature or sleeping as an inspiration for her choreography, but her work cannot be simply reduced to such references. It has the same kind of richness one can find in some of Kraftwerk's music, Mondrian's painting, or the clipped dialogue of film noir. To quote Bob Dylan: "*Something's goin' on, but you don't quite know what it is - do you, Mr Jones?*"

Guerin's style lies unambiguously within the realm of contemporary dance, drawing on the post-World War II styles sometimes classified as postmodernist. Her choreography nevertheless has the sharp, minimalistic precision and the attention to clean lines which was the defining characteristic of influential New York City Ballet choreographer, neo-classicist George Balanchine. I suggest to her that there is therefore some kinship between her work and that of Balanchine's successors, such as NYC Ballet choreographer Christopher Wheeldon (whose *Mercurial Manoeuvres* featured in the recent Australian Ballet trilogy *United*). Although Lucy points out that, "I haven't actually seen a lot of Balanchine myself," she nevertheless concedes that she is also, "very interested in

purity of form and in starting from a very clear, structural idea, and Balanchine's work does have a very clear style or overall aesthetic. Even so, my work doesn't really look *anything* like his."

The body shapes which Lucy herself tends to focus upon have much more in common with the pointed articulations and spiky dynamism found in the work of companies like Gideon Obarzanek's *Chunky Move* or Philip Adams' balletlab (with both of whom Guerin and several of her dancers have collaborated). "In *Melt*, I'm working with a lot of very intricate hand movements and finger details," she explains. "I always have looked at that in my choreography" - as with her commission for Chunky Move's *Bodyparts* (1999). "I'm interested in how joints and bones intersect, and fingers are very good for that kind of exploration. So there is a lot of connecting of fingers to elbows, to knees and to each other to form these lattices." Although Guerin tends to eschew the break-dance influences found within Obarzanek's work, her dancers can nevertheless be found on occasion tying themselves into intricate origami on the ground.

Even so, Guerin's own choreography has a more lingering, almost photographic style of pausing and rhythm than either Obarzanek or Adams—a quality which she explains helps to create "a certain tension" in the movement and the emotional dynamics produced by it. The extremely fast, aggressive shifts which one can observe in the movement crafted by her peers - "that random, crazy sort of chaos," as Lucy describes it - is not a feature of her own style. "I enjoy watching that kind of material," she observes, "but generally things in my own choreography are more well-defined. When I work on that kind of stuff myself in the studio... it's just not me!" Like thawing ice, Guerin's crystalline choreography proceeds at its own pace.

Melt is on at 7.30pm at *Chunky Move Studios, Sturt Street, this Thursday 19th to Sunday 29th September.*
Bookings: 9527 4876.