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DANCE

Fire and ice

Lucy Guerin goes to extremes with her return to the New York stage

By **Gia Kourlas**

Lucy Guerin's ideas for dances enter her imagination like bright flashes of light. She thinks of them as sparks. "Most of my work starts with just a little visual image that captures my interest," she says. "Then I try to unfold that into something dramatic and emotional."

In the case of *Melt*, one of two dances she will present at Dance Theater Workshop beginning Thursday 10, Guerin's point of departure was ice. The duet for Ros Warby and Stephanie Lake explores—on both a physical and emotional level—the sequential rise of temperature from freezing cold to boiling hot.

"I had this idea of a white stage," Guerin says. "The women were going to be topless, wearing one ice skirt that gradually melted throughout the piece. Then I wanted everything to gradually close in, until there was just a pinpoint of projected red remaining. It would have been fantastic! Unfortunately, I couldn't raise the money." She laughs. "Fancy that."

Guerin, who was born in Adelaide, Australia, but now lives in Melbourne, spent much of the '90s based in New York; in 1997, she won a Bessie for her piece *Two Lies*. "Living in New York came at a time in my life when I was beginning to

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choreograph," she recalls. "It was very exciting—I think you really forge strong connections with people in that kind of an environment. And also, because it's such a big place, I was able to be anonymous; I think that allowed me to not worry too much about what people think."

Melt is typical of Guerin's technique—transforming an austere idea into a dance of subtle power. Ultimately, she replaced the notion of an ice skirt with video projec-



SPACE INVADERS Trevor Patrick, center, faces missed opportunities in *The Ends*.

tions. As the dancers stand close to one another, their mood shifts from cold to hot; video footage is screened directly onto their bodies, dotting their hands with falling snowflakes or flashing bolts of heat lightning on their arms.

"Once I started working with the dancers—and this always happens to me—I got much more interested in the movement," she says. "I didn't really care so much about the visual set elements that I had originally been attached to. My work always comes down to tiny little details. In *Melt*, the movement became focused on the arms and the fingers, and that, for me, was the

most consuming part about it."

The Ends of Things, the other dance on the program, is vastly different; unlike *Melt*, it features a loose narrative, which centers on Trevor Patrick, who portrays a lonely, nervous man living in solitude in a structure that resembles a one-room house. As he progresses through his mundane morning routine (brushing his teeth, going to the bathroom), Patrick creates a characterization that is at once

haunting and funny. A sound score by Franc Tetaz mirrors his fastidious activities, and his missed opportunities are represented by three dancers who perform outside his structure. Eventually, they enter his space and destroy his boundaries.

The work changed dramatically from its first conception—a dance about multiple endings, which originated from an idea by Jad McAdam, an Australian DJ and

composer. Guerin was planning on collaborating with him, but in 2000, he died unexpectedly. "It was terrible," she says. "We only had worked together once, but I really felt stimulated by his aesthetic."

For Guerin, the decision to make the dance at all wasn't easy; apart from McAdam's death, she experienced trouble developing the piece in its early stages. "There was that fear that it wasn't going to work anyway," she says with a laugh. "I spent about four weeks in the studio trying to come up with endings, but I couldn't get anything to look like an end! You need to have a beginning and a middle first."

The result is a dance that can be admired by novices for its narrative clarity and by more experimental minds for its clever adherence to a rigid structure. "I worked a lot with the idea of the ends of the body," she says. "There's a lot of circling of the feet and the hands. Then, I added the narrative, which gave me a form to contain smaller endings. But as far as making the piece, I thought, What's the alternative? You don't do it? That seems just as bad in some ways. You have to push on. We went ahead with it, and I was very glad that we did."

Lucy Guerin Company performs at DTW Thursday 10 through Sunday 13.



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LUCY GUERIN COMPANY

Watching Lucy Guerin's dances is like looking through a microscope at ice crystals or single-cell organisms, except that the subjects are human. In "Melt," Stephanie Lake and Ros Warby move in a projected rectangle of light. They quiver, split apart, hug, and make faces of comfort or rage as the sound gets more urgent and the light gets brighter. "The Ends of Things," which had its début in Guerin's native Australia, focusses on a man in the last days of his lonely life, played with affecting dejectedness by Trevor Patrick. As he performs daily tasks, three dancers enlarge upon them by echoing his actions, treating him as if he were a puppet and finally crowding him out of his house and taking over his memories themselves. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. April 10-12 at 7 and April 13 at 2.)