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THE SPOTLIGHT

By [Christopher Reilly](#) [Email the author](#) September 30, 2011

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Bridge Span's Collapse Underscores 'Structure' Dance Performance

Choreographer Lucy Guerin's modern dance piece, which will be performed Friday and Saturday in Clayton, explores the human response to epic tragedy.

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About this column: Reviews, previews and observations about the arts scene in Clayton and Richmond Heights.

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Which is your favorite modern dance piece? [Tell us in the comments.](#)

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A dream turned into a nightmare Oct. 15, 1970, when a span of the [West Gate Bridge](#) in Melbourne, Australia, collapsed during construction. Approximately 2,000 tons of steel came crashing to earth, taking the lives of 35 workers in Victoria's worst-ever industrial accident.

The tragedy became the subject of *Structure and Sadness*, a modern dance piece by award-winning choreographer [Lucy Guerin](#) that will be presented at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday at [Clayton's Edison Theatre](#).

The work explores the resiliency of the human spirit and the physical, emotional and community rebuilding required after tragedy.

"I remember being told about the collapse by a teacher, and I remember being very upset," Guerin said. "When I moved to Melbourne in '88, I wanted to do a new work on bridges, and I made the connection. It's the first time I used a real event. I usually work more in the abstract."

Structure and Sadness debuted in 2006 at the [Melbourne International Arts Festival](#) and went on to win several awards, including an [Australian Green Room award](#) for best choreography, a [Helmppmann Award](#) for best dance work and an [Australian Dance Award](#) for best performance by a company.

During the performance, the dancers align cards in a row like standing dominoes. The cards get larger and larger until a building of cards has been constructed at the end of the line. When the first card is tipped, it strikes the next and creates a chain reaction that concludes when the falling cards reach a large construction, causing it to tumble to the ground. It is both graceful and horrific.

"They have to build it, but they still have to dance," Guerin said. "It takes about 20 minutes. There have been accidents where they've been tipped early, but only small sections have fallen. It's quite nerve-racking."

To choreograph *Structure and Sadness*, Guerin studied and explored the principles of construction for inspiration. "It deals with compression, suspension, buckling, shearing, tension and, finally, failure. Those became the principles."

Guerin said a subsequent investigation revealed the accident could have been avoided. "A number of factors contributed to the collapse," Guerin said. "A lot of safety regulations have come about because of that accident."

Her approach involves a combination of planning and improvisational dancing.

“I do a little of both,” Guerin said. “I usually have an idea of what I want to accomplish in the studio. I create a process that fits my theme, but it will change in the studio.”

After a brief U.S. tour of *Structure and Sadness*, Guerin will return to Australia, where her work will begin anew.

“I'm going back to Melbourne to work on a new piece called *Weather*. How it effects our lives. It's on the news constantly, and it's becoming more and more our responsibility.”

WHAT	<i>Structure and Sadness</i> dance performance
WHEN	8 p.m. Friday and Saturday
WHERE	Edison Theatre at Washington University in Clayton
TICKETS	Order online at Metrotix or by calling 314-935-6543

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