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Australian dancers examine a different bridge collapse

by [Euan Kerr](#), Minnesota Public Radio

October 7, 2011

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Minneapolis, Minn. — The people of Minneapolis are sadly familiar with how a major bridge collapse and accompanying loss of life can open an emotional wound in the community. Now, an Australian dance company is readying a performance that shows how such a tragedy had a similar impact decades ago on the other side of the world.

"Structure and Sadness," by the Lucy Guerin dance company, is inspired by the Westgate Bridge disaster 40 years ago in Melbourne. The dancers performing at the Walker Art Center will build a huge structure during the work - and then bring it down.

As choreographer Lucy Guerin recently ran some of her dancers through an extraordinary sequence of twists and gestures in rehearsal, she spoke about of her motivation for the work.

"It was Australia's worst industrial accident, and it collapsed during its construction in 1970," Guerin said. Thirty-five construction workers died.

Usually Guerin's work is more abstract. But she said she's fascinated by bridges, both as real things, and as metaphors, and how humans are deeply invested in bridges as a result.

"We have a sense that they are infallible, and we feel very safe within them," she said. "But when I was researching bridge collapses there were hundreds of them. I mean it seems that they collapse often. Well, not often, but they do collapse. They are not infallible."

There are three sections to "Structure and Sadness." First, as the dance begins, there is the construction. This is where the performers actually begin to prop together little boards.

"It's like a house of cards really," said Guerin. "And it starts off with these really small cards and they get bigger and bigger. And the structure itself takes up most of the stage and it's built during the dance."

"And it ends with quite a tall, seven-layer tower," says dancer Kyle Kremerskothen.



Guerin and Company

Building the tower is dancer Kremerskothen's responsibility. It ends up almost two stories high. Grids of neon lights along the back wall suggest an even bigger structure. Every performer builds when she or he is not dancing.

And then it comes down. The stage shakes as the sound rumbles through the piles of cards littering the ground.

"I have to say I find, sitting in the audience every night, there's a lot of tension and a lot of fear, I guess," says Guerin.

Guerin says the dance then explores mourning and recovery, moving on to rebuilding with hope for the future. Ultimately, Kremerskothen believes it ends on an up-note.

"It kind of talks to the resilience of humankind I guess, after that," he said. "So there is something to look forward to after the collapse."



Structure

"Structure and Sadness" was first performed in October 2006. That's almost a year before the I-35W bridge collapse on Aug. 1 2007. However, Guerin and her company know it's inevitable that Minnesotans will reflect on the local disaster as they see the piece.

"I don't know how it will be received," Guerin admits.

She knows the wound in Minneapolis is very recent. Staff at the Walker said they struggled with how to publicize the performance, knowing it will be seen as a healing opportunity by some, but possibly offensive to others.

Guerin said in Australia emotions were raw about the Westgate Bridge disaster even 35 years after it happened. She said every community where they have performed the piece since has seen a reflection of something that has happened locally. In New York it was the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Dancer Kremerskothen said he is eager to talk to Minneapolis audience members after the show. He said Guerin has created an open-ended experience.

"It kind of allows you to kind of bring your own thing to it," he said. "It doesn't tell you how to feel about something which is kind of special especially in a dance work."



Tower-building

"Structure and Sadness" runs through Saturday evening. [For show information.](#)

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