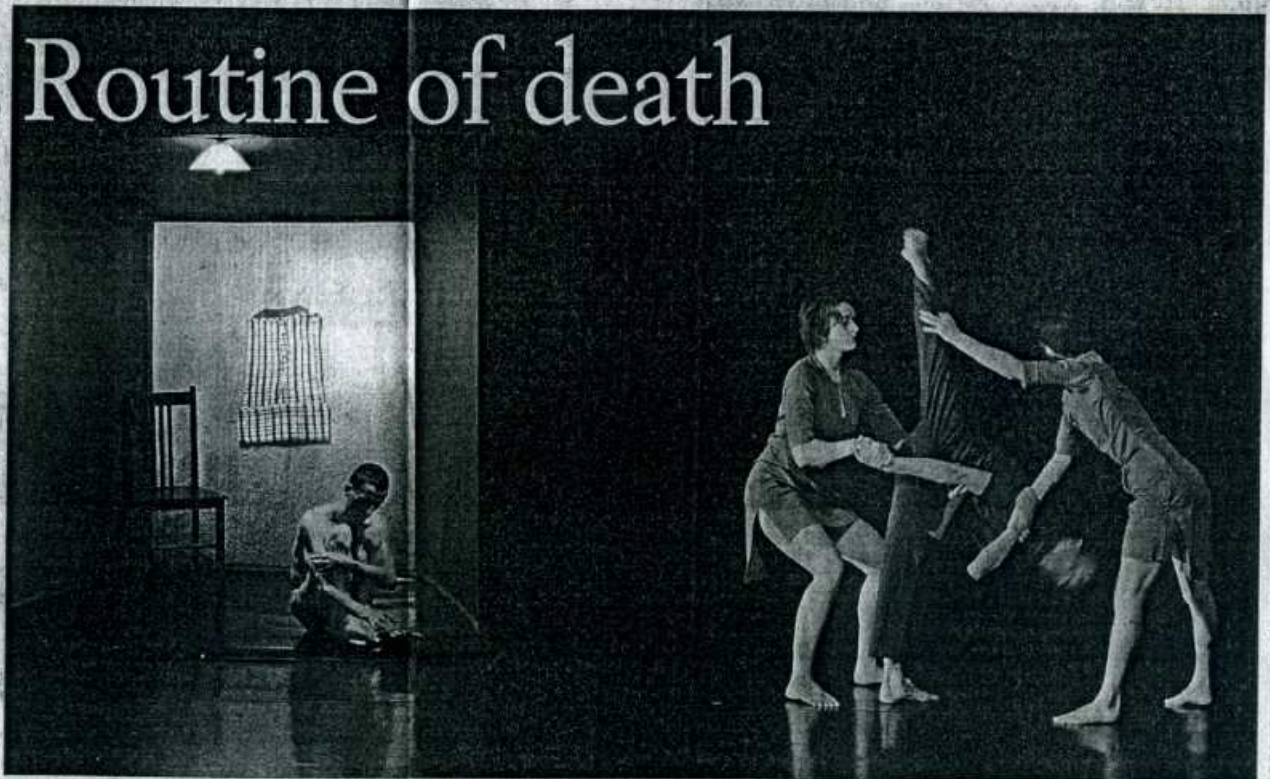


Melbourne Festival

Routine of death



Preparing for the end: From left, Trevor Patrick, Stephanie Lake, Brett Daffy and Ros Warby.

Picture: PENNY STEPHENS

Dance

The End of Things, Lucy Guerin
Company, National Theatre until
October 28

Review **Hilary Crampton**

IN *THE End of Things* choreographer Lucy Guerin presents a poignant yet up-beat reflection on the final days of things, lives, eras. It is both clever and moving, combining the persistent beat of techno music, muffled voices, fading codas of well-known soundtracks, as a filter through which we observe the diminished life of an individual whose time is drawing to a close.

The central role is movingly performed by Trevor Patrick. He finds just the right quality of restless gesture and anxious uncertainty that besets those who know their lives are behind them.

Guerin uses three figures to represent

aspects of the life of this fading individual. Their actions and presence can be read in many ways — as carers, as remembrances or as some sort of guiding and animating spirit.

Dorotka Sapinska's costume and set design cleverly indicate the drabness of this life: the three figures garbed in blandly uniform grey and Patrick in drab marl grey undies, the only touch of color being his badly matched elastic-waisted trousers. She houses him in a one-room tent-like structure, its dimensions reflecting the narrowness of his existence. This home moves closer to the audience or retreats, providing a cinematic sensibility to our observation — like a camera zooming in for a close-up to pry into intimate details, or drawing back to put his tiny life into perspective.

While Patrick's actions are restricted, the three guiding figures (Stephanie Lake, Ros Warby and Brett Daffy) perform his intentions larger than life

and, to the dominant beat of Francois Tetaz's score, perform in that robotic pelvis-thrusting style that has become a familiar feature of Guerin's choreography.

One can make connections between their actions and Patrick's pedestrian tasks — his painstaking folding of clothes being reflected in a funny routine whereby one folds the other two over, under and around each other, their faces expressionless, their eyes glazed, detached from this mindless routine.

Mostly they perform outside Patrick's abode, but occasionally invade. It is a mastery use of space by Guerin, as they manoeuvre Patrick through his daily routine in the confines of his tiny and safe domain with a tenderness punctuated by occasional concern. On other occasions they assume roles in some form of social event, Patrick at a loss in the midst of their chit-chat, meandering aimlessly, unable to make a connection.

The ending returns Patrick to the centre as the animating spirit of these scenes from a fading life. As his tiny abode collapses on to his sleeping form and the borderless expanse of the stripped stage envelops him, these minders, each engaged in the mindless routine that provides his life with structure, grind to a halt. He takes farewell of each in turn, shaking hands, turning to wave repeatedly, not in any hurry to leave, but knowing it is time to go. His tiny form shuffles into the blackness, with one last wave as he disappears into the void.

In this work Guerin demonstrates both depth and complexity, using current styles of movement, sound and design to reach beyond the surface of contemporary fashion, to reflect deeper social issues. The work is dedicated to Jad McAdam, her sound designer on past works who died before the completion of this one. It is a worthy and touching tribute.