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Saturday, March 8, 2003

Guerin's work goes from engaging to spellbinding

By ALICE KADERLAN HALSEY
SPECIAL TO THE POST-INTELLIGENCER

Lucy Guerin is an absolute original. The Australian choreographer, whose company is on its first Seattle stop, has been earning critical acclaim and numerous awards for her inventive, dramatic work -- with good reason.

Both pieces at On the Boards -- "Melt" and "The Ends of Things" -- use inventive theatrical effects to extend the visual appeal of her surprising and engaging movement style.

"Melt" opens with two women frozen in a three-dimensional pose in front of a screen, against which a collage of overlapping gray squares is projected. The collage also falls onto their simple white dresses. As they very slowly begin to "thaw," their bodies speed up as the patterns on their dresses change.

Over the next several minutes, as they continue to unfreeze, the projections, music and movements convey an increasing liquidity. In one particularly striking sequence, neon lines are drawn across the screen and the dancers' bodies, as the music track plays the sound of ice cracking.

This description may make "Melt" sound quite literal. In fact, it works much like butoh, the contemporary dance that originated in Japan. By creating stirring images, both keep the viewer spellbound.

Less successful, although equally distinctive, is "The Ends of Things," which captures a day in the life of a man closeted in a tiny apartment. As the work progresses, he moves out into the world -- figuratively it would appear, since he seems to sleepwalk through his interactions with the three lively characters who first appear entirely outside his room, invade his space and ultimately tear it down.

Dorotka Sapinska's set conveys brilliantly this narrowly circumscribed world. Trevor Patrick is compelling as the woeful man who lives inside his own head, desperately wishing to engage but terrified of human interaction. Dressed only in his skivvies, he can, with the mere contraction of his chest or the droop of his head, convey a lifetime of despair.

As the three "real" people, Ros Warby, Byron Perry and Stephanie Lake communicate a capacity for manipulation that suggests Patrick's fear is well-founded.

Guerin's intricate choreography, which sometimes puts the dancers into origamilike positions, is dazzling, but "The Ends of Things" goes on for too long. Guerin would have been wise to end this

DANCE REVIEW

LUCY GUERIN COMPANY

WHEN: Through tomorrow**WHERE:** On the Boards, 101 W. Roy**TICKETS:** \$25, under-25 rush \$12, 206-217-9888

