

DANCE REVIEW

Guerin company reveals its mastery of drama

Australian dance troupe shows award-winning form

BY JENNY JACKSON

What could be funnier or more tragic than a skinny guy in baggy underpants trying to connect with a beautiful girl? What could be further from our idea of modern dance as something remote and abstract that never condescends to be simply human?

The Lucy Guerin Dance Company from Melbourne, Australia, made its Canadian premiere at the National Arts Centre Tuesday with *The End of Things*, which follows a man as he moves away from the strictures of his daily routine into utter anguish and madness. Trevor Patrick doesn't so much dance the role of the hapless man as act him, and he is simply brilliant.

Guerin first presented the work at the Melbourne Festival in 2000, winning an award for the best dance theatre piece. Patrick won three awards for best male dancer. Guerin said in an interview before the performance that she didn't think she could put the piece on without Patrick, and, having seen his mastery of this pathetic, cringing creature, she's probably right.

Patrick balances humour and horror as his character wakes up, pants around his bony ankles, and goes about his routines, turning on the radio, pouring coffee, taking a long, relieving trip to the bathroom. Outside his house, three other dancers move around with casual grace, at ease with the teeming world, fighting, loving — all the human contact that clearly eludes poor Patrick.

As the work unfolds, the characters creep into his house and possess him by stealth, infusing what little is left of his sanity. Yet if he tries to connect with them, reaching towards them for love or companionship, they taunt him with greater cruelty.

Finally, they tear his little house to shreds, and the backdrops lift, revealing the raw in-

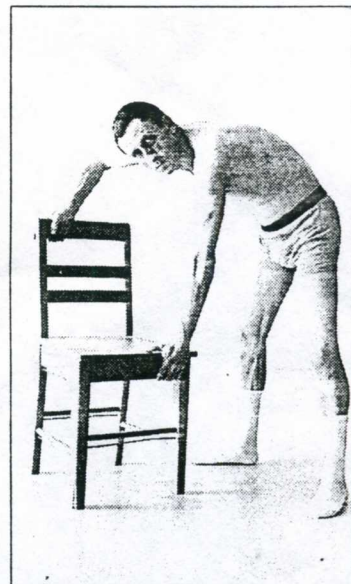
terior of the arts centre's theatre stage. There are no comforting boundaries now at all. He is completely cast adrift.

The evening opened with a shorter, less dramatic work called *Melt*, which looked at the continuum between freezing and boiling points. It was wise to start with this duet, as it was much less dramatic, but showed the company's dancing ability as opposed to its acting skills.

Guerin's ability to pack punch into the smallest gesture is remarkable. Dancers Stephanie Lake and Ros Warby really looked like blocks of ice shifting and breaking as they thawed.

A word, finally, about François Tetaz's sound score: for both pieces, they worked like clockwork with the dancers, neither insipid background nor the crashing, amplified kitchen accidents we seem to hear so much of these days. In *The End of Things*, there were inspired touches, like miking Patrick's every grunt and snuffle in the morning and using the song *I've Got You Under My Skin*, which took on a creepy double meaning as the dancing, partying incubi crowded into his house.

This is Guerin's first trip to Canada — let's hope she's back soon.



The Lucy Guerin company's Trevor Patrick is simply brilliant as he applies his dramatic dance technique to the role of a pathetic character.