



Spot the dancer

Mixing experts and amateurs has surprising results, writes **Harbant Gill**

STAND on one leg, close your eyes and then look up before you head out to catch choreographer Lucy Guerin's latest creation.

That's the advice of Guerin herself, who hopes it will give audiences a sense of how difficult such tasks are for two untrained dancers.

Guerin has put dance pros Byron Perry and Antony Hamilton next to visual artists Simon Obarzanek and Ross Coulter in her *Untrained*.

The team has come up with instructions, unseen to the audience, that the performers must follow.

They "do a stag leap", "take off your T-shirt and put it on", "eat a biscuit" and "draw a portrait of the person opposite you", for example.

The results are always interesting, sometimes hilarious.

Guerin has done it in part to find "original movement" after decades of working with a dance vocabulary.

"The main reason is I really love the movement of ordinary people when they dance," Guerin says.

"Dancers are amazing but when you are used to that form and you see an untrained person dancing, there are positions you never come across.

"There are freshness and immediacy that I find fascinating especially when contrasted with the dancer's awareness, which can never really be dropped.

"As the process has evolved, the piece has become a filter through which we explore... a lot of it is very personal and you get to know a lot about the individual. It's also taught me not to take for granted what the dancers can do physically."

Guerin chose men because they "generally have a more difficult time dancing and feeling comfortable in their bodies".

Five weeks of hilarity and male-bonding

rehearsals have led to an engaging piece in which the raw pair reveal more of themselves because they don't have the performer persona to hide behind.

Audiences are able to put themselves in the shoes of the untrained for the hour-long piece.

How did Guerin entice the untrained pair to make this courageous move and show their vulnerability?

Obarzanek, photographer brother of Guerin's partner Gideon, was "tricked".

"Lucy said it's going to be very slow and easy, we won't push you too hard," he protests.

"I love dancing at parties and thought 'imagine getting paid to dance!' But as time went on it wasn't that easygoing.

"She'd turned up the temperature; by then we were in too deep."

OBARZANEK was in agony for 10 days after pushing himself too hard, at a time when "just to stretch out and touch my toes was tricky".

He didn't resort to secret lessons with his brother, who is the artistic director of dance company Chunky Move, but simply worked out his limits. Then he discovered the joy of working with a team.

"They seem to have a happier disposition than artists who work on their own most of the time," Obarzanek says.

"I've actually become a bit happier through working with the body and being around other people. We're not trying to perform as dancers, we are trying to be ourselves. Being truthful to yourself is integral to the work.

"The biggest challenge is how to keep a straight face while the audience is laughing."

Well prepared: choreographer Lucy Guerin uses trained and untrained dancers in her new show.

Picture: MIKE KEATING

see > Untrained, Arts House, Meat Market, Blackwood St, North Melbourne, March 11-14. Tickets: \$25/\$18. Bookings: 9639 0096. It is part of the Dance Massive festival which runs until March 15. Visit www.dancemassive.com.au

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