

Amateurs take the spotlight, steal laughs

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THIS is fun. Not, perhaps, for people who expect an evening of serious innovative dance when they buy their tickets. But for regular dancegoers who enjoy something different, who are prepared to have questions asked and to ask their own, Untrained is refreshing and amusing.

As its title suggests, it involves two untrained dancers alongside two who have been dancing most of their lives, Byron Perry and Luke Smiles. Simon Obarzanek (brother of the choreographer Gideon) and Ross Coulter, in contrast, have neither training nor any obvious instinct for dance.

The four of them line up as they might in a traditional dance class when each person performs a required movement or phrase. These are not usually the same, just similar. But when Obarzanek and Coulter do them, the results are often hilarious.

Yet as we laugh and the whole thing is done in high good humour we can observe the stark differences in body shapes and control, in the ability to move and communicate through dance. I love watching amateur dancers doing something they love in circumstances where that passion guides their action. But this is something else.

Obarzanek and Coulter cope intelligently with their lack of skill in jumps, tumbling falls and turns, and it is fascinating to observe how they compensate.

The guys who can't do it become more interesting than the two who can. They have the audience's sympathy and admiration for their truly creative efforts.

Director Lucy Guerin has not gone so far as to ask the polished dancers Perry and Smiles to perform poker-faced and characterless, so there is not that degree of contrast. And you have to wonder: what would she have done if the untrained performers had started to get better? Told them to stay as they were?

As the piece evolves, the dancers pair off and take it in turns to follow the other. It is probably the peak of the action in its highs and lows of achievement and failure, though the brief finale with all four is pretty good. In fact, the "untrained" are in danger of looking not so bad.

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