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# Dance Review: Untrained

VARNYA BROMILOW, The West Australian  
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## Untrained

Lucy Guerin Inc.

### Perth Institute of Performing Arts

Lucy Guerin didn't set out to make a humorous work, which seems astonishing because *Untrained*, being performed at the AWESOME festival, is really, really funny.

Four male dancers, two trained and two untrained, perform moves within a white-bordered square. In the first few stationary minutes it was difficult to tell who was trained and who was not, at least to my untrained eye.

While James Shannon had the poise and confidence of the professional performer, Dean Cross had a refreshing, slightly slumpy goofiness that belied his training. Adding to the intrigue, one of the rookies, Marco Cher-Gibard, had an almost snarling cockiness that was later revealed as a ruse for first-night nerves.

The sight of rookies attempting to emulate the sleek athleticism of professional dancers was hilarious but it was the grave commitment of the "untrained" that made the show truly compelling. Both Cher-Gibard and Ross Coulter gave their all, even as their trained counterparts compelled them to imitate lengthy handstands, flying leaps and push-ups.

Cher-Gibard almost held his own at times but watching Coulter, on the other hand, felt a lot like watching myself attempt such feats. Tall and gangly, he nevertheless exhibited a shameless bravery as he awkwardly tossed himself about. A show that demonstrated how hopeless mere mortals are at moving would have been funny for a little while but too cruel to sustain a full hour. Guerin is canny here; by forcing the dancers to also copy "moves" made by the untrained she manages to make them look silly too.

That said, the work as a whole could almost be construed as a rebuttal to the "I could do that" school of anti-art nay-sayers. The sheer strength of Cross and Shannon, their seamless sense of movement and the exquisite lightness of their bodies as they rolled through air and along the ground - no, you couldn't do this.

Though run through with humour, Untrained is also a poignant examination of maleness. Just as the prevailing joke appeared close to outstaying its welcome, Guerin introduced a non-dancing sequence in which each performer spoke candidly about his relationship with his father. It sounds bizarre but worked well, providing a meaningful respite from the sometimes slapstick nature of the rest of the show. Similarly, an interlude in which the performers revealed their bodily insecurities added a new dimension of emotional depth.

Naturally enough, the audience reserved its most enthusiastic response for the two rookies. It would be fascinating to see how this production played in a country less obsessed with barracking for the underdog. As it was, Coulter and Cher-Gibard were certainly the heroes of the evening.

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