

Courier Mail

Master and apprentice on the stage

- Ben Dillon
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SMOOTH MOVES: Javier Briceno, left, and Matt O'Neill won a competition for untrained dancers.

Picutre: Bruce Long

Source: The Courier-Mail

A FASCINATION with the bizarre antics on a typical dance floor is the inspiration behind Untrained.

The Judith Wright Centre will soon play host to the Lucy Guerin Inc production of Untrained, a production that puts two untrained male dancers on stage with two professionals in a free-form performance where the difference in ability is stark, enlightening and often comedic.

Choreographer Lucy Guerin describes *Untrained* as an experimental work rather than a traditional dance performance.

"It's not a conventional dance experience but more like an experiment about how dance training forms movement," she says.

"The effort and energy for the untrained compared with trained dancers who are used to the rules and construct of the (dance) process is something that I wanted to show. We don't see ordinary men dancing because there is a tension in letting go."

While *Untrained* began as a workshop exploring Guerin's interest in choreographing for non-dancers, the show has since played to critical acclaim at the Sydney Opera House, the Adelaide and Perth festivals and the Hong Kong Festival.

"The audience are hopefully drawn to the effort of the untrained as much as you are enthralled by what the trained dancers do," she says.

"At the end I hope the audience comes away with a full portrait of each dancer."

The Brisbane auditions surprised Guerin as men from ages 18 to 53, with vastly differing backgrounds, turned up to strut their stuff.

"This was one of the most terrific auditions I have ever run. We had 40 men from all walks of life, including a geologist, carpenter and a resort owner from Coochiemudlo Island. We also had men who were magicians, tradies, cooks, actors and even a Special Olympics national swimming champion."

Matt O'Neill of Red Hill and Javier Bricenco of Stafford Heights were the two chosen as the untrained talent.

They will take turns at mirroring the professionals' moves, as well as executing traditional dance steps designed to highlight the difference in movement between trained and untrained dancers.

The professional dancers are Antony Hamilton and Alisdair Macindoe, both Green Room Award winners, with Antony previously involved in the first production of *Untrained* in 2009.

Both O'Neill and Bricenco are excited to be involved and looking forward to the rehearsals, where along with the professional dancers they will have input into the content of the show.

The attraction of dance for O'Neill is one of cultural access.

"One of the reasons I find it really fascinating is that people don't often like to dance unless they're either good at it or drunk," he says. "I don't think that is fair because dancing isn't supposed to be about if you're good or bad, it's about having fun. Everybody should have access to it, which is what attracted me to *Untrained*."

Bricenco is keen to get back into dancing, which has been a neglected aspect of his life since coming to

Australia from his native Colombia three years ago.

"I couldn't live without dancing," says the 28-year-old accounting student. "But most of the clubs here don't play my music, like salsa, so it feels like that part of my body is dead at the moment.

"Dancing for me is like breakfast or lunch. It is something I need to do, something that is part of my culture, my country, my family, my friends and everything in Colombia.

"I'm quite excited, because it is a break from my boring life as an accounting student."

Bricenco also says his cultural background gave him an advantage in the auditions. "I'm from Colombia and people dance there because they think it is fun; it is very different from Australia."

The notion behind *Untrained* was Lucy's desire to explore how the average male body moves when dancing.

"I was thinking about the idea for quite a long time," Guerin says.

"Over the years I watched untrained people grappling with formal dance moves and initially I wondered 'why are they bothering?'.

"But that lack of body awareness started to fascinate me because it is something I could never choreograph myself and is something that trained dancers can't emulate."

The idea of the untrained dancers providing a missing element to the repertoire of the trained dancers during the rehearsal process is an alluring prospect for O'Neill.

"You see it in many areas of life. You can learn a lot from someone who hasn't been indoctrinated in a certain form, but it's not like we are going to say to the trained dancers, 'We have all these insights to show you because we haven't learnt anything!'," he says.

Untrained is not all about dancing, though, with the performers drawing, singing and talking about themselves in the show.

"I will work with Matt and Javier for a week of workshop rehearsals and they will have the chance to help create the show," Guerin says.

"They will now face the fun challenge of following the dance steps of two very experienced and skilled dancers on the same stage. Perfect moves won't be the point; the purpose is for O'Neill or Bricenco to match the professionals in their own entertaining way. It's a very fun show for the dancers and audiences alike."

Untrained, Judith Wright Centre, May 13-14. Tickets \$40/\$35/\$20 available at the Judith Wright Centre and online.

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