

Lucy Guerin's 'Untrained' on tour

By [Fiona Mackrell](#) ArtsHub | Thursday, March 31, 2011

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LUCY GUERIN INC. 'Untrained'

What happens when you put two highly-trained male dancers and two men who have never had any kind of dance or movement training on stage and ask them to step through the same tasks? Far more than a stage version of a 'So You Think You Can Dance' audition, what emerges in award-winning choreographer Lucy Guerin's *Untrained* is a highly entertaining collaborative work that reveals something of the nature of artistic movement and how we express and expose ourselves through our bodies.

Since premiering in 2009 at the first Dance Massive, *Untrained* has been performed at festivals around Australia and internationally from a youth festival in Perth to [Adelaide](#) and the Sydney Opera House, to Hong Kong and Brazil. Guerin is currently in negotiations to take *Untrained* to BAM in New York and it about to commence a three-month Australian regional tour.

For the regional tour Guerin is picking up both new untrained men and switching around trained dancers at several of the locations, mainly because it goes for so long. Many of the 'untrained' men will be from the local region. They're Aussie blokes who come from all walks of life from accountants to labourers to footballers. The trained dancers are by contrast highly experienced and award winning professionals, such as Helpmann Award winner Antony Hamilton and Alisdair Macindoe.

For each new cast there is a workshop process, adjusting the tasks performed to the skills of the individuals and the dynamics of the group. 'It's not like a pre-choreographed show, Guerin says. Although there is a learned list of instructions, every time the performers respond a little differently, it changes from night to night.'

Untrained was initially sparked as an experiment in choreographing movement and dance for non-dancers. As one of Australia's Guerin was interested in demonstrating physical awareness, showing how differently trained dancers performed choreographed movement compared to untrained people.

'Dancers have such a sense of the bodies and where they are in space, whether their limbs are

straight or bent or their feet are pointed. Untrained people, without any dance training, tend to have an image of what their body is going to do but then trying to do it doesn't match up necessarily with the image. It's a very unpredictable, for me, very interesting way of moving.'

In the first workshops at Arts House in 2008, Guerin set both dancers and non-dancers simple movements. Obviously, says Guerin, the trained dancers could perform them with more precision than the untrained, which was interesting for a while but it wasn't enough for a show. So in addition to physical tasks such as back spins, double turns, flying leaps, cartwheels or handstands, the performers in *Untrained* make a one-minute film, take photographs, act out scenes from films playing all the characters, choreograph and imitate each other, talk about the experience and their physical insecurities and dance together. Gradually, a bigger picture emerges, 'like a portrait of each person', says Guerin.

What also emerged was a very funny show, driven by the performers enjoyment of each other's efforts and the vicarious effect that has on the audience. 'You feel a real sense that the audience are supporting the untrained men... there's an empathy there ... its almost like they get this trepidation because they imagine themselves being put up on stage and being asked to perform with no training.'

It's a work that engages audiences at two levels, says Guerin. There's the virtuosic movement, appreciating someone who can do things we can't. And then there's also seeing someone we can identify and connect with, someone who is like us trying to do those movements. The 'untrained' are as truthful and honest doing the tasks on stage as they can be, knowing the trained dancers will likely out-perform them. It's that 'Little Engine Who Could' quality that the audience cheers for just as their jaws drop at the grace and ability of the trained dancers.

The experience is a positive one for both the untrained and trained performers. 'I think they [the trained dancers] love it,' says Guerin. 'They've been very open to it and often the untrained comment on their generosity and patience.' For the untrained men, the show is 'massive' says Guerin. 'They work so hard and they're really thrown into this whole world.' Everything is new, from warming up before rehearsals to the routine of performing. They're amazingly courageous to take it on and I think that's really what makes the shows.

UNTRAINED REGIONAL TOUR VENUES AND DATES

13-14 May, Judith Wright Centre, Brisbane

24 May, Lismore City Hall, Lismore

27 May, Empire Theatre, Toowoomba

30 May, Jetty Memorial Theatre, Coffs Harbour

1-2 June, Civic Theatre, Newcastle

10-11 June, IPAC, Wollongong

20-21 June, BMEC, Bathurst

22-23 June, Orange Civic Centre, Orange

2 July, Nautilus Theatre, Port Lincoln

5 July, Middleback Theatre, Whyalla

7 July, Northern Festival Centre, Port Pirie

15-16 July, The Capital Theatre, Bendigo

19 July, Swan Hill Town Hall, Swan Hill

21 July, Wesley Performing Arts Centre, Horsham

22 July, Hamilton Performing Arts Centre, Hamilton

23 July, Portland Arts Centre, Portland

29-30 July, Canberra Theatre Centre, Canberra

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