

Dance Review: Lucy Guerin's plastic storm
Lucy Guerin Inc's "Weather" is a high pressure system with lots of great dancing

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Lucy Guerin's 'Weather'/Heidrun Lohr

So much of our description of a dance (or almost anything else) depends on context and comparison. Suppose you are a dance fan and you saw Lucy Guerin's "Weather" last night at Lincoln Hall, after seeing Oregon Ballet Theatre's "Dream" last weekend. Maybe you'd describe Guerin's work as a challenging piece of contemporary dance—the score wasn't very musical at all, despite the title it was abstract, the point of some of the sections seemed to be to exhaust the dancers, and while the movement may have been impressive it wasn't "beautiful."

Or maybe you saw Maguy Marin's "Salves" last weekend. In that case, maybe you were relieved to see some good, old-fashioned dancing, without Marin's puzzling content that seemed vaguely angry, even assaultive, and the movement that had nothing particular to do with "dancing." (One patron told White Bird's Walter Jaffe that "Salves" felt like a colonoscopy. Yikes!)

And even if you saw neither of those (nor BodyVox's "Body Opera Files"), still, it's axiomatic that "context is everything" or maybe "everything is relative" or "the ideology of the ruling class is the dominant ideology of any society." Wait, that last one is about something else.

Both of our imaginary "Weather" audience members, the balletomane and the tester of Marin's turbulent waters, might agree on one thing—those Lucy Guerin dancers can really move. And though they aren't the will-o-the-wisp dancers who might make fine leaves in the wind of the weather, their precision at the high speeds they are able to generate comes from the power of very strong, kinetically aware bodies.



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Guerin says "Weather" is based on weather patterns, but I think it could just as easily be called "Molecules," "Breath" or "More Fun With Plastic Bags Than You Might Think Is Possible," without losing the sense or enjoyment of it. I suspect it's a big mistake to sit there and attempt to assign specific weather events to what's happening onstage at any particular time. I never once thought, "Oh, that must be a low pressure system moving in" or "Wow, what a great depiction of wind shear," but then I'm not even an amateur meteorologist.

Oh, I suppose that because a lot of the dance divides the dancers into 1 on 5 patterns (one dancer outside a grouping of five) that maybe there's a political or social subtext on alienation or manipulation inside "Weather." But remember, I was part of the Maguy Marin group last weekend, and that was the most fleeting of thoughts, even for me.

That left me with the six dancers, a ceiling full of plastic bags (the only and very striking set element), and Guerin's sublime ability to find interesting ways to manipulate the first two. That was plenty.

Alisdair Macindoe's opening solo suggested perfectly what was coming up for the rest of the hour. How could a body that sturdy and strong seem that boneless and fluid? He supplied the windy sound effects with his breath and sliced and spun at high speeds and various levels seamlessly, without a single sign of stress. He was replaced by a lengthy duet by Amber Haines and Kyle Page that set them moving in elegant, almost waltzy, patterns. Gradually, those sped up, started to change, reaching a point of seeming exhaustion (not really, Haines is onstage almost the entire show and never showed a hint of slowing down), when other dancers would enter, stir them up to more dancing and leave the stage.

The other three dancers (Kirstie McCracken, Talitha Maslin and Lillian Steiner) having been introduced, some elaborate line dancing began in that 1-to-5 formation, and then the plastic bags fell to the floor.

Not all of them. That would have been WAY too many for the dancers to manipulate. But enough to fill the stage one layer deep. And the last four sections (by my count) are danced among them. The dancers send those bags flying, hide beneath them, shake them like pompoms, shove them to one end of the stage and back, scurry and dance about kicking up little cyclones of them. OK, I just included "cyclones" there because of the title of the piece. I might have just said "helixes."



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At one point Macindoe starts pulling a bag over Page's head, and they make excellent comic use of this prop, though my mother would have predicted that there was a 100 percent certainty that someone would end up dead. (They made it through alive, Mom!)

It wasn't all prop play. Guerin herself danced with Tere O'Connor Dance and Bebe Miller and choreographed for Chunky Move and Mikhail Baryshnikov. She's a proponent of the most energetic, intricate and demanding dancing—complex unison dancing, explosive solos with lots of moving parts, very physical duets—and that's what "Weather" delivers.

Gradually, some personality started to emerge from the dancers, the humor, sure, and a little attitude. ("Oh, the weather just got angry!") They started to emerge as single dancers with particular qualities: Maslin's the long-legged one with precise placements, McCracken is a puckish dynamo, and so on. By the time the stage manager through the switch and plunged the stage in darkness, we were just getting warmed up!



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