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Choreographer Lucy Guerin's 'Weather' swings between laxity and resistance



Dancers from the Australian company Lucy Guerin Inc. perform in "Weather." (Heidrun Lohr)

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(http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/catherinethomas/index.html) By Catherine Thomas | Special to The Oregonian (http://connect.oregonlive.com/user/catherinethomas/posts.html) on October 19, 2013 at 2:16 PM, updated October 19, 2013 at 4:04 PM

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Acclaimed Australian **choreographer Lucy Guerin** (<http://chunkymove.com.au/The-Company/Current-Creatives/Lucy-Guerin.aspx>) is a master of pensive, twisted psychodrama, of dance as play or spare abstraction. "Weather," her latest work for six gifted dancers, has elements of all three. Hundreds of plastic bags hover above the Lincoln Hall stage, aglow with golden stains of sunset, the set design ominous in its sheer massiveness. Guerin's movement is a powerful counterforce: liquid and rubbery, lockstep and mechanical, elaborately patterned.

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In his opening solo, a wonder of fluidity that accelerates to windmill speed, **Alisdair Macindoe** (<http://chunkymove.com.au/The-Company/Current-Performers/Alisdair-Macindoe.aspx>) creates his own soundscape of faraway

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wind whistling through a canyon. What begins in slow, seemingly boneless folds eventually looks as if he's battling a killer headwind.

When **Amber Haines** (http://www.lucyguerininc.com/about/Amber_Haines) and **Kyle Page**

(http://www.lucyguerininc.com/about/Kyle_Page) enter in perfect synch – arms straight, backs rigid, circling mechanically backwards in intricate figure eights, the dynamics change to an almost metronomic four-step beat. Guerin keeps the rhythm pulsing for so long that its effect is lulling, so it's all the more surprising when Haines and Page, still in perfect synch, unleash knees and elbows and then whirl across the stage like spinning tops.

As **Talitha Maslin**

(http://www.lucyguerininc.com/about/Talitha_Maslin), **Kirstie McCracken** (http://www.lucyguerininc.com/about/Kirstie_McCracken) and **Lilian Steiner** (http://www.lucyguerininc.com/about/Lilian_Steiner) take the stage, the contrast between loose or flailing limbs and rigid uniformity gets more complex. To a score that's an efficient, mechanical thrum, Haines walks and turns, adrift against her fellow dancers' machinery. As in her best work, Guerin is playing with perception. One dancer's sudden shift to a looser style looks like molecules rearranging themselves.

The theme of laxity and resistance surfaces throughout "Weather," sometimes uncomfortably. Guerin may be experimenting with movement possibilities, but she's also pushing buttons. An extended scene of a dancer being suffocated by a bag over his head seems to implicate the audience, whose natural impulse would be panic. Instead, nervous titters arose from the auditorium on Friday night. Duets ride the uncomfortable line between fun and aggression, comfort and torture. Dancing the edge between compliance and duress, what looks like massage builds to manipulation, to the point that Steiner is being heaved and spun like a floppy rag doll.

Midway through the work, prop, movement and voices intersect. Bags drop from a bright "sky" and silently coat the dancers, and the focus shifts to Haines' breath. Her deep inhales and expelled force -- and the long intervals between -- direct all of the stage action in a comic and elegant ripple effect. The dancers send the bags flying into a froth of white that looks like crashing waves, then – on their backs with arms linked -- become a human snowplow clearing up the flotsam.

At the dance's meditative end, the weather systems of the work's title, even an indictment of climate change, seem beside the point. Guerin's shifting dynamics point to human psychology -- tribal, isolated, conflicted -- but the action-and-reaction complexity of the movement is the drawing card.

--Catherine Thomas

'Weather'

Who: Lucy Guerin Inc., presented by **White Bird Dance** (<http://www.whitebird.org/>)

When: 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 19


Where: Lincoln Hall, Portland State University

Information/tickets: www.whitebird.org/lucy-guerin-inc (<http://www.whitebird.org/lucy-guerin-inc>)


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