
THE AUSTRALIAN

Intensity to the fore

EAMONN KELLY THE AUSTRALIAN OCTOBER 22, 2012 12:00AM



In her first work as Chunky Move's artistic director, Anouk van Dijk explores broad themes about the forces driving human behaviour. Picture: Jeff Busby Source: Supplied

DANCE

An Act of Now

Chunky Move. Choreography by Anouk van Dijk. Sidney Myer Music Bowl, October 18.

Weather

Lucy Guerin Inc. Choreography by Lucy Guerin. Merlyn Theatre, Malthouse, October 19.

AT last year's Melbourne Festival, outgoing Chunky Move artistic director Gideon Obarzanek presented *Assembly*, a work exploring human herd behaviour.

Obarzanek's Dutch successor, Anouk van Dijk, explores similar themes in her first work for the company, *An Act of Now*: tensions between individual identity and autonomy, and community pressures to co-operate and conform.

Eight dancers are trapped in a claustrophobic greenhouse enclosure that serves as a metaphor for constraining and unifying social forces. The dancers appear as caged primates, exposed in pulsating flashes of light (design by Niklas Pajanti) while headphones immerse audience members in Marcel Wierckx's throbbing electronic soundscape, punctuated by amplified enclosure noises: thudding bodies, primal vocalisations.

Voyeurism becomes detached scientific observation as van Dijk's choreography investigates primitive forces driving human behaviour: anxiety, intimidation, domination, compliance. Dancers press desperately against glass confines, are repelled from walls in convulsive sequences and thrown together in immensely physical passages of tumble rolls, spasmodic turns and circling lines.

Unable to escape, they subsist in a space where brawn dominates: an alpha male roars and all echo his call, females struggle against possessive male lifts, one dancer is backed into corners and expelled from the enclosure by a growling mob.

Offsetting this violent undertow, moments of collective harmony and sensual paired work include arching couples in slow counterpoint, disappearances through holes in the floor, and dancers delicately suspended from roof beams.

Intense and menacing, the work places extreme physical demands on its dancers and requires precise placement. On opening night, local stalwart Stephanie Lake seriously injured her wrist during a particularly vigorous ensemble passage and was forced to leave the set for medical treatment. The production paused while van Dijk consulted with the dancers to revise the remaining choreography and, remarkably, the show continued.

Although tempestuous at times, Lucy Guerin's *Weather* is a more sedate affair that contemplates the invisible world of atmospheric conditions. Staged under a dense canopy of white plastic shopping bags - evoking clouds and environmental harm caused by human detritus - *Weather* sees six dancers variously embody atmospheric forces, represent the human response to climate shifts and mimic the moving symmetries and repeating patterns of forecast visualisation tools. As props, the bags become animated in various ways, the dancers' movements revealing invisible atmospheric forces as plastic flaps and floats, inflates or scurries away from swirling arms like dried leaves in autumnal breezes.

An Act of Now, until Saturday. Tickets: \$40-\$56. Bookings: 136 100 or online.

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