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Elemental Forces Drive Lucy Guerin's "Weather"

United States **Lucy Guerin (with dancers from the premiere season), "Weather,"** Lucy Guerin Inc., Royce Hall UCLA, Los Angeles, 4.10.13 (JRo)



Lucy Guerin "Weather"
Photo: Heidrun Lohr

Elemental forces were at work on the stage of Royce Hall on Friday, October 4 when Lucy Guerin, the Australian choreographer, presented her North American premiere of "Weather."

Nature's seasons have long been a romantic lure for choreographers and composers – Petipa, Robbins, Glazunov, Tchaikovsky and Vivaldi, to name a few – but this fascinating piece by Guerin lives, not in the idyllic realm of dewdrop fairies and snow queens, but in the ominous present of twenty-first century weather.

In spite of the formidable terrain – climate change never being far from the mind while watching the piece – Guerin and her skilled dancers achieved a poetic evocation of the elements. Under a ruffled canopy of clouds by set designer, Robert Cousins, the programmatic dance unfolded:

A lone figure undulates to the faint sound of wind, his body tossed by an ever-increasing gale. The sound rises and we discover it's the whistling breath of the dancer. A man and woman enter and without touching, perform a

mechanical dance, a kind of robotic tango. They slowly spin as a cacophony of sounds rise: are they weathervanes rotating in circles or hapless victims? We feel as if something cataclysmic is about to happen. Three dancers rush on stage, their arms slicing the air like wind turbines. There is an imperative to the dance and its "music" – an urgency driving the piece.



Lucy Guerin "Weather"
Photo: Heidrun Lohr

The electronic minimalist score by Oren Ambarchi rumbles through the floorboards of the theatre. Suddenly the ruffled clouds brighten and, in the space of a breath, the sky sends down tufts of white. The tufts dance for a moment in space and we realize they're plastic bags – hundreds of them. As they float towards earth, we experience a moment of pure poetry, as reflective and magical as a Japanese brush painting.

The dancers collapse into the snowdrifts of bags and rise and fall from the midst of the debris, then playfully romp like children during a first snowfall. But is it snow, or is it waste – the refuse of an ecologically damaged planet?

And then thirty-five minutes into the piece, the dance loses its drive and hovers.

Unable to resist the lure of what could be mined from a single plastic bag, Guerin allowed two of her dancers to explore the bag and its possibilities. Unfortunately, with the music paused for too long and the duo's movements better suited to a vaudevillian pantomime, the forward dynamic of Guerin's dance drama lost its momentum.

After what seemed like ten minutes, the dance resumed and equilibrium was restored. Bags were pushed around the stage by reclining dancers, arms moved in intricate, inventive patterns, figures shook and shuddered.

Though in need of trimming down from sixty minutes, there's no doubt that Guerin, in "Weather," created movement that was wholly organic to a dancer's body – movement that arose out of some inner necessity. She has a seasoned intellect, which was deftly communicated through dance, and she raised questions in need of answers.

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