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Fall Arts Preview

'Weather' at UCLA's Royce Hall marks a first in L.A. for Lucy Guerin

Los Angeles audiences will get to see the choreographer's work for the first time in October in a piece that explores humanity's complex relationship with the environment.

September 12, 2013 | By Susan Reiter

Australian choreographer Lucy Guerin has been recognized for her intriguing and thought-provoking works since the 1990s, when she spent a pivotal seven years performing and choreographing in New York City. Mikhail Baryshnikov took note of Guerin's individuality in 1999, including two of her dances in his White Oak Dance Project's repertory.

Based in Melbourne since 1996, she founded her company Lucy Guerin Inc. in 2002 and has returned to New York often enough to keep its dance audiences abreast of her more recent projects. These have been notable for their meticulously structured containment, and their understated yet quietly devastating resonance.

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But UCLA's presentation of "Weather," a 2012 work for six dancers that examines our complex relationship with the elemental forces of the environment, marks the first time Los Angeles audiences will see her work.

PHOTOS: Arts and culture pictures by The Times

Created for the Melbourne Festival, "Weather" marked a new direction for Guerin, whose recent projects — some incorporating text and speech — had taken as their starting point such diverse topics as a famous Melbourne bridge collapse; the disturbing undercurrents beneath simple human conversations; and the effects of the news cycle on the contemporary psyche.

"I felt that these works were creating more of a commentary about the relationship between the performance and the audience, and I wanted to get back to the essence of how I create movement with the dancers in the studio through a process of physical investigation," Guerin said in a recent email exchange. "One of the things that drew me to the idea of weather is its overwhelming force — and that it is one aspect of nature we still cannot control."

"Weather" features a commissioned score by Oren Ambarchi and set design by Robert Cousins.

The cast combines veterans of earlier works with several newer performers. "We spent a lot of time improvising to find very specific physical qualities," Guerin said. "There is a mix of choreographed and improvised movement in this piece, some of it created by the dancers in response to tasks I have set. Through these tasks we connected with the visceral nature of weather and its effect on the human body. More than any of my recent works, 'Weather' relies on the skill and physical intelligence of the dancers."

calendar@latimes.com

Lucy Guerin Inc: "Weather" plays at 8 p.m. Oct. 3-4 at UCLA's Royce Hall. Info: <http://cap.ucla.edu>.

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Title:

Weather at UCLA's Royce Hall marks a first in L.A. for Lucy Guerin

Date:

2013

Citation:

Susan Reiter, Weather at UCLA's Royce Hall marks a first in L.A. for Lucy Guerin, Los Angeles Times, 12 September 2013

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