



## CONVERSATION PIECE

August 30th 2012 4:53 pm | Theatre | Review - By *Diana Simmonds*

*Ideas are two a penny, it's what you do with them that counts*

**CONVERSATION PIECE**, Lucy Guerin Inc & Belvoir at  
 Upstairs Belvoir Street, 29 August-16 September 2012.  
 Photos by Brett Boardman of the company.



Running at just over an hour, this new dance-theatre work by Lucy Guerin, three dancers, three actors and six iPhones is nothing if not deceptive. It's a mix and match and meld of two of the oldest and newest human preoccupations: storytelling and new toys. It's said in the blurb, and by the guiding creative mind, that the show will be **different** every night, depending on the nature and direction of the conversation that opens the performance.

The three dancers enter - **Alisdair Macindoe**, **Harriet Ritchie** and **Rennie McDougall** - and, in the centre of a squared off area of Belvoir's not-square stage, observed only by a row of 12 orange plastic chairs, they engage in one of those discussions about nothing and everything that so often happen between friends and colleagues. Each dancer speaks into a pair of **iPhones**, discretely recording their own words - animated, **desultory**, meaningful, directionless; more or less articulate and punctuated with "ums" and "ahs" and bursts of laughter and giggles. It's as interesting or not as most overheard snatches of conversation, ranging across the profound and the silly. And in the moment it's impossible to tell the difference.

Enter the three actors - **Alison Bell**, **Matthew Whittet** and **Megan Holloway** - and each is handed one of the iPhones. They plug in earpieces and begin reciting back whichever voice is in their ears. At first it's comical, but very quickly it **highlights** something we instinctively know but rarely see for real - that a story is instantly different the minute it leaves the mouth and mind of its creator. Even when a phrase is being repeated back verbatim within minutes of its first utterance it is different and can only ever be different. Amazing? **Profound?** Obvious? Maybe all three, but the effect is electrifying. The audience has been witness to "the truth" - and then hears it back, and it's still the same "truth" but it's so **dissimilar** as to be virtually another language.

As the piece progresses the **fragments** of "conversation" - now familiar to the audience - are re-spoken, reconfigured and repeated, in different segments, different order and so on. The iPhones meanwhile are plugged in and unplugged again from connectors that drop from above and are wired in to a sound system. There are pieces of music, slices of sound effects and various apps (percussion, guitar and so on), all **tapped** and swiped and set in **motion** by the performers who then respond to whatever happens.

They interact, the dancers dance, the actors sort of dance, they continue with the Chinese Whispers storytelling and offer constant reminders that chaos and anarchy can only only happen within a nice, neat, civilised framework. And then, people being the funny little critters that we are, chaos and anarchy are quickly made over to be comprehensible and bearable and orderly. Some call it improvisation, others call it jazz. And it alternates between nonsensical, intriguing, moving and **hilarious**.

While thinking about the show this morning-after-the-night-before, I came across a friend's post on Facebook - a quote from **John Cage** - "I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I'm frightened of the old ones." It seemed apposite: *Conversation Piece* is about the second oldest human activity told via the imaginative and creative co-option of one of the newest - techno playtime. To put it another way: without **imagination** and creativity being brought to bear on what we already know, there's no way there will ever be anything new and interesting. Many theatre- and dance-makers (and their **audiences**) don't get that and nor do they want to; if that thought doesn't scare you then it might be better to stick to *Midsomer Murders*. Finally it all brought to mind another thought from **Cage**: "Ideas are one thing, what happens to them is another."

**Lucy Guerin** and her ace collaborators (including set and costume designer **Robert Cousins**, lighting designer **Damien Cooper** and composer and sound designer **Robin Fox**) had an idea, then they did something with it. What they did makes one realise how rarely that happens. **Recommended.**

Pages: 1 |

[Send to Friend](#) | [Archive](#) | [Home](#) | [Subscribe](#)

### COMMENTS

*There are no comments for this article.*

### ADD A COMMENT

A registered username and password are required to post comments.

Don't have one? [Get one!](#)

Username:

Password:

Comment:

Subscribe by: [RSS](#)

### FEATURED



#### CONVERSATION PIECE

Ideas are two a penny, it's what you do with them that counts



#### FACE TO FACE

Get your teeth, heart and mind into something truly substantial and rewarding



#### THE SPLINTER

Deceptive, disturbing and resonates long after its final moments



#### SOUTH PACIFIC

The musical thoroughly deserves its place in Opera Australia's repertoire.



#### CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION

The apparently ordinary is rarely ordinary at all

### NEWS

#### NEXT TO NORMAL: GONE

Why can't the producers get it right?

#### PHRYNE FISHER TO RETURN!

Terribly fashionable, unmistakably glamorous and handy wit pistol

#### MARGARET WHITLAM - 1919-2012

We will miss her

#### HANDA OPERA ON SYDNEY HARBOUR

Let there be light - lots and lots of it

#### CATE AND ANDREW: WHEN NO NEWS IS NEWS

Wow! What a mean-spirited non-story

[see full News archive >>](#)

### WHAT'S ON

#### HISTORY II

1st September 2012 (QLD)

#### CAROLINE NIN'S HYMNE A PIAF

September 1 (NSW)

#### UMOJA: NO MEN ALLOWED & SCARLET ROAD

September 3 (NSW)

#### UMOJA: NO MEN ALLOWED & SCARLET ROAD

September 3 (NSW)

#### WIND GAP

September 4 (NSW)

#### TREASURE ISLAND

September 5 (NSW)

Around Town	Art	Bars & Pubs	Clubs	Comedy	Film	Gay & Lesbian	Kids	Museums & Attractions	Music	Restaurants	Shopping	Sport & Outdoor	<b>Theatre</b>	Time In	Travel
-------------	-----	-------------	-------	--------	------	---------------	------	-----------------------	-------	-------------	----------	-----------------	----------------	---------	--------

**What's happening**

# Conversation Piece

30 Aug-16 Sep , **Dance, Theatre, Theatre reviews**

Recommended

What?

Where?

When?

- Theatre
- Dance
- Musicals
- Opera
- Restaurant deals

**Follow**

- Newsletter
- RSS feed
- Theatre RSS
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Google+
- Spotify
- Foursquare
- iPhone App
- Other Time Out cities
- Magazine subscription

**Newsletters**

Your Email:

- Newsletters:
- Arts monthly
  - Comedy monthly
  - Comedy weekly
  - Family monthly
  - Film monthly
  - Food & drink monthly
  - Music weekly
  - Music monthly
  - Travel monthly

*Belvoir and choreographer Lucy Guerin join forces to present much more than just a talkfest*



First published on 24 Aug 2011. Updated on 30 Aug 2012.

You might interpret the title of the latest production at Belvoir St Theatre any number of ways, but, first and foremost, *Conversation Piece* is a vigorous coming together and dialogue between two usually separate modes of performance: theatre and dance.

It begins with, yes, a conversation – one that is, we're assured, entirely improvised. Alisdair Macindoe, Rennie McDougall and Harriet Ritchie have the kind of meaningless, meandering chat in which talk ricochets from subject to subject. They go from discussing the origins of the word 'vomitorium' to a story about projectile vomiting; from the fate of Sizzler to all-you-can-eat Korean barbeque; from the extravagance of oysters to the ins and outs of sexbots and blow-up dolls. It's fun eavesdropping on the conversation much in the same way it's fun eavesdropping on any spirited conversation between friends, but it's ultimately forgettable stuff.

Except that we won't forget it, because Macindoe, McDougall and Ritchie record their eight minutes of idle patter on their iPhones. The three of them are replaced by Alison Bell, Matthew Whittet and Megan Holloway – who are fed, through headphones, the entirety of that conversation. The eight minutes are re-enacted – utterance for utterance – but the words emerge like something regurgitated, stripped of all the rich non-verbal cues that were present in the initial interaction. Delivered in this way, it practically ceases to be communication at all.

When Macindoe, McDougall and Ritchie return to the floor and begin to dance – the others continuing to babble away – we're reminded of the vital eloquence of body language.

This is only one of several ways in which Macindoe, McDougall and Ritchie's improvised overture of chit-chat is recreated throughout *Conversation Piece*. Over the course of the production it's embedded in a variety of conversations or would-be conversations: compressed into one rambling crazy-person monologue, reinterpreted into a grating gossipy overheard phone call or blurted out piecemeal in a series of baffling non-sequiturs.

But some of the most evocative moments of communication, and communication breakdown, are those presented through dance: Bell's wobbly attempts to emulate Ritchie's virtuosic movements; Holloway struggling to keep up with a meticulously choreographed routine; McDougall wildly mirroring Holloway's own insane dance moves.

**Also on at Belvoir St Theatre**

1. Private Lives - Theatre - 29 Sep-11 Nov
2. Medea - Theatre - 11 Oct-25 Nov
3. Don't Take Your Love to Town - Theatre - 29 Nov-23 Dec

[More events at Belvoir St Theatre](#)

**Similar events**

- Salome
- Medea
- Madama Butterfly
- Sex With Strangers
- The Splinter
- Don't Take Your Love to Town
- South Pacific
- Rapid Write

**Other events this day**

- FBI Radio's 9th Birthday - Clubs
- Comedy Court - Stand Up Competition - Comedy
- Friday Night Raffles - Gay & Lesbian
- Yo Grito! - Clubs
- WWE RAW World Tour - Sport & Outdoor

**Latest features**



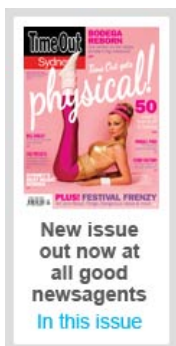
**Ensemble Theatre 2013 season**

What's this? Nudity at the Ensemble?!



**Broadway: Into the Woods review**

Once upon a time in New York City...





**Subscribe today and save up to 75%**  
[Read more](#)





**Our free iPhone app**  
[Download](#)

The scenes themselves are linked with the logic with which a conversation might flow. Bell's awkward pas de deux is followed by her hilarious smirking revenge, wherein she pummels the passive Ritchie with unconstructive negativity.

*Conversation Piece* is about more than just people conversing of course – or ‘conversating’, as Ritchie cheerily calls it on opening night. There’s a clue embedded in the original definition of the word ‘conversation’, which originally didn’t just mean ‘speaking together’ but, quite more broadly, ‘living together’. Choreographer Lucy Guerin and her performers have sought to capture nothing less than the myriad challenges of living with our fellow human beings: a preoccupation it shares with all the greatest theatre. They pull it off with grace, wit and flair.

[More Sydney theatre reviews, plays and previews? Sign up to our weekly newsletter](#)

Words by Darryn King

 Print
  Email
  Tweet 5
 Share 0

**Conversation Piece video**



**Sign up to our weekly newsletter**

Perfect plan for your weekend delivered every Thursday

[More features](#)



**OPEN DAYS**

**SEPTEMBER 8&9**  
**10AM - 3PM**  
**BOTH DAYS**



[aftrs.edu.au/opendays](http://aftrs.edu.au/opendays)

**Conversation Piece details**

**Belvoir St Theatre**


**Address**  
 25 Belvoir Street  
 Surry Hills 2010  
**Telephone** 02 9699 3444

**Price** from \$29.00 to \$62.00  
**Date** 30 Aug-16 Sep  
**Open** Tue 6.30pm, Wed-Fri 8pm, Sat 2pm & 8pm, Sun 5pm

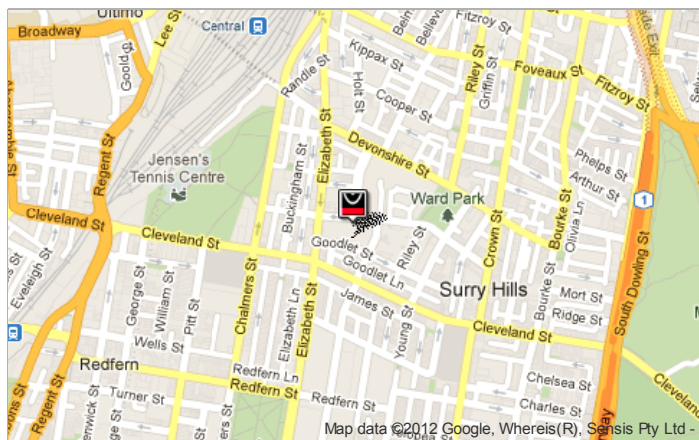
**Director:** Lucy Guerin  
**Cast:** Alison Bell, Megan Holloway, Aisclair Macindoe, Rennie McDougall, Harriet Ritchie, Matthew Whittet

[Belvoir St Theatre details](#)  
[Surry Hills area guide](#)

**Time Out Sydney** on

 +3,139

**Belvoir St Theatre map**




If this map or venue details are incorrect then please [Contact Us](#)

**Restaurants near Belvoir St Theatre**



Switch back to Ely Michelle Clough to use this social plugin.

 Sydney Arts+Theatre  
**TimeOutSydArts**

[TimeOutSydArts](#) The Sydney art scene's masters of deception, [@WhiteRabbitSyd](#), reopen their doors for

NOW WITH EXTRA SOURCE



## REVIEW: Conversation Piece | Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney

August 31, 2012 - 7:57 am, by Lloyd Bradford Syke

Tweet 1 0 Share 0



Alisdair Macindoe and Harriet Ritchie in Conversation Piece | Belvoir St Theatre

There's no doubt *Conversation Piece* will amount to just that. And there can be no doubt that Lucy Guerin, choreographer and director of this co-production, is a vital, important, influential and innovative choreographic and theatrical force.

But while the premise is irresistible, it doesn't necessarily make for 70 minutes of compelling theatre. Maybe 20. Or 30. When I say doesn't, I should say didn't, as it's designed to be different every night. In fact, it can hardly help but be since, as the name implies, it's based on a spontaneous conversation three actors improvise, from scratch (or so we're told), in the moment, before our very eyes and ears.

When I say actors, in this production, the line is blurred between actors and dancers. So it's actually the dancers we see on stage first, acting. Well, having a conversation. Being themselves, presumably. Or so we're led to believe. The factors (a term jokingly coined during rehearsal) are Alisdair Macindoe, Rennie McDougall and Harriet Ritchie. The actors involved, seen on stage precisely eight minutes later (the timed length of the generated condo), are the gifted Alison Bell, attention-getting Megan Holloway and multifarious Matthew Whittet.

On the night, conversation centred, in heaped spoonfuls, around food. Macindoe was informative, relating facts about the unsustainability of seafood. The next generation may never taste fish. Ritchie told tall tales, of a stepfather that once ate 96 oysters, without ill effect. A cool dude, a surfer, he strode on out. There was discussion of projectile vomiting, life-size sex dolls, the relocation of the Sizzler empire to Thailand, an all-you-can-eat Korean BBQ restaurant on Rundle Street. All of this recorded on iPhones. In fact, this was a 70-minute ad for iPhones and cool apps. Talk about product placement: if the production wasn't sponsored, it was an opportunity missed, on both sides of the equation.

In come the actors, recapitulating the original conversation as it's fed through their earphones. This was the moment when my cynicism was aroused, since there seemed to be a very conscious, overt attempt to accentuate the idiosyncrasies of the first utterers, particularly for comic effect, rather than be strictly true to the premise of the work: faithfulness should've been the objective, rather than exaggeration. What was interesting, I suppose, was the decision to subvert the communication by freezing all gesticulation. This transforms the inanities of everyday social discourse into something one's more likely to read about in the DSM IV. Even the slightest differential in pauses, a louder, more cacophonous laugh here, a marginally more anxious response there, cranks the dial from average, or 'normal', to weird, or downright perverse.

Re-enter the dancers, who reverse the polarity, communicating the entire conversation through movement as individually expressive as their verbal styles. From this point, it's reinterpreted in many and various ways: excerpted; monologued; delivered as a telephone conversation; inflected with accents; stripped of words and recreated as a language comprised of nonsensical sounds. The last is engaging, as we're reminded of how much, say, facial expression, volume, pitch, intensity, emphasis and other qualities bring to bear insofar as understanding between people, even when there's no language, as such, in common.

There are startling moments, such as when Ritchie embarks on a athletic solo, bending and

Sign Up Log in

crikey DAILY MAIL

A voice of independence  
the issues that really mat

START MY FREE MEMBERSHIP

### About

*Crikey* cheers and jeers from the cheap seat taking you behind the curtain of Australian theatre to review the best (and worst) on stage. Our team of writers lurk in darkened auditoriums around Australia to assess the of the stage. [Read more...](#)

Posts Comments

### FACEBOOK

stretching in ways few humans can. And there's certainly humour in Bell's futile, but creative attempts to follow suit. Indeed, this is reiterated when Holloway tries to join the troupe, as they indulge in a complex, synchronised routine. Later, the tables are turned, when Macca seeks to mirror Holloway's wild loungeroom abandon. Other than in these episodes, much of the other choreography is, for mine, unremarkable; even questionable. And the tearing down of border fences between dance and theatre, which sounds so exciting and new on paper, isn't entirely or convincingly effected.

Bell's sergeant major like harangue of Ritchie is probably the most amusing scene; Bell gets a ringing endorsement for her comedic sensibility from me. Robin Fox's composition and sound design plays a prominent part, as do interpolated songs from people like Johnny Cash, singing Nick Cave's *The Mercy Seat* which, much as I enjoyed them, left me in a quizzical state, pondering the relativity. Especially as they seemed to break any flow that was established. Blessed relief, perhaps? Like a commercial break?

Macndoe's destructive slomo performance was fastidiously realised and was one of the most impressive sequences but, again, why? It's all very well to fall back on clichés about abstraction and an overarching aspiration to provoke thought, feeling and foster further exploration, but what suffices academically, or in the confines of a rehearsal studio, workshop or festival of dangerous dance and theatrical ideas doesn't necessarily stand as theatre for which people are expected to fork out their hard-earned.

While the work has much to offer insofar as generating feelings of compassion, understanding (the manipulations of conversation prompt realisation that in the act of 'conversating' we are desperately seeking recognition, acceptance and approval) and empathy, it tends to follow a sinewave rather than arc in its dramatic effectiveness. While the opening night audience seemed, on the whole, wildly enthusiastic, I wasn't. I fear some of us may be talking about *Conversation Piece* for all the wrong reasons.

I will be checking out those cool apps though. On that whatsaname that, as Guerin has observed, so effectively keeps us isolated, even while opening us to a universe of connections.

**The details:** *Conversation Piece* plays Belvoir St's Upstairs Theatre until September 16. Tickets on the [company website](#).

[Comments \(0\)](#) | [Permalink](#)

**Post a Comment**

You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.

[« REVIEW: iOU Dance Solo Series \(Spring Dance 2012\) | The Playhouse, Sydney](#)



[Switch back to Ely Michelle Clough to use this social pl](#)

#### Pages

- [About](#)

#### Categories

- [Arts festivals](#)
- [Adelaide Fringe Festival](#)
- [Melbourne Fringe Festival](#)
- [Melbourne International Arts Festival](#)
- [Melbourne International Comedy Festival](#)
- [Sydney Festival](#)
- [Sydney Fringe Festival](#)
- [Awards](#)
- [Broadway](#)
- [Cabaret](#)
- [Casting](#)
- [Circus](#)
- [Comedy](#)
- [Dance](#)
- [Media coverage](#)
- [Musicals](#)
- [Opera](#)
- [Plays](#)
- [REVIEWS](#)
- [Adelaide](#)
- [Brisbane](#)
- [Canberra](#)
- [Melbourne](#)
- [Perth](#)
- [Sydney](#)
- [Short plays](#)
- [Show funding](#)
- [Theatre buildings](#)
- [Uncategorized](#)

#### Crikey Blogs

- [The Stump](#)
- [The Poll Bludd](#)
- [Pollytics](#)
- [Croakey](#)
- [Cinetology](#)
- [The Northern](#)
- [Back in a Bit](#)
- [Culture Mulch](#)
- [Fully \(sic\)](#)
- [Plane Talking](#)
- [Rooted](#)
- [Pure Poison](#)
- [First Blog on t Moon](#)
- [Laugh Track](#)
- [Liticism](#)
- [The Urbanist](#)
- [Game On](#)
- [Next ACT](#)

#### Archives

- [August 2012](#)
- [July 2012](#)
- [June 2012](#)
- [May 2012](#)
- [April 2012](#)
- [March 2012](#)
- [February 2012](#)
- [January 2012](#)
- [December 2011](#)
- [November 2011](#)
- [October 2011](#)
- [September 2011](#)
- [August 2011](#)
- [July 2011](#)
- [June 2011](#)
- [May 2011](#)
- [April 2011](#)
- [March 2011](#)
- [February 2011](#)
- [January 2011](#)
- [December 2010](#)
- [November 2010](#)
- [October 2010](#)
- [September 2010](#)
- [August 2010](#)
- [July 2010](#)
- [June 2010](#)
- [May 2010](#)
- [April 2010](#)

[Sponsored Links](#)

## Conversation Piece



**A Belvoir and Lucy Guerin Inc co-production. Belvoir Theatre, Sydney. Choreographer/Director: Lucy Guerin. 25 August – 16 September, 2012.**

This is bracing experimental work right at the heart of Sydney's theatre establishment. Based on a nightly eight-minute improvised conversation, six performers — with their iPhones set to the Voice Memo application — explore the recorded words, dig for new meanings, swap roles, present increasingly weird re-imaginings of the original conversation. Three of the cast are billed as actors, three as dancers, though the distinctions are often blurred. Together, using an amplified musical app,

they even make a reasonable rock band.

The highly original work springs from Melbourne-based choreographer Lucy Guerin and is the end product of years of intense experimentation. The excellent dance sequences and musical numbers are obviously set pieces, but you'd have to see more than one performance to be sure that each opening conversation was, as claimed, completely different.

On my night it's a banal, overlapping chat between the three dancers (Alisdair MacIndoe, Rennie McDougall, Harriet Ritchie) each recording their own 'parts' on separate iPhones. The deliberately trivial cross-talk covers singer Cher, the TV series *Glee*, an incident that morning when a toaster caught fire, the efficiency of vitamins and the derivation of the phrase 'play it by ear'.

Then the three actors (Alison Bell, Megan Holloway, Matthew Whittet) enter and, listening via headphones to the recorded words of their 'partners', give an immediate second-hand rendering of the original. This is funny and unsettling and, as the 70-minute performance proceeds, darker variations reveal unspoken meanings and unexpected undercurrents. There's an interrogation, even a mass murder.

The experiment on my night is consistently entertaining and just long enough. Taking a well-deserved bow at the end are the show's six hard-working iPhones. These clever little critters are taking over the world.

*Frank Hatherley*

Images: Rennie McDougall, Harriet Ritchie & Alisdair MacIndoe and Alisdair MacIndoe & Harriet Ritchie in Conversation Piece. Photographer: Brett Boardman.



To keep up with the latest news and reviews at Stage Whispers, click here to like us on [Facebook](#), or follow us on [Twitter](#).

**UNDERGRADUATE COURSES IN**  
ACTING (ACTING OR MUSIC THEATRE STREAM),  
DESIGN, PRODUCTION, COSTUME AND PROPERTIES

LEARN MORE AT [WWW.NIDA.EDU.AU](http://WWW.NIDA.EDU.AU)

**NIDA**

**AON** Call Wayne Corbett  
[02] 9683 0930

or [Click Here](#)

A R N 268627

### [Legally Blonde Musical](#)

Winner of 7 major awards including Best New Musical. Book now!

[legallyblonde.com.au](http://legallyblonde.com.au)

### [Sydney Opera Tickets](#)

Up to 90% off Opera Sydney. See Today's Offer in Sydney!

[www.Ouffer.com/Sydney-Best-Opera](http://www.Ouffer.com/Sydney-Best-Opera)

### [Exclusive Photography](#)

View our Gallery. Read our Testimonials.

[www.artphotobykira.com.au](http://www.artphotobykira.com.au)

AdChoices ▶



**The Australian**  
**Friday 31/08/2012**

Page: 15  
Section: Arts & Entertainment  
Region: Australia, AU  
Circulation: 129363  
Type: National  
Size: 210.94 sq.cms.



**slice**  
CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip

# Dancing the small talk into Chinese whispers

## THEATRE

**Conversation Piece**  
Choreographed and directed by Lucy Guerin.  
Belvoir, Sydney, August 29

THREE dancers chat inconsequentially on stage, recording it on their iPhones for about eight minutes. Three actors come in and take the phones and listen through earphones, re-creating as best they can the tone of what we have just heard. From this simple beginning, Lucy Guerin and her performers build up — using dance, songs and more improvised talk — an intricate pattern of cleverly repeated versions of the original conversation.

On one level it is all rather banal. A lot depends on the original talk, which will vary from night to night. On opening night it included all-you-can eat restaurants, sex dolls and looming seafood shortages. The progression of what becomes the "script" has the structure of any light chat in which people are trying to make conversation.

But as the words are copied,

repeated, interacted with and danced we get an intriguing performative meditation on what exactly performance is. To what extent are the original talkers contriving to be theatrically interesting? How do the actors, for all their initially stumbling re-creation of the recorded words, bring character and colour to it?

How do you dance a conversation? There are some choreographed dance sequences and all the performers have songs and soundscapes on their phones that are occasionally plugged into the theatre's sound system and danced to. As the complications multiply and as the actors and dancers interact and start to compete with other, an element of drama creeps in. They are starting to make up theatrical situations, not just things to rabbit on about.

Towards the end there are some scenes of tension. An actor watches a dancer and then unplugs his phone and puts her own song on, and dances in her style to that. He films her on his phone and then later copies her dance as he watches it play back. Another actor listens to one of

the dancer's lines of talk from the original conversation and delivers a withering commentary on it. The effect is electric, not just electronic.

Guerin has assembled a group of very fine performers with strong personalities — Alison Bell, Megan Holloway, Alisdair Macindoe, Rennie McDougall, Harriet Ritchie and Matthew Whittet — and within the framework that she has established they create a lot of the show themselves. Their relationship with their phones seems for a long time to be more important than their relationship with each other, and even at the end the phones predominate. This is alienating, just as it is when we watch people conduct intimate conversations in cafes or on buses, or when we use our own phones and ignore people around us.

Perhaps we should all talk to each other more.

**JOHN McCALLUM**

*Tickets: \$42-\$62. Bookings: (02) 9699 3444 or online. Until September 16.*



BRETT BOARDMAN

**Conversation Piece is a meditation on performance**



HOME  
 theatre  
 travel  
 eats | drinks  
 ABOUT

CONTACT

Oz Baby Boomers  
 PO Box 3484  
 Rhodes NSW 2138

T: 02 9743 5734

M: 0409 831 216

[EMAIL](#)



POSTED: 02 SEPTEMBER 2012

*Conversation Piece*, choreographed and directed by Lucy Guerin

[Belvoir](#) | Belvoir Street Upstairs | Until 16 September

*Conversation Piece* is an unlikely topic for a dance work, irreverently mixing dance and theatre and, as a by-product, commenting on the relationship between the two. Each night the show presents a different conversation, which is recorded and provides the stimulus for the improvisation that follows.

Three dancers take the stage and begin a random conversation about their day — the burning of toast, for example. Each dancer records their conversation into an iPhone. Three actors enter and are handed the iPhones, into which they plug in and begin to recount the recorded conversation. As an audience we become familiar with these idiosyncratic snippets of dialogue as they are repeated and a displaced narrative of sorts unfurls with multiple strands.



Improvised dialogue can be extremely dull but the repetition of the words exploring various rhythms and tones, reveals instead the complexity of the transmission of message and the playful nature of human communications.

Undercurrents run beneath the basic verbal exchange and it is very much the up-to-the minute choreography that explores these undercurrents, conveyed with precision and commitment by the three highly skilled dancers — Rennie McDougall, Harriet Ritchie and Alisdair Macindoe. Images and ideas are suggested by the dancing bodies with evocative power and it is the dance far more than the dialogue that provides the cohesion.

The six iPhones play a crucial part, as they are both an extension of each performer and have an existence of their own when they are plugged into wires that dangle from the sound system above the stage. Music is selected by the performer and provides both mood and immediate movement of exchange. There are well crafted individual moments from all three dancers, in particular Ritchie's solo to The Cure and Macindoe's menacing manipulation of the other characters in slow motion, which established a tense, dark mood to the evening's frivolities.

The three actors — Alison Bell, Megan Holloway and Matthew Whittet — have considerable charm and generous expressiveness but their skills are somewhat overshadowed and upstaged by the exploration of the physicality of the human body. As the show progresses we accumulate more information and insights into each performer and we see their commonalities as well as their variances.

Post-modern in its approach, this is an absorbing investigation into the ideas that resonate in daily verbal interchanges and the vernacular of the everyday. Lucy Guerin continues to impress with her strong focus on effect of meaning on movement in a piece that is far more complex than it at first seems. Thumbs Up!

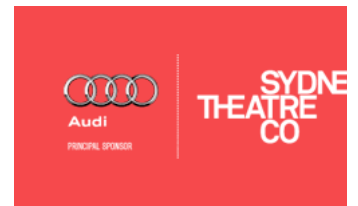
[HOME > THEATRE >](#) [RETURN TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

[RETURN TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

[HOME > THEATRE >](#)



Matthew Whittet & Alisdair Macindoe. Image: ©Brett Boardman.







Sydney Morning Herald  
Monday 3/09/2012

Page: 16  
Section: Arts & Entertainment  
Region: Sydney, AU  
Circulation: 170666  
Type: Capital City Daily  
Size: 159.03 sq.cms.



slice  
CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip

## DANCE THEATRE

# Word and movement in battle royal

### CONVERSATION PIECE

Belvoir St Theatre, August 31  
Until September 16

Reviewed by Jill Sykes

THE choreographer and director Lucy Guerin is fascinated by comparisons between trained and untrained performers of dance and between the spoken word and the language of movement.

Guerin's 2009 work *Untrained* was a highly entertaining success.

Both trained and untrained dancers shape her latest offering, *Conversation Piece*, with a little help from technology.

It begins with three dancers chatting about ordinary things: for instance, washing up and what school teachers are like, the night I saw it. (There are different subjects in every performance.)

Since they are not "acting", some words can be hard to catch when they talk over the top of one another.

Fear not. They are recording what they say on their iPhones and we are



**Pas de deux ... Matthew Whittet and Alisdair MacIndoe.** Photo: Brett Boardman

about to hear it all again from the three actors, who listen through earphones and speak from the recording.

A dance sequence intervenes, performed by those trained to do it – neat and snappy, but nothing exciting – before the dancers and actors cross over into each other's territory. One non-dancer makes a good fist of joining in with her three terpsichorean colleagues and wins everyone's sympathy. An actor

keeps up his one-sided spoken "conversation" relayed through his earphones while a dancer makes an approaches that is so blatant it is practically rape; a battle royal between the spoken word and movement.

And so it goes on, with individuals selecting music on their iPhones. It can be seen as an interesting exercise between actors, dancers and technology, and the performers carry out their tasks impeccably. But it's not one for which I could find any enthusiasm.

As a lover of dance and theatre, I was left unsatisfied on both counts. What Guerin wrote about her ideas in a program note was more inspiring than what I saw on stage.

But I am happy to report that it struck a chord with the Belvoir subscription audience, more accustomed to plays and less familiar with Guerin's work, although they saw her *Human Interest Story* at this venue last year. They looked happy, laughed appropriately and applauded warmly at the end.



## Sydney Xpress News Monday 3/09/2012

Page: 24  
Section: General News  
Region: Sydney, AU  
Circulation: 25000  
Type: Magazines Lifestyle  
Size: 144.45 sq.cms.



**slice**  
CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip

REVIEW

## THEATRE

VERONICA HANNON

veronica.hannon@gaynewsnetwork.com.au



### CONVERSATION PIECE

Belvoir St Theatre, Until 15 September  
Bookings: 02 9699 3444

Choreographer and director Lucy Guerin's latest work is a meditation on contemporary social intercourse. It brings together six young artists from the disciplines of theatre and dance.

Three dancers walk onto the stage. They begin an unscripted conversation. They record the trivial chatter on their iPhones. The banal talkfest stretches to eight minutes. I suspect the intention is to bore us although the recollection of a projectile vomiting incident in Sizzler reduces many in the audience to hysterics.

When three actors join the dancers, take their phones and plug in earphones I begin to dread the worst. Sure enough, the actors face front and regurgitate what we have just listened to. All this empty talk begins to dull my mind and I want to scream, "For god's sake will somebody start dancing!" Before my self control deserts me, Johnny Cash comes to the rescue, his cover of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds 'Mercy Seat' begins to play, drowning out the prattling actors and the dancers begin to move.

From this point on I find myself a lot more engaged by the performance. Thankfully I don't have to hear the initial

conversation again in its entirety. Instead the use of snippets planted in some very different exchanges – an overbearing commuter takes a call on a crowded train, a mad woman rants to anyone who'll listen – is often witty and interesting. In one scene actor Alison Bell shows off her comic chops to great effect, seemingly channelling *Gunnery Sergeant Hartman* from Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, as she tears apart dancer Harriet Ritchie and her contribution to the opening conversation.

Still the most memorable moments, revealing the subtleties and failings in human communication, are expressed in dance. Dancer Alisdair Macindoe brings a real sense of danger to the proceedings. In a scene with actor Matthew Whittet we observe a conversation at cross purposes turn into something a lot darker. Macindoe is a dancer fully in control yet his physical bullying of Whittet is extremely confronting.

The dancers – Ritchie, Macindoe and Rennie McDougall – are all sublime movers and the actors – Bell, Whittet and Megan Holloway – are able to bend text to their will. It is really their show.



## Daily Telegraph

Tuesday 4/09/2012

Page: 48  
Section: Tbreak  
Region: Sydney, AU  
Circulation: 350059  
Type: Capital City Daily  
Size: 176.85 sq.cms.



# slice

CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip

# Transforming the trivial into the profound

## REVIEW: CONVERSATION PIECE

A CASUAL chat between three young people covers a gamut of topics, among them projectile vomiting, all-you-can-eat gluttony and dwindling fish stocks, and is full of the banalities, nervous laughter, mutual recognitions, forced jokes and storytelling typical of our everyday conversations.

This seemingly trivial conversation, though, is being recorded on their phones and soon, three others are listening to it via headphones and repeating verbatim the individual voices.

Already, the nuances, rhythms and meaning of what was originally spoken have taken on a different hue in the guise of different voices and personalities.

The conversation is a constant thread throughout this mesmerising production by Belvoir and choreographer/director Lucy Guerin, which deftly combines dance and acting (or as the cast calls it, “dacting”) into a seamless and riveting whole.

Three sets of plastic-chair banks flank the stage and leads connecting the performers’ mobiles to loudspeakers winched down from the rafters, so that,

using their phone apps, the “conversation”, among all its manifestations, also takes a musical turn.

When the dance performers who initiated the original, improvised conversation (Rennie McDougall, Harriet Ritchie and Alisdair Macindoe) launch into their tightly-woven moves, the feeling is that there will be more substance to their words than we might have thought. Soon, some quick-step toe-tapping and flapping resonates with its own, wordless conversation and as the actors Alison Bell, Megan Holloway and Matthew Whittet later try to emulate them, they quickly find they don’t fit in.

After Holloway tries vainly to copy the quickfire moves of the dance trio, she finds the only true way to express herself is by letting herself go and doing her own thing, letting her hair down literally and figuratively.

As the “outsiders” look for a way into the conversation, there is a hint of menace on both sides, especially when Bell turns Ritchie’s part in the conversation against her, circling her with words as a weapon.

Guerin weaves what begins as

a simple premise into a theme of great weight and consequence about social interaction.

**GARY SMITH**

Belvoir St Theatre, Belvoir St, Surry Hills;  
until September 16, \$29-\$62, 9699 3444,  
belvoir.com.au

ST



An everyday chat dissected in a highly original production.



## Drum Media Tuesday 4/09/2012

Page: 44  
Section: General News  
Region: National, AU  
Circulation: 31580  
Type: Magazines Lifestyle  
Size: 146.87 sq.cms.



**slice**  
CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

press clip

## CONVERSATION PIECE THEATRE

### Belvoir Street Theatre

Three actors, three dancers, one stage and an unscripted conversation Lucy Guerin's *Conversation Piece* takes these elements and puts them through various permutations in a manner similar to Raymond Queneau's literary *Exercices In Style*. The results manage not only to pull apart the building blocks of conversation and social interaction – by examining each element; an exchange, an utterance, a glance or an offer, in an unexpected light or from an unusual perspective – a desire cited by Guerin, but also lay an interesting platform for 'potential' performance; what, if anything, can be made from these elements and their myriad combinations? It begins with an eight-minute conversation as dancers Harriet Ritchie, Rennie McDougall and Alisdair Macindoe broach projectile

vomiting, the Technocalypse, sex dolls and seafood, and a whole lot more. Recorded live to iPhones, it is then performed verbatim by Alison Bell, Matthew Whittet and Megan Holloway, all plugged into earphones. From here the conversation is warped, pulled apart and reconstructed before our eyes: played out as an awkward conversation on a train, as rhythm-driven interpretive dance, as fierce interrogation, as babbled nonsense. It occasionally drags, at times the content feeling too familiar or repetitive, but it's the subtle nuances that arise from each permutation that make the work so intriguing, and the enormous and multifaceted skill of the entire cast ensure that the potential of this work comes to the fore. And in this case, it is, after all, the potential that is so engaging, more than enough to stir desires for a repeat viewing (or two, three...). Conceptually, Guerin has created the framework for a piece that cannot be exhausted.

**Dave Drayton**

*Running until Sunday 16 September*



# Concrete Playground

## Conversation Piece



When: Saturday, 25 August - Sunday, 16 September  
Where: Belvoir St Theatre Upstairs, 25 Belvoir St, Surry Hills  
How much: \$62/42/29

*Conversation Piece* directed and choreographed by Lucy Guerin, begins with an improvised conversation between three dancers, Alisdair Macindoe, Harriet Ritchie, and Rennie McDougall. The quotidian chat is recorded on iPhones and used as base material for the performance that follows. The exchange is different each night. Joining the dancers on stage are three actors: Alison Bell, Megan Holloway, and Matthew Whittet.

The show is something of an experiment. Guerin devised the work in collaboration with the performers, and the result isn't so much a blend between dance and theatre as a meeting. The contrast between the dancers and actors is clear and at times hilarious. Bell and Holloway try to follow a choreographed routine at one point with comic results, and Whittet's attempt to resist the lyrical advances of Macindoe is wickedly funny.

*Conversation Piece* is a bit empty as a play and indeed makes more sense as a dance piece or even perhaps anti-theatre. The language used in this show is abstracted and words are almost treated as found objects. The show has much in common with Peter Handke's 'Sprechstücke' or 'speak-ins', which use words to form language criticism rather than well-made plays. As with Handke's works, *Conversation Piece* uses words as toys to be played with rather than vessels of expression or description. In fact, there couldn't be a better example to support the argument that words do not *hold* meaning; rather, it is their use that is meaningful. Bell rendering some of Ritchie's banal comments into vicious condemnations is a prime example.

The music created by the performers with their iPhones is hugely enjoyable, and Robin Fox's sound design mostly supports the action on stage. A few of her choices seem an odd fit though, such as Johnny Cash's version of *The Mercy Seat* playing during a choreographed sequence. The song is extremely lovely, but stands out as a grand emotional wash against the otherwise very detailed production. Other than this moment, the piece never hands us grand narratives or sentimentality. Instead, we're treated to a joyful string of conversations between technology, language, and movement.

By Jessica Keath

Will You Be Attending?