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What's happening

Conversation Piece

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

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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](#)

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

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- Friday Night Raffles - Gay & Lesbian
- Yo Grito! - Clubs
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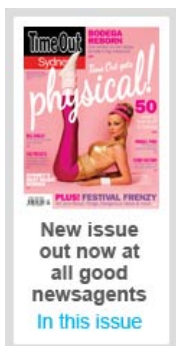
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The scenes themselves are linked with the logic with which a conversation might flow. Bell's awkward pas de deux is followed by her hilarious smirking revenge, wherein she pummels the passive Ritchie with unconstructive negativity.

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.

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Words by Darryn King

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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

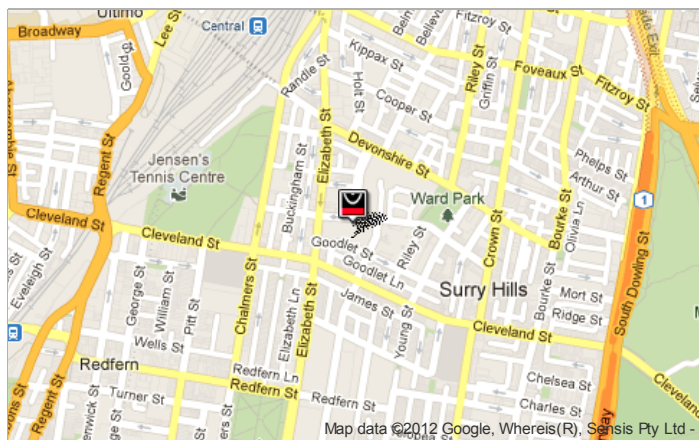
Director: Lucy Guerin
Cast: Alison Bell, Megan Holloway, Aisdair Macindoe, Rennie McDougall, Harriet Ritchie, Matthew Whittet

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

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