

Dance review: Lucy Guerin's *Weather* whips up a dance maelstrom

BY NATASHA GAUTHIER, OTTAWA CITIZEN NOVEMBER 8, 2013



Australian choreographer Lucy Guerin and her company presents a work called *Weather* at the NAC Nov. 7,8,9, 2013. *Weather* is an atmospheric new dance work, an homage to the breathtaking power of the elements and an exploration of the extremities of our ever-changing climate.

Weather

Lucy Guerin, Inc.

National Arts Centre

Reviewed Nov. 7

OTTAWA— Everyone knows Canadians love to talk about the weather. But it took an Australian to dance about it.

To a frozen northerner, the Land Down Under's hot, sunny climate may seem ideal. But every year, Australians are threatened by forest fires, searing droughts, floods and vicious storms, all apparently getting deadlier as human sprawl collides with Mother Nature.

Melbourne dancer and choreographer Lucy Guerin's 2012 work, *Weather*, explores our complicated relationship with the uncontrollable forces of nature. In Guerin's world, wind, rain, sun and snow shape and erode our emotions and thoughts as implacably as they carve stone and earth.

Weather opens with a lone male dancer flailing like a sturdy sapling buffeted by a hurricane. He is at once elegant and wild, looking at times like one of those giant wind puppets in a used car lot. He even provides his own whistling, whooshing soundtrack.

This free, loose solo morphs into a duet, with a male and female dancer spiralling relentlessly around each other with increasing urgency and violence. Every so often their rigid pattern is broken up by other dancers careening across the stage, but they always return to their inexorable vortex.

The rest of the work is an impressive *moto perpetuo* for the entire company — four women and two men — with only occasional pauses in the intensity. Oren Ambarchi's pulsing, clubby score fades in and out, but you never forget about the importance of breath, the origin of rhythm and music. The dancers howl and sigh, limbs slicing and chopping though their swooping voices.

Much has been made of *Weather*'s imaginative use of the humble white plastic shopping bag as prop, set and metaphor. A panel of the bags hangs over the stage, softly filtering the light. At first glance, they look like ruched parachute silk. At a certain point, a bank of the bags is cut loose and they drift to the ground like birds, or snowflakes. The dancers play in their poufy, rustling mass, rolling around, skating with them on their feet. More ominously, one performer uses a bag to try to suffocate and restrain another — a comment on the harm our wasteful, convenience-loving habits can inflict on our environment.

Guerin creates beautiful visuals with an unbeautiful object. She's also a ruthless editor, adept at contrasting taut and spontaneous, organized and chaotic, passive and active gestures. She crams a lot of material into 65 minutes but it never feels rushed or incoherent. An environmentally-inspired dance piece could easily have been preachy, tedious or excessively cerebral. In Guerin's deft hands, it's absorbing, exciting and magical.

© Copyright (c) The Ottawa Citizen