Word and movement in battle royal

Reviewed by Jill Sykes
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CONVERSATION PIECE
Belvoir St Theatre, August 31
Until September 16

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 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.

*This story was found at: http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/dance/word-and-movement-in-battle-royal-20120902-2587q.html*
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