The West Gate Bridge dance of disaster

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Actors Kyle Kremerskothen and Lina Limosani appear in Structure and Sadness West Gate Bridge in the background.
MARK WILSON

CHOREOGRAPHER Lucy Guerin remembers when the West Gate Bridge collapsed 39 years ago.

"No matter where you were living, it was something that affected the whole country," Guerin says.

It was a memory so strong that it propelled her into building an artistic bridge to one of Australia's worst industrial disasters called Structure and Sadness. Guerin directed and choreographed the work which, she says, explores the collapse not as a factual narrative but as a physical and visual response to a devastating event.

**For more on the West Gate Bridge collapse, see exclusive Leader video here**

"It's not a documentary work, it's a dance work," Guerin explains.

"We didn't base it on individuals. It's really quite an abstract work.

"The intensity and depth of the experience that people had, there's no real way to experience or express that."

Guerin says the production starts with the bridge collapse and goes into the engineering principles of compression, suspension, torsion and failure.

She says the bridge's concrete and definable form contrasts with the unknowable grief and chaos brought about by its failure.

The production premiered during the 2006 Melbourne International Arts Festival and has toured around the world.

It has also received recognition through a Helpmann Award for Best Dance Work, an Australian Dance Award for Outstanding Performance by a Company and a Green Room Award for Choreography.
Guerin says she was pleased with the way the work had been received.

"I think it does bring this event into people's minds," Guerin says.

"And I think although it a local story, it's really a universal story.

"It gives people a sense of the delicacy of life and how the built structures around them are not as solid as they seem.

"The whole of one's life can collapse in a few seconds through an event. In this case it was when 37 bolts came loose.

"It really goes to show how fragile an environment we live in."


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