Structure and Sadness | Lucy Guerin

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Structure and Sadness | Lucy Guerin
Written by Stephanie Glickman
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Structure and Sadness is as its title suggests – full of structure, but not so mechanical as to lack the sadness. Originally premiered at the CUB Malthouse in 2006 as part of MIAF, the work is enjoying a brief remount season. This rare opportunity to revisit the work, which hasn’t lost any of its enthrall or power, reminds us why Guerin is such a quality choreographer and significant Australian artist. It is satisfying in every way - from its actual choreography through to its perfectly matched visual design elements and its interplay of narrative and abstraction.

With the 1970 Westgate Bridge collapse tragedy as its impetus, Structure and Sadness uses choreographic activity to express ideas of tension, buoyancy and balance in a series of delicate solos and duets. Against a backdrop of scattered rectangular lights, Byron Perry rolls out of and within a large cardboard sheet, the flat, angular material becoming an undulating partner in dance. As duets progress – bodies rolling and enfolding, contact improvisational style, or suspending and manipulating string or poles between each other, they suggest a building of both industry and emotion. A seesaw with four dancers on one end and only one on the other should topple, but doesn’t. In perfect harmony with these actions, performers steadily and meticulously construct a precarious structure that transverses the stage. Guerin paces this activity so calmly and Gerald Mair’s sound design supports it so well that even though it should come as no surprise that the structure will collapse like slow-moving dominos, it is still a shock when it does.

There are then more literal sequences – the housewife washing dishes, singing a pop song to herself, interrupted by a news flash on the radio that will change her life forever. Two identically dressed women upstage – a Greek chorus designed to lead to that moment of collapse - that moment when nothing will be the same again. When the work transitions into a more pure dance ensemble sequence of three male-female couples – it somehow fits perfectly and abstractly suggests domestic tranquility shattered, the heartbreak of lost love and the grief of death.

Guerin extracts the essence of her tangible subject and turns it into something other. She doesn’t over or under work her theatrical elements – she finds the perfect balance. Every element steadily builds and recoils. There is method to the madness. The abstract movement always leads somewhere, always extends her concepts and relates back to the rest of the work. The more narrative elements slot in comfortably and bring the work back to its real enthrall or power, reminds us why Guerin is such a quality choreographer and significant Australian artist. It is satisfying in every way - from its actual choreography through to its perfectly matched visual design elements and its interplay of narrative and abstraction.

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Like the men on the Westgate, Guerin is a builder – layering her story several levels deep but not losing sight of a clear pathway for the audience. She masterfully manages the near impossible task of marrying the literal and the non-literal while never dumbing down or cluttering up. Structure and Sadness is as its title suggests – full of structure, but not so mechanical as to lack the sadness.

While the six strong ensemble all contribute to the work, Perry and Harriet Ritchie stand out for their abilities to truly embody the shibboleths of Guerin’s choreography and to bring out its rich, sensuous textures with just the right...
amount of fluidity and tension.

Malthouse Theatre presents a Lucy Guerin Production  
Structure And Sadness  

Director: Lucy Guerin  

Venue: Merlyn Theatre, The CUB Malthouse  
Dates: 25 November – 29 November 2009  
Times: Wednesday – Friday 7.30pm, Sunday at 5pm. Matinee Saturday 28 November at 2pm.  
Tickets: $16 - $38  
Bookings: www.malthousetheatre.com.au | 03 9685 5111

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