Dancer Lucy Guerin defies severe jet-lag to talk to MARY BRENAN

Two separate flight delays had stretched Lucy Guerin's long haul from Australia to Glasgow by several wakeful hours. It seemed mean even to raise the subject of sleep, but sleep is the subject explored in <i>Heavy</i>, part of the double bill that Guerin and her company are performing in <i>New Moves</i> at the Tron tonight.

It occurred to Guerin that even though technology—in the form of polypgraph machines—can track the rhythms and patterns of sleep, can identify sleep disorders through the differing brainwaves, it cannot reveal the contents of the dreams that either trouble or assuage us.

"It's about the readable, the knowable, the measurable, compared with the indefinable. We can tell when people are dreaming, but we still don't know why they dream. Or what they dream about. People don't always know, themselves. Dreams can be completely ungraspable, even to the dreamer," explains Guerin—who, as a child, wished there could be "some kind of video camera you could plug in and record your dreams with..."

<i>Robbery Waitress On Bail</i>—the other work on show at <i>New Moves</i>—drew its inspiration from a Melbourne tabloid and its report of a waitress held at knifepoint—by her boyfriend.

They escaped with $25,000 but were later caught and sentenced. As with <i>Heavy</i>, Guerin found herself musing on what lay beneath the surface of the recorded event. The headlines told one story but not unlike the polypgraph marking—they didn't reach down into the driving forces within these people or the interior thought processes that ran through them while events unfolded.

By her own admission, Guerin is not wildly enthused by narrative dance. Her use of a story, here, is merely a means of showing how dance differs from text. "Rather than acting out the story in dance—something I don't find very successful—I try to use the dance as a kind of dramatic or psychological layer."

And she nips, neatly, round the whole story-telling business by projecting the text as a backdrop. "That was my way of saying the audience shouldn't worry about the narrative—they could see it up there in black and white. They could see what the dance added to the story. Or how the dance described the story. It was almost like a demonstration of what's important to me about dance."

Her ability to express duality in a situation—to pick up on contrasting elements, or the disparity between external/internal—have brought her considerable recognition not just in Australia but in America, where she was based for seven years. A hunger to explore new techniques and approaches took her to New York. A need to reconnect with Australia—and perhaps define and channel these cultural experiences into a creative identity—brought her home. But not before she'd picked up a prestigious Bessie award in New York and had a duet commissioned by Mikhail Baryshnikov for his White Oaks Project. Not that any of this has given her a diva-esque temperament. She generously conceals the inevitable jet-lag, and even though she doesn't think dance is translatable into words, she tells me: "You have to come up with a way of speaking about your work. It can be difficult, frustrating—but I think you've got a responsibility to get the work out there, known to the audiences. I try to look at it in a positive light: it can help you clarify what you're doing."

Anyone who can be so outgoing and focused after being up in the air for hours should be well worth watching on stage.

<i>New Moves</i>: Australian Showcase opens at the Tron tonight with the Lucy Guerin Company and solo artist Lisa O'Neill.