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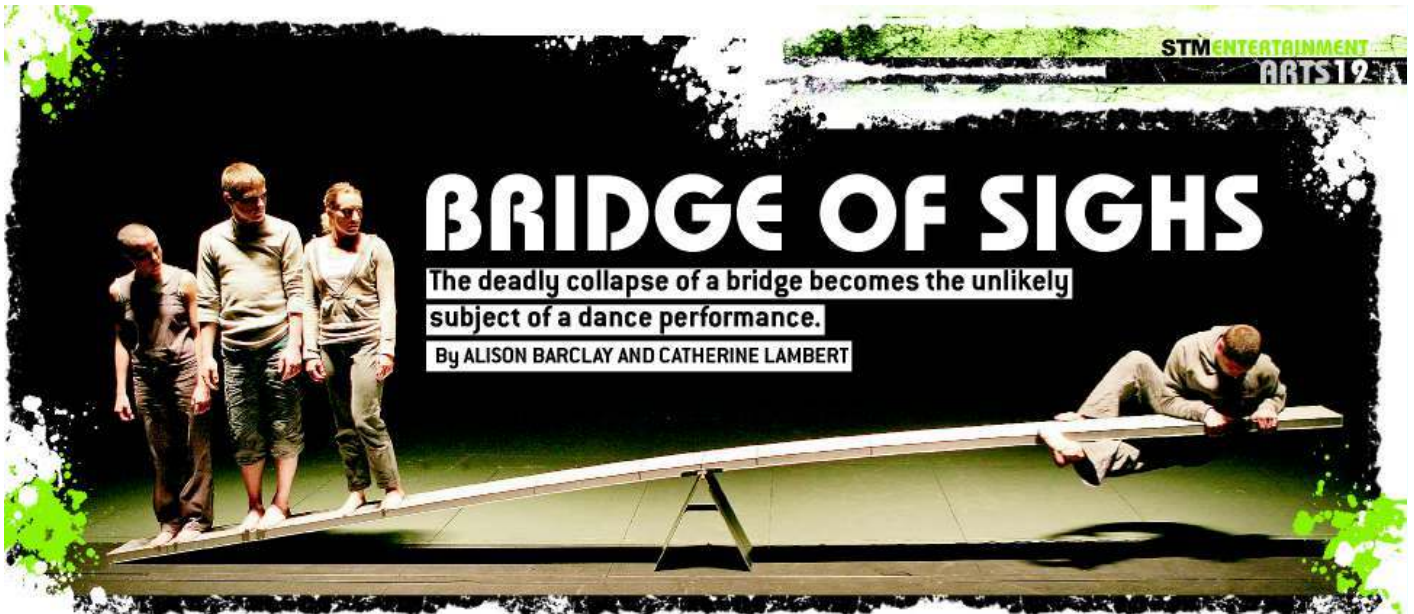
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IT'S A STRANGE SORT OF DANCE PIECE THAT

would deal in hi-tech terms such as "torsion", "camber", "cable-stayed" and "box girder".

But choreographer Lucy Guerin has taken the tragic events of October 15, 1970, when 35 construction workers were thrown to their deaths from Melbourne's West Gate Bridge as it collapsed, and created a unique living memorial.

The Melbourne-based Guerin, daughter of a civil engineer, was a nine-year-old Adelaide schoolgirl at the time of the 1970 disaster and only vaguely aware of its magnitude. Moving to Melbourne in the mid-'90s, when she first crossed the bridge she sensed its ghosts.

"It was intended to be, and it is, a very valuable link between the west and the city. It has really connected these two communities," says Guerin.

"But because of that terrible event it is not so much a symbol of achievement.

"When I moved to Melbourne and saw the West Gate I immediately associated it with the deaths of those men.

"And you do think about your own end, your own death, when you cross the bridge, partly because you are up high and exposed to that wind."

Her work, *Structure and Sadness*, is inspired by the event and is now showing at the Perth International Arts Festival.

Having perused the papers of the 1971 Royal Commission into the disaster, Guerin has elaborate

knowledge of what led to the half-built bridge's structural failure. She took her new understanding of compression forces and transferred it to the human body for this contemporary work.

"It has very much become something about collapse and support, with the bridge forming a direct link to the emotional aspects so that it could actually apply to any event where a man-made structure collapses and has those devastating results," she says.

As well as the language of structure, Guerin plumbed the language of sadness through the numerous victim's and eye witness accounts that aired at the royal commission.

"The more research I did, the more devastating I realised it was," she says. "Soon I wasn't really aware of the details; I just thought of the men going off to work and saying goodbye to their families and just not realising that they would never see them again."

The set takes on the "strange feeling" many people say they have when they drive over the bridge.

Designed by Ben Cobham and Andrew Livingston, it is "almost like a house of cards", Guerin says.

"But the dancers feel quite safe," she says. "If it fell I don't think it could hurt them, but I keep reminding them to be careful."

***Structure And Sadness*, tonight until Tues, 7pm.
Playhouse Theatre. Tickets \$45, from www.perthfestival.com.au or phone 9484 1133.**