



## ARTS

Edited by Stephen Bevis



# Building a vision

### DANCE

Structure and Sadness  
Lucy Guerin Inc  
Playhouse Theatre  
Review: Maggi Philips

A rectangular piece of pliable material drops to reveal a collapsing figure. This moment, unannounced and simple, encodes from the beginning the drama of *Structure and Sadness*, offering a view of the inextricable bridge between humans and their technology.

With uncanny understatement, choreographer Lucy Guerin's dedication to the 35 workers killed in the 1970 collapse of the West Gate Bridge engineers the dimensions of failure that lie just beneath the surface of human vision.

The bridging constructed in dance is a three-way puzzle between materials, enterprise and vulnerability. That falling ply shape of the opening becomes a fundamental exercise in testing the tensile capacity of tools and materials.

Workmanlike, Guerin's six dancers — Fiona Cameron, Antony Hamilton, Lina Limosani, Alisdair Macindoe, Kirstie McCracken and Byron Perry — manipulate ropes and boards side by side with the muscles and skeletons of their own bodies.

They methodically explore the nuts and bolts of ideas as the 50-minute piece unfolds to the industrial sounds of Gerald Mair's music.

With daring and precision, the dancers build a metaphorical and literal house of cards. They even bring out a giant ladder as the structure reaches its apex high above the stage in a performance that is as much theatre as it is dance.

At each step, the ideas transform into the body, girder and joints of materialisation, fine-tuned through the workers' concentration. At the same time, because this view of construction is not given by architects and engineers but by dancers skirting the tenuous structure with their movement, tensions of doubt begin to build in the audience. Strains



escalate when the dancers test out the leverage of a makeshift seesaw. It is child's play made dangerous. Losing their balance, the domino effect ricochets through the complex stage structure. With a terrible expectancy, humans and materials fall.

In the performance world's shattered aftermath, sadness seeps into structural matter. The death and the distress produced when strength gives way to fragility are hard emotional fields to traverse in any medium, except perhaps in the trapped voice of dance. Here, against the vortex of emotional intensity, Guerin makes some courageous choices.

After the collapse, Cameron returns to the stage as a housewife washing and drying the building blocks of construction while singing along to a pop song on the radio. When her insouciant daydreaming is interrupted by news of the disaster, her grief fuses into a replay of the explorative testing of the materials.

The repetition of these actions is a reminder of the incipient flaws and limits of materials and human desire. Enriched by the set and lighting design by Ben Cobham and Andrew Livingston, the work's parting image, like its opening, is simple. A woman walks across a bridge whose structural supports are the dancers who laboured to create its reality. It is then that the heart contracts.

*Structure and Sadness* is an extraordinary exploration of the human investment in engineering feats. Its finely crafted choreographic structure binds six highly skilled dancers into a worthy Australian bridge that securely projects its vision into an international festival.

**Structure and Sadness ends tonight.**



Finely crafted: Lucy Guerin's dancers construct a metaphorical and literal house of cards with daring and precision. Picture: Jeff Busby