



In 1970, 35 men lost their lives when 2000 tonnes of material came crashing down during the construction of the West Gate Bridge in Melbourne. Through contemporary choreography, the raw emotion surrounding the event has been reignited in **STRUCTURE AND SADNESS**. Dancers **KIRSTIE MCCRAKEN** and **BYRON PERRY** speak to **KASSIE GADEKE**.

FINDING STRUCTURE

Sweeping into town for the Perth International Arts Festival are dancers McCracken and Perry, both trained at the Victorian College of the Arts, as part of Lucy Guerin's *Structure And Sadness*. Interpellated from the West Gate Bridge tragedy in Melbourne 38 years ago, the piece is a juxtaposition of engineering and emotion, contrasting construction and contortion with the collapse and breakdown of human relationships.

"It's definitely a narrative... It's slightly abstract but has the most merit of any of Lucy's work," McCracken said with Perry adding that *Structure And Sadness* is "refreshing" and "emotional".

Guerin, an acclaimed choreographer, began researching the event not "as a factual narrative but as a physical, emotional and visual response to a devastating accident" integrating themes of compression, suspension and failure. Perry and McCracken were involved from the beginning of the project helping choreograph particular scenes of the performance. "Lucy would come to us with an idea... [She] would put together a phrase of movement, like you would learn in a normal dance class, and then give us a concept, Byron would have cables slipping, I had contortion. We'd apply it to the phrase, go away and get a clear idea, add a few falls, figure out ways to show it to her and push it further," McCracken said.

"It's not where you begin, but where you go, the filters you apply, the qualities you impress into it. It began very simplistically," Perry added. "We did quite a bit of research, we learnt about different structures, methods, materials, viewed bridge-making on sites... Lucy tried to find emotional parallels, based on the forces, the duress."

Though the piece has an obvious historical significance,



Perry doesn't at all feel that audiences will have to have been affected by, or even know about, the West Gate Bridge, describing it as emotional, coming across as a house of cards that could crash easily.

"It's a universal theme, in general the public responds well. People love a theme and a narrative to follow, and the piece very moving. Disasters are on the news all the time and affect people in and out of Melbourne," McCracken said.

Structure And Sadness involves an astounding set pieced together by the dancers during the performance. The two laughed as they told me about the paddlepop stick towers they made to help learn about construction. "The dancers helped design it," Perry said of the set. "We did tasks with building blocks. It's amazing how much the structure creates an atmosphere and tension, there's an emotional barrier there because it might fall away at any stage."

And part of what drives the two to continue dancing is the ability to always push further in the art – as well as the love of it. "You're always creating more," McCracken said simply. "You never feel like you can't quite achieve it, that you can never perfect it. You always want to keep improving, be a better dancer, or performer or actor."

"It's not specifically so you can dance someone else's steps," Perry added. "But to be involved in the process, the sound, there's a whole set of skills." McCracken and Perry are excited about bringing the performance over to Perth, and are happy with where dance is generally at in Australia.

"It's in a good place. Things like *So You Think You Can Dance* raise the profile. We love that!" McCracken laughed.

Finally, Perry added, "I think people were scared by [contemporary dance] before, but now they've seen more, it's more natural. Contemporary can be anything. Almost anything."

WHAT: *Structure And Sadness*

WHEN & WHERE: Saturday 9 to Tuesday 12 February, Perth International Arts Festival, Playhouse Theatre, Perth