

Dance Australia

## Chunky Move: An Act of Now, Melbourne Festival

Extra-terrestrial rave experience with brain-frazzling effects

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The departure point for Anouk van Dijk's first work for Chunky Move was a series of conversations among the dancers. Van Dijk posed questions about art, society and the meaning of movement. These led to broad-based discussions on concerns about how we are in our current world; our proximity to one another and how people function in groups.

There is a strong sense throughout *An Act of Now* of the work growing out of improvisation and explorations around these loose themes. Decisions around staging and design have a very strong bearing on how this material is delivered choreographically and the overall audience experience.

After gathering and being provided with headphones, audience members are led to the top of the hill at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl and stand, gazing down toward the stage area into blazing lights. This is a very effective way to capture the audience and stage-manage their experience. With fragments of sentences intercut with swooshing sounds,

delivered through the headphones, we are able to make out repeated utterances as we simultaneously try to negotiate the visual landscape.

The crowd is led down the hill, through the fixed seating and directed onto the stage. We are seated in tiers around three sides of a glass hothouse. Inside, smoke partially obscures figures who approach the glass, halt and then retreat into the mist. This is reminiscent of a Callum Morton artwork in which partial glimpses of interior spaces are revealed and stories hinted at.

Sound delivered through the headphones includes the breathing of dancers and the slapping and pounding of hands and bodies on the floor. This is all audible without the phones but is amplified through them. The technique of personalising the auditory experience and enclosing audience members in an individualised world has been used by other performance-makers and was utilised effectively by Tim Darbyshire in his work, *More or Less Concrete*, earlier this year.

The movement begins ritualistically and has a cool, detached feeling. In the early pairings, little sense of intimacy and connection is felt between the eight dancers. Growling vocalisations and a crescendo in the sound is accompanied by a more dynamic and wild quality. The dancers seem to urge a soloist into a frenzied fit, throwing herself in circular movements onto the floor. A duet is combative. The partners fling and hurl each other onto the ground. Lighting starkly illuminates the figures in this landscape from the back and then suddenly locates itself inside the hothouse.

The windows of the glasshouse are used to illustrate a sense of enclosure as the dancers brutally connect with its panes, slide down them and exploit levels of space. This later has the dancers exploring their relationships with the structural aspects of the cube; the rail that runs around its perimeter and the structures overhead. In the final part of the work, voids in the floor allow for emergence and disappearance of dancers.

This work has power and the location engages. The dancers disappear gradually from the hothouse and are finally seen cavorting on the hill above. There is joy and liberation in this nightscape. The work is well danced and interesting, but much of the appeal lies not in the choreography but in the site and the ways in which the audience is invited to interact with the work.

Choreographically, *An Act Of Now* felt very much like a series of improvised scores around a theme. At times it also felt like a choreographic workshop, with movement being echoed and repeated and some quite familiar vocabularies utilised. That being said, the emphasis on decentred movement reminds us that van Dijk works with a methodology that she calls “countertechnique”, which represents an unfamiliar relationship to weight, gravity and the body.

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It is important to note that during opening night, one of the dancers, Stephanie Lake, was injured. This led to the performance being halted and continuing, one dancer short. The group completed what seemed like a well-shaped resolution to the work, but it was not seen in the form intended. Interestingly, the 'nowness' of this work ended up being partially reflected in this disruption with many audience-members believing it to be an intentional part of the work.

This is a tantalising debut work for a new generation Chunky Move. It will be interesting to see how van Dijk balances the elements of dance, site and approach in future works.