

## Intensity to the fore

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In her first work as Chunky Move's artistic director, Anouk van Dijk explores broad themes about the forces driving human behaviour. Picture: Jeff Busby Source: *Supplied*

**AT last year's Melbourne Festival, outgoing Chunky Move artistic director Gideon Obarzanek presented *Assembly*, a work exploring human herd behaviour.**

Obarzanek's Dutch successor, Anouk van Dijk, explores similar themes in her first work for the company, *An Act of Now*: tensions between individual identity and autonomy, and community pressures to co-operate and conform.

Eight dancers are trapped in a claustrophobic greenhouse enclosure that serves as a metaphor for constraining and unifying social forces. The dancers appear as caged primates, exposed in pulsating flashes of light (design by Niklas Pajanti) while headphones immerse audience members in Marcel Wierckx's throbbing electronic soundscape, punctuated by amplified enclosure noises: thudding bodies, primal vocalisations.

Voyeurism becomes detached scientific observation as van Dijk's choreography investigates primitive forces driving human behaviour: anxiety, intimidation, domination, compliance. Dancers press desperately against glass confines, are repelled from walls in

## The Australian

convulsive sequences and thrown together in immensely physical passages of tumble rolls, spasmodic turns and circling lines.

Unable to escape, they subsist in a space where brawn dominates: an alpha male roars and all echo his call, females struggle against possessive male lifts, one dancer is backed into corners and expelled from the enclosure by a growling mob.

Offsetting this violent undertow, moments of collective harmony and sensual paired work include arching couples in slow counterpoint, disappearances through holes in the floor, and dancers delicately suspended from roof beams.

Intense and menacing, the work places extreme physical demands on its dancers and requires precise placement. On opening night, local stalwart Stephanie Lake seriously injured her wrist during a particularly vigorous ensemble passage and was forced to leave the set for medical treatment. The production paused while van Dijk consulted with the dancers to revise the remaining choreography and, remarkably, the show continued.