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Chunky Move – An Act of Now at Melbourne Festival – Melbourne

By Jordan Beth Vincent on October 21, 2012 in Reviews · 0 Comments



Chunky Move in *An Act of Now*.
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Chunky Move

Melbourne Festival: *An Act of Now*

Melbourne, Sidney Myer Music Bowl

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www.chunkymove.com.au

www.melbournefestival.com.au

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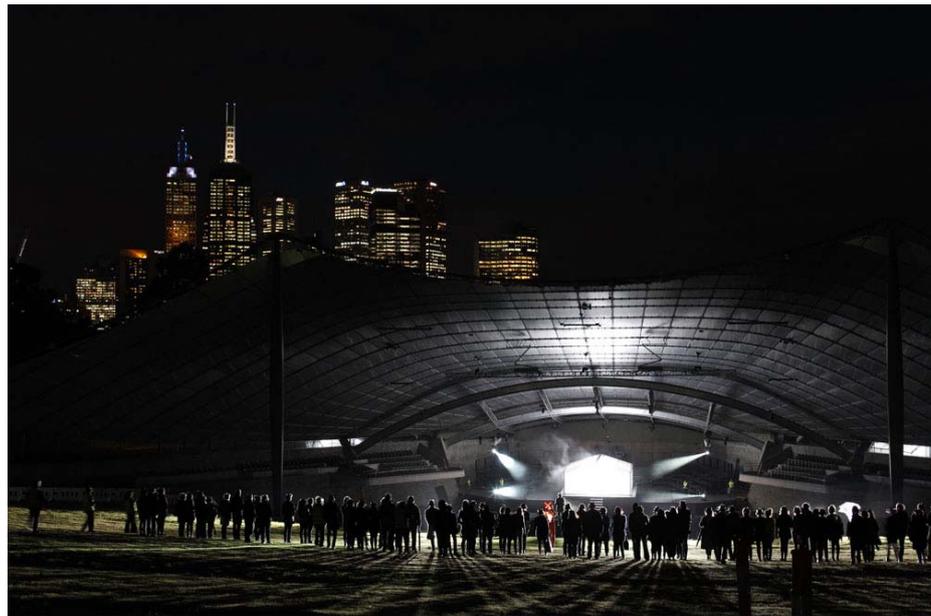
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An Act of Now is the first work for Chunky Move by new artistic director Anouk van Dijk. For nearly two decades, the Melbourne-based contemporary dance company was run by Gideon Obarzanek whose fascination with new technology and contemporary methods came to characterise the company's work. Works like *Mortal Engine* and *Glow* saw the creation of sets in which projections responded in real time to dancers' movement; other works, such as *Connected* and *Assembly*, featured large-scale interdisciplinary collaborations. In keeping with Obarzanek's legacy, van Dijk is making experimental work for this new version of Chunky Move – playing with space and technology through sound and lighting explorations.

The work begins with a short hike up to the crest of a hill overlooking the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, an outdoor amphitheatre best known for hosting summertime holiday concerts. Melbourne's city skyline winks at us beyond the lip of the Bowl, reminding us that, despite the expansive open space, we are, in fact, standing in the centre of the city. Every audience member – all 350 of us – are handed individual headphones. Whispering voices stream through as part of Marcel Wierckx's sound design: "I can't tell you that," moans one woman's voice. "I can't take responsibility for that," murmurs a man. A figure appears in the distance, vamping like Michael Jackson, with smoke billowing out from under his coat and fedora.



Sidney Myer Music Bowl and performance space for *An Act of Now*.

© Jeff Busby. (Click image for larger version)

The audience proceeds down the hill of the amphitheatre through the seating banks and onto the stage itself, where a house of glass and metal is revealed as a cage for dancers who appear and recede amidst the fog within. The immediate implication is that this is some sort of containment facility or a place of quarantine; as the work progresses it is clear that van Dijk is actively exploring notions of communal behaviour and proximity.

The glass box, which forms the dancing space for eight performers, is relatively small, measuring only 6 meters by 6 meters. As the smoke within dissipates, the dancers form tableau that range from introspective to confrontational, as

though they are exploring the limitations of the space. From scene to scene the dancers slowly disrobe. Sunglasses, heels, leather jackets are cast off as the dancers strip away the accouterments of urban life.



Chunky Move in *An Act of Now*.
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When dancer Nina Wollny finally begins to move, lunging into the space with a series of whipping, rotating leaps, the sheer power she demonstrates comes as a shock. Van Dijk's own movement system, Countertechnique, willfully pushes bodies off balance – creating a movement vocabulary in which the body's centre of gravity is consciously challenged. At times the movement is reminiscent of children on playground swings, twisting the ropes until they are taut, and then releasing into an explosion of swirling, spinning velocity. For this work, the sense of spin is punctuated by dynamic shifts, the bodies noisily slamming and crashing into the floor, glass walls, and one another.

Dancers scale to hang from the rafters of the house and emerge, feet first, from holes that appear in the ground. The space, we discover, is far larger than we may have realized. In one memorable moment, dancer Alya Manzart runs wildly out of the house and into the hill beyond, hurling traffic cones and flags into the empty seats. He returns, somewhat abashed, and is welcomed into the fold once again.

The juxtapositions explored in *An Act of Now* are impressive – clear air surrounding a fog-filled glass structure, a tiny glass house set against a huge open space in the background, an open area in the heart of the city. Connected, intimately, to the sounds within the house by our headphones, we play Big Brother – watching, listening and judging the displayed behaviour from both an anthropological and an entertainment perspective.

An Act of Now is a violent production – physically, emotionally and conceptually. Partnering work sees the dancers holding one another in headlocks, covering faces with hands and arms, and punching, slapping, and

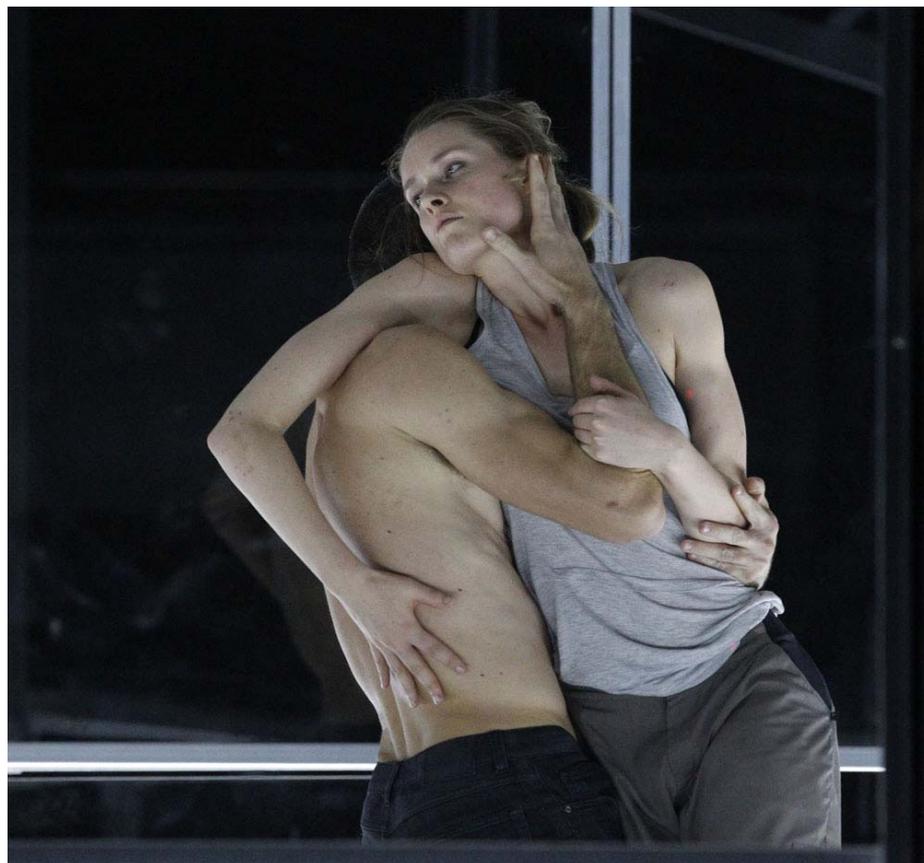


Chunky Move in *An Act of Now*.

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shoving one another to the floor. The material is challenging, both to watch and, no doubt, to perform.

During the opening night performance veteran dancer Stephanie Lake sustained an injury. The show was stopped, choreographer Anouk van Dijk rushed to restage the work in full view of the audience, and the company eventually managed to finish the performance with Wollny stepping into Lake's integral role. While the company demonstrated exactly the kind of professionalism we expect from dancers of this caliber and experience, their distress at the event was clear – as was ours in the audience. The second night saw seven dancers instead of the original eight in performance, but so well was the work restaged, that I found I did not even miss the extra person.



Chunky Move in *An Act of Now*.
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At the end of the day injuries are part of a dancers' life and the show must go on. This incident did, however, highlight the risk inherent in performing highly physical movement in a space so small. Then again, the very sense of danger makes the viewing of *An Act of Now* highly exhilarating – somewhat akin to the fear and marvel that comes from watching an artist on a trapeze swinging high above the earth.

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Tags: Alya Manzart, An Act of Now, Anouk van Dijk, Assembly, Big Brother, Chunky Move, Connected, Gideon Obarzanek, Glow, Marcel Wierckx, Melbourne, Melbourne Festival, Michael Jackson, Mortal Engine, Nina Wollny, Sidney Myer Music Bowl, Stephanie Lake

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