

The Australian

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# Nimble steps declare the body's rhythm

## DANCE We Unfold

Sydney Dance Company. Choreography by Rafael Bonachela. Sydney Theatre, March 31. Tickets: \$40-\$70. Rush tickets: \$20. Bookings: (02) 9250 1999. Ends April 11.

**W**e *Unfold* can be read in many ways — a very good thing when it comes to dance — but most obviously Rafael Bonachela is presenting himself and his substantially changed body of dancers to Sydney. After a rocky year for the Sydney Dance Company one can only say welcome.

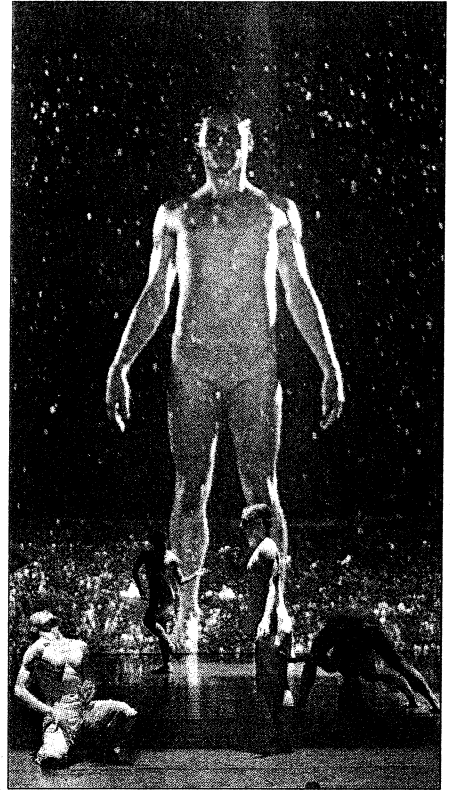
Bonachela's second work for the company (after last year's *360*), and his first as new artistic director, is deeply absorbing. At the largest level it shows humankind as pieces of stardust, atoms in a vast universe. It also develops complex and delicate relationships between individuals and, at the most intimate level, touches on perhaps the most profound truth of existence, which is that we are essentially alone.

The design is intriguingly spare and rich simultaneously. There is no physical set to impede movement and a mainly monochromatic palette. The dancers are backed by a monumental, extraordinary piece of video art by Daniel Askill and bathed in Hugh Taranto's soft, sculptural light. The colours of Jordan Askill's unfussy costumes (some a little too reminiscent of sleepwear) are subtle to the point of disappearing.

There's nothing shy about Ezio Bosso's music, his Symphony No.1 "Oceans" for Cello and Orchestra. As its name may suggest, it's a wall-of-sound work with strong underlying rhythms, repeated crescendos and exciting crashes, interspersed with lyrical lines from the cello. Bonachela and Bosso have a close working relationship that pays dividends here.

The video art is so powerful it sometimes grabs all focus, but in the main Bonachela's intricate movement language has a fine setting. The dance is hard-edged in one way, with explosive arms and legs, swift and unguessable changes of direction and strong overall dynamics. Dancers can be going all out, then suddenly there will be a moment of deep stillness. At times the stage picture bring to mind an installation by British sculptor Antony Gormley, who specialises in representations of the body.

Within that dynamic is a fluid freedom in the upper body, something Bonachela's new dancers excel in. The choreography is described as being made in collaboration with the dancers, so it's not surprising that some dancers who have worked with



Fluid freedom: SDC ensemble in *We Unfold*

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Bonachela before are seen prominently. His language is deeply ingrained in the fibres of Amy Hollingsworth, Juliette Barton and Paul Zivkovich, all superb. And what a joy to see Richard Cilli, more or less straight out of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, showing such presence and maturity. Adam Blanch, who danced with SDC under Graeme Murphy's directorship, shines brightly too. Murphy and his wife, Janet Vernon, were at Tuesday's opening; a gracious gesture on their part.

It's likely to take some time before the ensemble settles down. Hollingsworth has European commitments straight after this (as does Bonachela), Zivkovich is listed as a guest artist and long-time SDC member Bradley Chatfield is to leave before the end of the year. So *We Unfold* is very much a beginning, but a fine one.

Deborah Jones

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