



**CULTURE**

# Life's vital signs: a skip and a beat

AN ANNOUNCEMENT inviting travellers to board a plane usually heralds the beginning of an adventure or a happy escape from daily life. But Amy Hollingsworth, the Sydney Dance Company's dance director, said a boarding sign would fill her with dread.

"For me, it was quite a traumatic experience based on being a younger traveller," she said. "I used to get very nervous getting on a plane, saying goodbye to my family."

In contrast, the company's artistic director, Rafael Bonachela, said roundabout signs tended to stick in his mind: "As we know, [a] roundabout is three arrows that go in a circle and how many times in life have we said to someone: 'We're just going around in circles'?"

"How many times have we been in a love triangle and not known how to get out of it?"

The signs of life, from instructions on the side of the road to those at airports and shopping centres, are the inspiration for their upcoming show, *The Land of Yes and the Land of No*, which premieres at the Brisbane Festival on September 28, before coming to Sydney in October.

"I was intrigued about the way that our life can be directed and affected by signs," said Bonachela, the choreographer. "They reflect the decisions that we make in life. Also, the paths that we take, the turning points, the risks and the adventures."

He said these daily commands sparked memories and emotions among the dancers, which formed "the soil and the soul of *The Land of Yes and the Land of No*".



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**Rafael Bonachela and Amy Hollingsworth talk about the SDC's new show.**

Bonachela said his roundabout sign became a menage a trois performed by three dancers and three musical instruments in the show. "It is about a situation that doesn't resolve and maybe I have been there a few times," he said.

Bonachela is reworking his original production, which toured Britain and Europe in 2009, with more dancers, a

larger set built of neon tubes and new costumes.

Some of the choreography has also changed in response to new feelings and emotions provoked by everyday signage, said Bonachela, who recently agreed to lead the Sydney Dance Company for another three years. "No, I don't miss Europe. You sign the contract of a job that you hope is going to be everything you expect and that is what has happened."

Hollingsworth performed in the original show, winning the Critic's

Circle Award for most outstanding female performance.

Each of the dancers brought their own encounters with signs to Bonachela's improvisation sessions, which also involved an Italian composer, Ezio Bosso.

Some of their memories were sad, others humorous, Hollingsworth said. Compared with the feats of athleticism Bonachela usually demands from his dancers, Hollingsworth said *The Land of Yes and the Land of No* was a gentler, more reflective show.