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Dancers give life to Parrott's computer creations

18th February 2008, 4:00 WST

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Ever since I saw Chrissie Parrott's Mirra Coda at the Quarry in 1989 and Terra at His Majesty's Theatre in 1991, I have carried a torch for her work, so this review is coloured by a belief that she is one of Australia's most adventurous choreographers.

Mirra Coda and Terra were a superb collaboration with designer Andrew Carter, and composer David Pye and his Nova Ensemble.

In the past eight years, and since 2003 with her partner, composer and animator Jonathan Mustard, Parrott has played around with computer software and digital imaging that captures human movement. In the early days, the technology overwhelmed the creative side but there is today more of a balance. This was evident in A Midsummer Night's Dream that Parrott and Mustard created for the West Australian Ballet in May 2006.

Metadance in Resonant Light is a dynamic installation with four dancers, arranged in three parts. Parrott created dance phrases on a computer using animation software. Her dancers studied them and transferred these movement phrases to the dance studio. Choreographer and dancers then created pieces that blended the human and the humanoid in solos, duets and quartets.

In Joshua Mu, Sharlene Campbell, Sally Blachford and Jacqui Claus, Parrott has four extraordinarily accomplished artists who are as equally in tune with computer imaging as they are with Parrott's unique dance vocabulary.

In the 12-minute solo Recording Angel, Parrott has projected text from Lindsay Vickery's poem Songs of Virtual Love and War, with Mu's sculpturally lit figure interacting with a projected image, sometimes in harmony, sometimes delayed, sometimes in opposition. The amplified sound reminded me of the scratching of a needle on disc at the beginning of an LP recording — and the heightened anticipation that went with it — when that technology was commonplace.

The second piece, Split, was 14 minutes long, a duet for Campbell and Blachford dressed in little black frocks, with film projected on to framed panels. Here, Parrott was playing with time and the shifting frames of memory. Many of the dancers' attitudes and gymnastic sequences had a voyeuristic appeal.

The major work was the title piece, 25 minutes in length. The stage, front to back, was hung with translucent panels on to which were projected what looked like falling snowflakes but were actually winding and dingbat computer fonts. Throughout the dance, to a Mustard computer-generated score, these streams were replaced by a continuous flow of data.

At times there were different types of mathematical progressions and iterations, at other times the axes of three dimensional space.

Behind, beside and in front of these panels, the four dancers worked in these spaces with

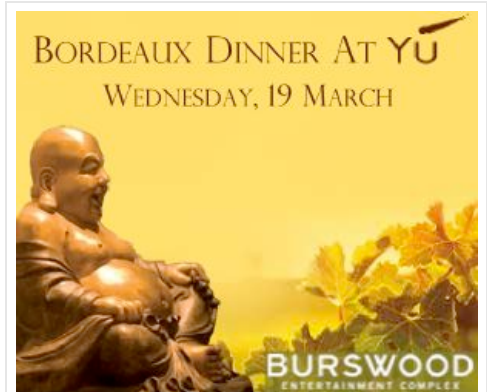


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precision and discipline to Parrott's complementary choreography. The demands in concentration and timing were unforgiving and unrelenting.

It was a remarkable achievement, as was the daunting challenge of the logistics of staging the program in such a tight space.

The poet Robert Frost defined freedom as "feeling easy in the harness". On this showing, it is evident that Parrott feels increasingly comfortable with the technology and its creative possibilities.

The installation, without the dancers, can be viewed during each day of the season, which ends on Thursday.

Dance
Metadance in Resonant Light
Chrissie Parrott
Perth Institute of Contemporary Art
Review: David Hough

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