



Jeff Busby/Chunky Move
Dancers Alisdair MacIndoe and Marnie Palomares, in a scene from Chunky Move's "Connections."

MACHINE in MOTION

Australia's Chunky Move brings modern dance to MoCA

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NORTH ADAMS, Mass. — On first glance, at photos and Youtube videos, you might think the "Connected" dance program by the Australian group Chunky Move was some sort of man vs. machine story right out of Orwell's "1984."

Nothing so dark, choreographer and group artistic director Gideon Obarzanek says; it is, instead, a marriage of machine and man in the form of a union of his dancers and a kinetic sculpture by visual artist Rueben Margolin.

"There is a certain dark ethic," to the union of the two art forms, Obarzanek said last week in a telephone interview from Melbourne. "But this piece is not really a world orchestrated by machine. In the first part (of the program) is the completion of the machine ... in the final part we find a human relationship with the machine."

The audience can judge for itself when Jacob's Pillow Dance and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art co-present Chunky Move's "Connected," on Saturday, March 24, at 8 p.m., and Sunday, March 25, at 3 p.m., both at MASS MoCA's Hunter Center.

An evening-length dance program, "Connected" merges the worlds of visual art and dance, animating the physical relationship between 11 dancers and a kinetic sculpture made of wood, recycled plastic, paper, and steel. Constructed in real time during the performance, the sculpture — and "Connected" itself — builds in momentum as dancers and machine interact, driven by a haunting electronic score by composers Oren Ambarchi and Robin Fox.

"I have always been very interested in combining dance with other art forms, and being able to see the body of movement from another perspective," Obarzanek said. "I have been working with video tracking systems ... video captured and projected onto the dancer ... When I saw Rueben's work, there was something similar. The sculpture was responding to the strings as dancers would respond."

"There was an early industrial design (to Margolin's work) and I thought 'This would be an interesting combination.' The relationship is very literal, very apparent."

Of course, there are some challenges when man and machine interact on stage.

“It is difficult,” he said. “It requires a great deal of patience, working with something so fragile, and it has specific parameters, what can you do and can’t do when attached. The wonderful thing is a sense of transcendence, the forms transcend their mechanical form ... they become like wavelengths. That is something that works very well in this production.”

Obarzanek said the union of dance and kinetic sculpture, especially by Margolin, is something he “is open to” in the future. And, as he will soon be leaving as artistic director of Chunky Move, he says anything is possible. But for now, he will tour with “Connected” and allow what comes next to come next.

And Obarzanek has certainly made a name for himself with Chunky Move.

The name “Chunky Move” is a play on the state of Australian dance, then and now, Obarzanek said.

“The group formed 16 years ago,” he said. “When I first began making performances, a lot of ... (Australian) choreography was quite inelegant; big and blonde, kind of chunky, and it still is in a way.”

So while Chunky Move is certainly athletic, it is not “inelegant.”

Known as “one of the driving forces behind Melbourne’s thriving dance culture” according to Theatre Notes. “Chunky Move has challenged expectations with works that have been innovative, eclectic, physical and bold,” according to ARTS HUB. Obarzanek is a 2005 Bessie Award-winner for Outstanding Choreography/Creation.

The company has performed throughout the U.K., Europe, Asia, and the Americas, including week-long engagements at Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival in 2005 and 2007.

“We’ve presented Chunky Move over the years at the Pillow (and) they are always fresh and inventive,” Ella Baff, Jacob’s Pillow artistic director, said in supplied material. “‘Connected,’ their newest work, is perfect for MASS MoCA ... (visual artist) Margolin is known for large kinetic sculptures that move and morph, well suited to the dynamics of dance... It’s a fascinating interplay of human, machine, and movement.”

But it is not a dark tale of man vs. machine — unless you think it is.

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MASS MoCA is located at 87 Marshall St. Ticket prices are \$39, \$29 and \$25, with \$10 seats for children under 16. For tickets and information call 413-662-2111 or visit massmoca.org. For additional information on Jacob’s Pillow visit jacobspillow.org.



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Dancers and kinetic sculpture interact in a scene from Chunky Move’s “Connected.” The program is coming to MASS MoCA.