

Dance review

# Wayne McGregor fascinates with his dance-technology fusion

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From Tuesday's Globe and Mail

Published Monday, Feb. 07, 2011 3:24PM EST

Last updated Monday, Feb. 07, 2011 3:30PM EST

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## Entity

- Wayne McGregor | Random Dance
- At the Grand Theatre in Kingston on Saturday

Britain's Wayne McGregor produces works of immense depth, and his fusion of dance and technology has made him one of Europe's hottest choreographers. McGregor's intriguing full-length piece *Entity* (2008) is currently on a three-city Canadian tour, and contemporary dance doesn't get more sophisticated than this.

*Entity* is a quintessential example of McGregor's intellectual and artistic inquiry. He's fascinated by dance as science, or how the mind and body work together to produce movement. And this cold experimentation goes hand in hand with images of stunning beauty.

McGregor sets his thesis right at the start with a grainy movie of a running dog, which looks like an experiment from the work of motion picture pioneer Eadweard Muybridge. The dog is an entity, a body viewed in the abstract, and so are the bodies of the 10 dancers that follow. Through a series of solos, duets and ensembles, they are entities moving through space. The way McGregor works the body, and combinations of bodies, is a fascinating process.

But *Entity* is not just cool science. Abstract though his movement is, little stories seem to be happening to individuals, to couples and to larger groups of dancers. The humanity of the entities cannot be suppressed. The movement is also living sculpture, beautiful in its conception and striking in its visual impact.

The choreographer's signature is a body that seems to have no rigid interior structure. In the Q&A that followed the performance, words such as double-jointed, boneless and extreme were used in an attempt to describe McGregor's physical calling card.

The basic McGregor body, with a nod to Bob Fosse, has the shoulders back, the chest and pelvis thrust forward, with the deep concave arch of the spine raising the buttocks to almost impossible heights. The limbs pivot through the sockets at unbelievable angles. Movement travels through the body as fluid waves. No matter how distorted the position, the body is always supple. Nothing jars the lyrical flow.

In terms of partnering, bodies combine in such convoluted ways that one often can't discern which limbs belong to which dancer. In trios and larger groupings, the individual actions of the dancers become almost impenetrable. The quicksilver physical changes are a kaleidoscope that moves too quickly for the eye to rest on one detail for any length of time.

Hand in hand with the movement are the visuals. The digital video of Ravi Deepres is projected on a curved mesh screen designed by Patrick Burnier. Burnier's costumes begin as unisex white T-shirts and

black briefs. In the latter stages of the dance, the men are bare-chested while the women wear black halters. This increased exposure of flesh becomes the landscape for Lucy Carter's arresting lighting.

The mostly black-and-white video images are fleeting algebra equations, bar codes, DNA spirals and microscopic cells. Numbers hurtle by at dizzying speed. Mathematical calculations and laboratory specimens are superimposed on one another to blur the focus. Occasionally we catch a glimpse of body parts. The tools of hard science have been rendered into video art that is beautiful in and of itself.

The original music by Joby Talbot and Jon Hopkins is very dramatic, more cinematic soundscape than dance accompaniment. Whether edgy electronica, melancholy strings, lyrical pastorals or nerve-wracking scratchings, the score is always atmospheric and evocative.

In the finale, the image of the running dog returns, but this time we look at the entity differently because of McGregor's choreography. We can isolate its rippling muscles, see the gorgeous symmetry of the legs in motion, and be aware of the effortless beauty of a body pushed to the extreme.

*Wayne McGregor | Random Dance appears at Ottawa's National Arts Centre on Feb. 8 and Montreal's Place des Arts from Feb. 10 to 12.*