

# A dance across the city in 31 days

BY JILL SYKES

At 6 am today, Tess de Quincey and Stuart Lynch set off on a month-long project to dance Sydney from the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House to the Martin Luther Kirche, Ariel bookshop and what was once a Mark Foys window, from Rookwood Cemetery to Congwong Bay, and the RSPCA animal pound to the Nielsen Park changing sheds.

Although the title of the venture is *Compression 100-Sydney*, more than 100 performances are already planned for the 31 days of May. And room for more, according to this pair of indefatigable artists who are involved in each as performer, director or choreographer in collaboration with other dancers, writers, musicians and visual artists.

*Compression 100-Sydney* has so many facets that the breadth of its embrace is dizzying. De Quincey and Lynch talk about it like a couple of duetting dancers, picking up a topic and running with it, tossing off a linking idea and starting afresh in a new direction without drawing breath.

Metaphorically speaking, they have hardly drawn breath since January, when they began to set the idea in motion.

From their point of view, it is putting a charge into the Sydney arts scene; getting to know colleagues they may never have met in an international performing career that keeps them on the move between Australia and Europe via Japan and India; discovering unlikely venues in Sydney; tapping into local ideas and offering their own in exchange; sparking new artistic relationships; finding audiences in unexpected pockets of the community and, in the process, being inspired by a wide range of unscripted circumstances to extend their own body of creative work. From an observer's angle, it is a chance to view major and minor landmarks of Sydney through different eyes. For instance, on Friday, May 31, they will be "dancing the Parramatta Road" in recognition of it being the most often mentioned local site in their research among Sydneysiders.

De Quincey and Stuart look beyond its loud commercial roar



Stuart Lynch and Tess de Quincey. . . a dizzying embrace of dance from Parramatta to The Rocks.

Photograph by SAHLAN HAYES

and the traffic's inroads on its businesses today, with calls for pre-Olympics beautification, to its historical context in following one of white settlement's first major routes inland: plenty of source material there. Regular dancegoers at Dance Week's Dance Advance in the Sydney Town Hall on Friday night will find de Quincey and Lynch on the program. Later that night, end-of-week revellers at The Rocks might come across them working with sculptor Rod Berry.

The following morning, dog walkers at Glebe Point are likely to be first on the scene for their simultaneous collaborations with sculptor Joan Brassil and musician Garry Bradbury. So it goes on.

The length of performances ranges from 31 seconds at the Centrepoint Tower to a grueling 24 hours for a collaboration between Lynch and Nicholas Tsoutas at Artspace. Most are around 15 to 30 minutes, and many have public access for

which an update will be available daily by phoning 1800 061 942.

Others, such as a performance and group choreography at Long Bay Prison, kindergarten and university engagements, a restaurant table talk with Open City's Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch and an appearance at Prince Henry Hospital, will be closed to public view, though some will be recorded on video or find their way obliquely into radio coverage via 2SER-FM 107.3.

De Quincey and Lynch bring to their project strong backgrounds in Japanese dance in which exhaustion plays a key role as it pushes performers to their limit. They expect that will play a part here. So will the speed and intensity that are integral elements in their approach to exploring and developing experimental dance and performance language.

While some of their fellow artists are known to them, many are not, which is the way they

wanted it. With funding from the Australia Council and the NSW Ministry for the Arts, they offered their services free to individuals, organisations or venue managements to become hosts of a performance. With a frontline of independent experts to avoid the situation of only choosing people they knew, they built up a crowded grid of richly varied performing challenges.

Their favourite reply was from an artist who nominated Bondi Beach at 4 pm on May 29 and 30, promising further instructions by post. Other invitations have been designed for a purpose: for example, the so-called "hostile audiences" in the unlikely venues of the Sydney Casino and the Penrith Panthers.

The spark of one new working partnership has ignited even before the performance: as Peking Opera performer Xu Feng Shun and counter-tenor Michael Dale were introduced and shown around their proposed venue, Castlecrag's

Haven Amphitheatre, they began to sing in what was apparently thrilling spontaneity.

Participants have been invited by de Quincey and Lynch to "meet in performance in which ever way you feel most suitable and relevant to your area of work" in an effort to find the spirit of Sydney, to gauge the physical and meta-physical character of the city.

"The emphasis will be on the art of performance itself . . . and immediacy rather than a rehearsed meeting. We're hoping that *Compression* will stress experimentation and will research the area, where language is shaped by the works themselves, practice provoking theory."

Documentation is an important aspect, and there is also a long-term vision for setting up a permanent performing space for experimentation and dialogue with an audience.