

industry is cyclical and the global downturn will have an effect on Australia. However, these are not new challenges for our industry," says LPA president Andrew Kay.

"We are looking at ways to sustain our activity across the live performance industry. This means finding new and innovative ways to deliver compelling live performance events

mony can be held at the Sydney Opera House for the first time, marking another step forward in the awards' visibility and profile.

And although the voting procedures are not perfect, the Helpmanns are surrounded with goodwill. As the night of nights for Australian show business, they give the sector a little boost of pizzazz.

- **Ballet or Dance Work:** *Mathinna*. Bangarra Dance Theatre
- **Opera:** Billy Budd. Opera Australia
- **Play:** *War of the Roses*
- **Musical:** *Wicked*
- **JC Williamson Award:** Michael Gudinski and John Bell

# Silent witness to peas as objects of desire

MELBOURNE'S independent dance scene has long burbled away on the smell of an oily rag.

Now several well-established companies are supporting work development and performance opportunities for younger, less established choreographers.

The Next Move is one such scheme, launched last year by the state's largest contemporary dance company, Chunky Move. This year's recipient is company regular Michelle Heaven.

*Disagreeable Object*, developed gradually over the past decade, is 30 minutes of illusory simplicity, densely packed with choreographic detail and allusion.

Blending physical theatre, dance and visual illusion, it explores silent film conventions and the manner in which varying frame rates during film editing and playback emphasise and distort the relationship between stillness and motion.

Loosely chronological vignettes separated by blackouts (recalling silent film's inter-titles) reveal an odd couple: a fastidious, skittish little woman (Heaven) in long-

## DANCE

### **Disagreeable Object**

Choreography by Michelle Heaven. Chunky Move Studios, Melbourne, July 21.

sleeved black lace bodice and bustle skirt, and a relatively gargantuan, awkward figure in butler's tails (Brian Lucas).

Domestic narratives are implied but the action revolves around a stash of green peas that both desire, the supply of which she possessively controls, heightening his compulsive appetite into obsession.

She violently nibbles, gnaws and bites her peas from the pod, the juices running down her chin. He gobbles compulsively, without expression or enjoyment.

A sadistic relationship develops, devoid of physical intimacy and tenderness, the fleeting passion of a mechanical, fractured tango leading her to a series of increasingly dastardly attempts to poison his peas.

Drawing on gothic horror conventions, the narrative, delivery and design smacks of German expressionist cinema, particularly

*The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*. A clever set and lighting design by Ben Cobham and Louise McCarthy's costumes help emphasise disconcertingly distorted scales (between performers and objects) and angular contortions of arms and silhouetted profiles.

Meanwhile the psychosexual narrative, with its (growing) pea fetish, recalls Jean-Paul Sartre's musings on object symbolism, the surrealists' interest in Freudian psychoanalysis and what Dali called objects of symbolic function.

Indeed, Heaven's work borrows its title from a 1931 phallic-shaped wooden sculpture by Swiss surrealist Alberto Giacometti; largely smooth and featureless, it might be a banal, everyday object were it not for some prominent, sharp-looking spikes at one end.

Voyeurs to the action, modern audiences may perceive *Disagreeable Object* as a witty pantomime. Look closer and this expertly wrought cautionary tale reveals plenty of adult themes.

Eamonn Kelly