

SOUND AND MOTION

Seona Mac Reamoinn on '*The Secret Project*', a collaboration of performance and technology

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The Secret Project, which had its European premiere at Firkin Crane, Cork on Thursday is not so much an arcane and mysteriously furtive operation, but more a shared open project about secrets, that brings together performance and technology. Jools Gilson-Ellis, writer, choreographer and performer, and composer and digital artist Richard Povall have been researching motion sensing technologies over the past four years and this collaboration has now developed to include dancers Cindy Cummings and Mary Nunan.

Motion sensing technology, where sound triggers movement, is given full rein in this project. Some of the text is pre-recorded, signalling a range of dance movement, but it is punctuated with longer sequences of live spoken text which sparks a completely different sequence of movement. So, not just dance improvisation can be absorbed here but also a creative use of memory. Making a work about secrets, the covering and then unravelling of stories and truths that then change with the unreliability of memory, offers many possibilities for a storyteller.

In a way, Gilson-Ellis is the choreographer as storyteller. She produced most of the original text for this piece although in the process of rehearsal and development, Mary Nunan and Cindy Cummings have each brought individual perspectives and spoken text to the finished work.

Dance and technology are only the latest collaborators in an art form that thrives on interdisciplinary activity and Irish audiences have been introduced to a range of different experimentations in recent times. Dance Theatre of Ireland's *Soul Survivor* and Olwen Fouere's recent work with Roger Doyle are two striking examples.

Gilson-Ellis, who lectures in performance studies at UCC, is keenly aware that technology can both be a liberator and an imprisoning force on creative activity and on dance performance. She is categorical that this new work does not fall into that

trap..."This is not about technology, but about time and about secrets, the technology is offering a way and a process to enhance the performance and theatrical possibilities." In reality, she says, the piece is surprisingly, "poetic, tender and emotional".

The Secret Project also marks a collaboration between two dance agencies, Firkin Crane in Cork and the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada where extended residencies for all involved in the project contributed to its development. As Jools remarks "one of the greatest things we had was time to make and remake, to watch and refine". For choreographers that is often the problem, too little time to conceive and rework a piece.