

Antony Hamilton's *Forever & Ever* a witty display of shock and awe

By **DEBORAH JONES**

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Antony Hamilton says his new work for Sydney Dance Company developed from thoughts about order, chaos, human nature and popular culture. And yes, you can see that.

But those ideas are for pondering afterwards. In performance, *Forever & Ever* lays siege to the senses with a mighty display of shock and awe. It's immediate, visceral stuff, as Wednesday's opening night reception proved. The roars of approval went on and on.

Hamilton starts things quietly enough with just one dancer — Jesse Scales on Wednesday — moving to a private beat. The -silence intensifies concentration on the woman. Who is she? What is she thinking? Where does she come from?

Then kapow! The choreographer's brother Julian, of the Presets, throws in a sonic boom and we're off. A mysterious, unsettling line of others shuffles onstage in strict order of height, shrouded in shapeless coverings. Some have long cones in place of hands. Designer Paula Levis has a mischievous streak: Cistercian monks, mad cults, monster puppets and the KKK come to mind.

Julian Hamilton's all-enveloping score thumps with an insistent, regular beat that underpins an evolving sonic atmosphere, and lighting designer Benjamin Cisterne responds with vivid explosions of colour that quickly bloom and dissipate. (Anyone with sensitivity to loud noises and/or lightning-fast changes in lighting states may want to bow out of this one.)

Meanwhile, the dancers scatter and start shedding their gear, revealing costumes that then reveal others underneath. Various costume designs encourage the formation of neat little subsets, sometimes moving in canon. The vibe is of haughty fashion models on mind-altering drugs at a particularly exclusive nightclub.

When the company finally strips down to basic black with touches of body paint, the music too becomes stripped-back. Things calm down. Two large groups are separated from one another and then share the same space, for now. The witty concluding image suggests the cycle just may start all over again.

Forever & Ever is made for the whole SDC ensemble, looking predictably fabulous. Antony Hamilton's movement language can be ultra-precise and mechanistic but it also has a juicy and even sultry quality that suits SDC to a T.

The evening starts with a revival of Rafael Bonachela's *Frame of Mind* from 2015. It's moody and contemplative with close-contact duos punctuating intense groups. A strong spell is cast by the evocative set (Ralph Myers) and lighting (Cisterne), and this time there's a huge bonus with Bryce Dessner's score being played live by the Australian String Quartet.

Forever & Ever, Sydney Dance Company. Roslyn Packer Theatre, Sydney, October 18. Tickets: \$45-\$95. Bookings: (02) 9250 1999. Duration: 90min with interval. Until October 27.