

# Metropolitan

## Rare fusion for a new generation

This week Sydney's clubbers have an unlikely, new venue: the Opera House, writes Juan-Carlo Tomas.

Pumping, synthetic dance music and the more cerebral performance art, on first impression, seem an odd couple. But that's exactly the sort of unlikely (or unholy) marriage a new series of productions are bringing together, opening this week at the Opera House.

The first, *Dance Tracks #1* opens on Friday in The Studio, and attempts to meld two of Australia's more distinctive live electronic music acts with choreographed dance works and tech-heavy visual effects.

It gets better. The day before sees *Squeeze Me*, a dance party for young people aged 11 to 16 years. In many ways a dress rehearsal for the following night, entertainment will be provided by four of Sydney's most popular party DJs to a backdrop of computer-generated visual effects.

The Studio's executive producer, Virginia Hyams, says the program is designed to give younger audiences a taste of the arts in a friendly format.

"*Dance Tracks #1* is really a key part of being able to give dancers an opportunity to make new pieces of work," she says. "It's broadening their audience base, and taking it into an environment that's fun and accessible, rather than in a more traditional style." But the part-club, part-performance art feel has more than one artist involved saying, "it'll just have to come together on the night".

Local electronic-acoustic dance band *The Bird* will headline the night along with Melbourne-based outfit *B(if)tek*, composed of Nicole Skelty and Kate Crawford.

### HOUSE MUSIC

#### DANCE TRACKS #1:

**When:** Friday and Saturday, 9pm.  
**Where:** The Studio, Sydney Opera House.

**Who:** Electronic acts *The Bird* and *B(if)tek*, with new dance works by Kirstie McCracken, Lisa Griffiths and Michael Whaites. Visual effects by Kirsten Bradley and Carli Leimbach.

**Tickets:** \$25/\$20, plus booking fee.

**Bookings:** (02) 9250 7777 or [www.sydneypoperahouse.com](http://www.sydneypoperahouse.com)

#### DANCE TRACKS #2

**When:** May 24-25

**Where:** The Studio, \$23/\$20.

**Who:** Electronic artists *Pnau* with indigenous choreographers Albert David, Jason Pitt and Bernadette Walong, and film/video artist James Littlemore.

#### SQUEEZE ME

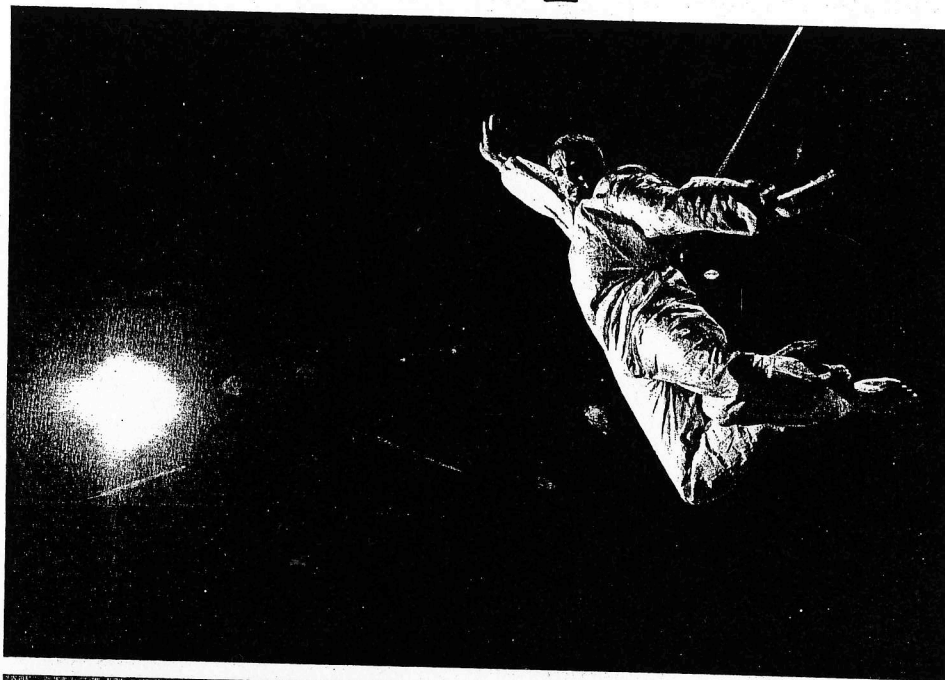
**When:** Thursday, 4pm-9pm.

**Where:** The Studio, \$15 plus booking fee.

**Who:** DJs Mike Dotch, Friendly (DJ set), Nervous and Mandy Rollins. Visual effects by Cicada.

Crawford, 28, says the chance to perform at the Opera House will be a highlight of her career. More used to playing in less salubrious surroundings - including car parks - she says *Dance Tracks #1* shows an increasing acceptance of electronic music within mainstream arts culture.

"Playing this shows that electronic music is actually capable of performing in a whole lot of different venues, and is not just about making people get up and dance to repetitive sounds," she says.



Rising to the challenge ... Michael Whaites in flight, above, and Melbourne outfit, *B(if)tek*, left, are working together for a new clubbing experience. Main photo: Peter Morris

experience with a completely electronic music accompaniment, but he's not short of exposure.

"I've been a clubber from way back," he laughs, "this is a combination of all my dance experience and practice, melding it with a more easy and fun club-type of feel."

Whaites's strategy to get noticed on the dance floor will be to take to the air, performing one of his works in a harness, and the other with a five-minute underwater backdrop.

"The first is to a track called *Flight* by *The Bird*, which will be fun. I'll be flying in a harness, so that's what I've been rehearsing at the moment.

"The other is to a track called *Doctors and Nurses* by *B(if)tek*. It's all about breath and oxygen and not having enough of it, and dying and those sorts of things."

They seem like heavy themes for an audience more used to romping about hedonistically than taking in the deeper points, but Whaites adds that you don't have to see it that way.

"I don't want it to be a serious form of art," he says, "I want people to enjoy it and have fun with it."

"Dance can actually be performed in different ways. The Opera House is a most spectacular venue, and The Studio space is acoustically just brilliant, with very high ceilings, and the sound system is amazing, so for us it's a complete treat."

One of the highlights of the production, she adds, has been a chance to work with trained dance artists - a far cry from the arm-slinging gyrations more common on club dance floors.

"In terms of the dancers being involved, that's going to be really

surprising," she says. "I was quite inspired. It's been really interesting the way they take up what you do in a theatre space. Instead of us trying to get people to move up and down repetitively, it's actually about getting people to perform a totally different piece of work around your music."

*Dance Tracks #1* will be hosted by Lisa Ffrench, lead singer for the band *Lino*, and features three works choreographed and performed by Kirstie McCracken, Lisa Griffiths and Michael

Whaites. One intriguing aspect about performing in a dance music space - with the audience moving - will be to capture their attention, Whaites says.

"I'm not sure how that will work, we'll have to see on the night," the 35-year-old Sydney-based artist says, deadpan. "I think specifically when we're performing light will be focused on us, and I think that will give the audience a sense that there's something going on and they should be watching it."

This will be Whaites's first