NORTHERN TERRITORY

Tracks Dance
Struck

Concept and Direction
David McMicken, Tim Newth

Choreography Joanna Noonan, Nick Power, Julia Quinn, David McMicken

Youth Dance Animateur Erwin Fenis

Original Music/Soundtrack
David McMicken

Design Tim Newth

Costumes Ann Gibb

Lighting Designer Andrew Dudley

Sound Engineer Matthew Cunliffe

Core Dancers Darwin Mob - Vera Tabuzo (Darwin Nurse), Paul Viojan, Kathryn Lawrence, Ricky Borg, Koel Wrigley, Karajayne Handberg, Rachael Pen-Dennis; American Servicemen – Imanuel Dado (Lover), John Rigas, Erwin Fenis.

Darwin is perfectly suited for outdoor events during the Dry season and Tracks Dance have a reputation for producing high quality outdoor performances. Still, I was nervous about seeing a modern dance performance. Though I enjoy them (the ease with which dancers contort, swing, or surge is nothing short of remarkable), simply watching disciplined bodies can leave me cold, with a feeling that I somehow missed the heart, or point, of the piece. I need not have been nervous. *Struck* is all heart and highly entertaining to boot. It's storytelling through dance and theatre. It's a story told by community about community, about prejudice and social mores, and about love and tragic outcomes.

The WWII Gun Turret at East Point Reserve is an inspired backdrop for this tale set in Darwin, early 1942. Rivalling any modern art sculpture, judiciously lit to create mood and location, the ever present gun turret is a constant reminder that Australia's involvement in WWII happened in Australia, not just on foreign shores.

The young cast of 40, ranging in age from fourteen to 25, play out the dramatic impact of war on a community with humour, energy and commendable skill. Four choreographers fused multiple dance forms from swing and ballet to hip-hop and break, working their young dancers hard for three to four months prior to the season. The result is that every performer, regardless of skill, experience or what role they play, is engaged in the action. Characters are well rounded. The audience is spoilt for choice. Wherever you look there are stories being played out. There are no small roles here!

There are no enemy soldiers either. In *Struck*, conflict is created when the allied Americans come to town. Everything changes. Soft tone lighting gives way to fiery hues and searching spotlights, the gun turret looms large, the dance style becomes edgier. With precise blocking, salutes, good acting and a deliberately disjointed music track (combining the national anthems of both countries), the confusion and ambiguous feelings of the local Australians are clearly demonstrated as this outside force arrives to sort things out.

A relationship develops between a young Australian nurse and an American Serviceman. Things reach a head when the love-struck pair dance publicly. Their blossoming love is not accepted by the community. The girl's brother shows his distaste by starting a fight, one he never walks away from. The story ends with a distraught young woman weeping over the body of her dead brother. It's not a happy ending, and one that surely begs the question: how on earth can there be peace when those on the same side can't even get along?

Before we witness this tragic end there is much to rejoice in the unfolding of *Struck*. Ann Gibb has done a magnificent job at transforming 21st century teenagers into 1940's war personnel and civilians through her bold, crisp costumes and authentic hairstyles - particularly for the women. The original music/soundtrack, like the dance routines, fuses styles and time periods. There's a particularly inspired moment when the Americans and Australians clash to the thump of Frankie Goes to Hollywood's eighties anthem, *Two Tribes*.

The structure of the show is well crafted. It tells a clear story by moving between small domestic scenes with family and young lovers, whimsical solo pieces, large chorus numbers set in a hospital and dance hall, and punchy all male routines by the American Servicemen. I love the irony of Americans being portrayed by young men with predominantly Asian features. The dance routines are strong and tight, with space enough for them to show off their individual break dance talents.

The very watchable Vera Tabuzo dances a fine, sweet solo to the tune of *One Day He'll Come Along, The Man I Love*, whilst the silky *I've Got You Under My Skin* is the perfect choice for Xavier Burrow's charming swoons of unrequited love. Imanuel Dado brings flair and emotional depth to the role of the young American lover, Erwin Fenis is arresting as the Commander of the Americans, and Ciella Williams' impressive characterisation of the Head Matron really makes her shine.

Finally, it's the chorus numbers that stole my heart: the adventurous, swinging ensemble of young Darwin performers altogether strutting their stuff. They were having a ball which, not surprisingly, infected the audience. Supported by a talented group of professional creative artists, the young cast of *Struck* are living proof that Tracks Dance is a company who live by their creed, 'our company is our community'. ✪

Caroline Reid is excited about her re-location to the top end. She is a freelance writer who's passionate about theatre and music. Her plays have been produced by Radio National, DADAA WA, Deckchair Theatre, Urban Myth Theatre of Youth, and been included in international festivals.

Below > Vera Tabuzo, *Struck*, Tracks Dance 2008