Kate Molleson: Hello, and welcome to the Edinburgh International Festival 2025. I'm Kate Molleson, and this is The Warm Up, an insider's guide to the performance that you're about to experience.

This time we turn our attention to a stunning collaboration between the visionary choreographer Crystal Pite and the groundbreaking theatre maker Simon McBurney. Before we hear from Simon McBurney and the dancer, Genevieve O'Keeffe, here is our Festival Director, Nicola Benedetti.

Nicola Benedetti: This is the Scottish premiere of *Figures in Extinction*. It's a work that showcases the phenomenal talent of the leading contemporary dance company, Netherlands Dance Theater, in collaboration with two significant artists that both have a celebrated history with the festival.

Dance and theatre legends Crystal Pite and Simon McBurney have come together with NDT to confront hard truths about humanity's impact on the world, and explore the meaning of art in the face of mass destruction. This moment is what our Festival is all about. It is no exaggeration to say you will be seeing some of the world's greatest dancers on stage from Netherlands Dance Theater, but also to have two powerhouses contributing to the creative vision, the story, the visuals, the movement in both Simon McBurney and Crystal Pite.

You just cannot get a more outstanding collaboration of artists.

Genevieve O'Keeffe: My name is Genevieve O'Keeffe. I'm a dancer with NDT 1. I've recently been part of the creative process of *Figures and Extinction*.

Simon McBurney: Hi, I'm Simon McBurney and I collaborated with Crystal Pite on *Figures in Extinction*. Very, very early on we identified three areas in which human beings feel extraordinarily separated. So the first separation, if you like, was between us, and we can call it nature, but the living world. And I threw all sorts of things at Crystal, and one of the things that she came up with, which started to stimulate her was this horror of the list of everything that is going extinct.

This provided a huge impulse for her. I recorded all sorts of things. I recorded lists of extinction. I even recorded my own daughter who was talking about animals that she no longer saw. I recorded all sorts of bits of text from John Berger about our relationship with animals, and we read books about nature and eventually this came up to create a piece in which there is a kind of dialogue about where we are in our relationship with the living world.

Then came the second piece in which Crystal provoked me, and this became about if you like, as to why are we behaving as to way we're behaving? And a fundamental question for me, which has always interested me is why do we think as the way that we think? Why do human beings behave and think as they do? And we got very excited about the work of Iain McGilchrist and about the divided brain, how human beings inevitably are in a kind of cycle of behaviour, in which, in some sense they're almost separate from themselves, but they find, we find ourselves very separate, one from another.

We no longer think of ourselves collectively. And why is this? And that became the subject of the second piece, which is called, *and then we come to the humans*. The first piece is called *the list*. The second piece is called, *and then we come to the humans*. And finally, and this we kind of decided right from the beginning was our disconnection from the past and the future.

So the third piece, which is called *Requiem*, is essentially about our separation from the dead and how this relates to how we are now and in the future. So the dead and our separation from them was at the heart of the third piece. Now, all of that sounds very ethereal, but of course what happens is we walked into the room with ideas and then it was through the amazing and beautiful and inspirational creativity of those dancer-artists, creatives at NDT, who we flung these ideas at. Or we put them in situations, or Crystal choreographed to create these three pieces of work.

I know what it felt like from the outside, but perhaps Gen can give you an idea of what it felt like to be thrown these ideas and then have to work with them.

Genevieve O'Keeffe: I mean, being brought the topic at first was quite, maybe confronting is a good word to use because as dancers, our craft is our body. Often it's not so specific, we don't attach words to it necessarily all the time. And so in this process, we were really demanded to reflect specifically on certain points like death, our mortality, our genealogy, where we've come from, our ancestry. That's not really a process that we use very often in our craft to actually understand who we are as individuals, what we're bringing into this process.

I thought through each of the tasks, talking about the rituals around the dead, how we process grief, the stages of that, these emotions, the separation from the reality of that, what happens to your body, that it, it becomes the earth, it becomes nature sort of to really sit on those points and reflect how they feel in the body too.

As dancers, we're used to sort of translating feeling and emotion, but this in moments to really actually consider those feelings, anger, denial, or just the fact

that my body won't be here anymore. Those sort of points were quite challenging to bring onto a stage and sit in to consider that this is a point in time.

We're not gonna be here. Also, our people that were here before us are no longer here. Sort of understanding that sense of responsibility that this timeline, as Simon said, was here long before us, and it'll continue long after us.

Simon McBurney: In all three, because they're about separation, there's a sense of collectivity.

So when the audience come in, one of the first things they will see is the entire company. That is the same with each of the three pieces. It begins and ends with this extraordinary company of dancers, 21 dancers or more, and everything is done collectively.

There are solos, there are duets. There are moments of great silence. There are moments of great individuality. But you do get a sense of a collective. So in the first piece, it will be a sequence. It's called *the list*. So you can expect a sequence of events, but they are all joined together by an overarching sense of what are we doing in the second piece. It's almost like the dancers are like cells in the brain.

So you get a feeling almost like a kind of hive of different ideas, interconnected thing, and they're constantly working throughout. It's a very, very physically demanding piece. And in the third one there is again, the sense of collectivity. But if you like, what happens is you get to meet the people who you've seen in the first two half hour sections who are dancers.

And suddenly in the third piece you go “oh, these are who these people are. And they too have a connection with a wider, deeper, more profound and real world”.

Genevieve O'Keeffe: To be able to go through those three journeys that Simon talked about here. And at the end, it really is a sense of arrival, which is very gratifying as a performer, to have an experience that feels meaningful and feels like it fulfills me in a way that's just beyond the pleasure of performing or connecting with audiences.

Kate Molleson: Simon McBurney and Genevieve O'Keeffe. *Figures in Extinction* is on at the Festival Theatre from Friday the 22nd until Sunday, the 24th of August, runs for two and a half hours with two intervals, supported by

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