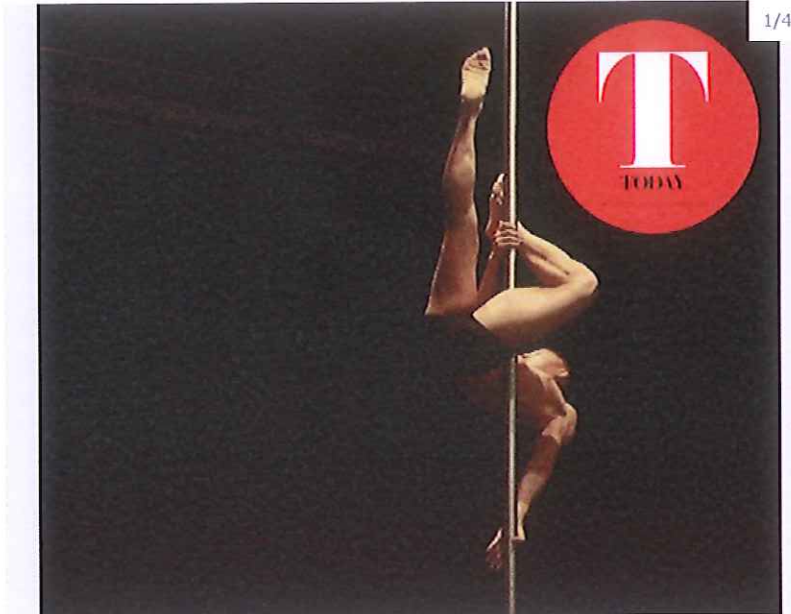


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da:ns Fest 2014: Giving props to dance

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Pole dancing, YouTube videos and hats at this year's edition

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SINGAPORE — When it comes to dance, all you really need is a stage and a warm body or two to work that stage, right? Well, not all the time.

Next month's da:ns Festival will feature shows and names such as Matthew Bourne's acclaimed manly take on Swan Lake; FAR by hotshot Sadler's Wells choreographer and occasional Radiohead music video guru, Wayne McGregor; and returning flamenco giant Maria Pages. But you've also got to give props to some of the other artistes in the line-up — quite literally.

Stick'em up

Sticking out right in front of us on the stage will be a pole — which performers Daniel Kok and Eisa Jocson use to showcase their pole dancing talents for ALPHA, a show done in collaboration with Belgian choreographer Arco

Renz.

Kok and Jocson may be contemporary dance artistes, but they're also certified pole dance champs. The latter, who is co-owner of Manila dance school Dance Station, won the Philippines' first pole dancing competition in 2010. Kok, meanwhile, was the overall champ of the SG Pole Challenge contest in 2012 and represented the country at the finals of the International Pole Championships, which was held last year in Singapore.

"Pole dance has been a key part of my artistic practice in the past few years, allowing me to study the politics of desire and exchange in performance," shared Kok, who got hooked on the dance form while working on a piece for the M1 Singapore Fringe Festival in 2007.

"I decided to include pole dance in one of the segments. At that time, there was little information about pole dance online, but I found Ming (aka Suzie Wong) in Singapore to give me some private lessons. That got me hooked on pole dance as a training regime."

While pole dancing may not be considered by many to be a "serious" dance genre — with its ties to activities such as health and exercise or even to strip club culture — its "outsider" status proved interesting to Kok and his collaborators, even if they're not quite concerned about the novelty aspect in the framework of contemporary dance.

"In ALPHA, we are looking at different ways of working with pole dance, tapping into its full range of erotic energy and athletic finesse. This dance that we are working with could be entertaining as well as seductive, alluring as well as provocative. We hope that the image of the Other can appear alongside recognisable forms, but also have the potential to subvert them," said Kok.

Also working with them on ALPHA are lighting designer Takayuki Fujimoto and sound artist Marc Appart. According to Kok, the LED lights employed by the former will become part of the choreography itself while the latter's soundscapes will draw from various sources in pop and entertainment cultures "to create a psychological and spatial dimension to the dance".

He added: "By looking at different urban cultural traditions — normally overlooked as non-art — we hope to create another expression for physicality and movement."

And what exactly will this expression take the form of? "The audience will see skin, sweat and sequins," shared Kok. "The audience will think with us."

ALPHA is on Oct 10 and 11, 8pm, Esplanade Theatre Studio.

CAUGHT ON YOUTUBE

In the piece Forecasting, Croatian dancer-choreographer Barbara Matijevic will be performing with a "partner" of sorts — a laptop.

Created with Giuseppe Chico, the piece is the third in a trilogy that looks at the relationship between bodies and

technology, and here, they concentrated on amateur videos that have been uploaded on YouTube. Matijevic will perform movements that are linked to around 100 videos they've chosen, from cooking tutorials and pet videos to those showing fetish objects and weapons.

"My movements are entirely dependent on the videos — I move in order to place my body in positions that complete the parts of the body that we see on the screen. In a certain sense, I provide what is missing in the frame. The result is an extremely precise choreography that doesn't even seem to be a dance," she said.

Forecasting reveals the interplay between the physical presence and the virtual image. "We wanted to provoke a break in this continuity, to crack it open — using a laptop screen — in order to create, literally, the 'windows of the possible'."

YouTube was the perfect source, said Matijevic, because of the richness of material found there: "The number of people who post there, as well as the variety of situations and objects with which they interact are virtually infinite," she said.

It wasn't so much the individual videos as the very medium itself that Matijevic and Chico were interested in exploring.

"Our intention was to treat these videos as accessible, cheap and ubiquitous tools of self-narration. More than anything else YouTube is a social space — a domain of self-expression, community and public confession, it reflects the cultural politics of the present times. We felt that there was an enormous potential in this kind of collectivisation of knowledge. Maybe the future historians will gain more insight into the social and psychological reality of our epoch by doing an in-depth study of YouTube videos then by researching the material provided by the official media," said Matijevic.

Ironically, despite creating an entire piece based on YouTube videos, she's never uploaded one herself.

"Personally, I use YouTube every time I want to see how somebody else has done something that I intend to do — in most cases, I realise their way is better than mine. There's always somebody who thought of doing the same thing in a way that is better, quicker, more efficient or simply more fun!"

Forecasting is on Oct 12, 3pm and 8pm, Esplanade Theatre Studio.

HATS OFF

Dancer-choreographer Christina Chan has used her fair share of props in the pieces she has created and choreographed: A table for *Shift Or Go* at the Singapore Dance Theatre's (SDT) *Passages* showcase last year, a box in *Fat Room* and a whole bunch of seemingly random objects — including a watermelon — for *Bufo Alvarius*, both for *Frontier Danceland*, of which she's a member.

"Bufo has been done over 12 times now and the list of props we have encountered is rather diverse. They have

changed with every performance, because we get them from the audience, the performance venue or whatever we happen to have that day," said Chan.

In her latest piece *Traces We Left Behind* (as part of the SDT's *Intermezzo* triple-bill showcase with Toru Shimazaki and Ma Cong), Chan will be employing hats. As for what exactly does that entail, she prefers to keep it a surprise, simply saying that it's "a very simple, rather unexciting object from which everyone can draw their own associations and conclusions".

But it's not like Chan is obsessed with using objects to propel her works forward. Far from it. "I generally shy away from props because my first inspiration usually comes from people and music. Most of my work have no props and no sets and (I use) really simple costumes and lighting, which makes them easy to travel with. It often also has to do with convenience, as a young artist I must use what is easily available to me and manageable in the time given to me," she said.

That said, she acknowledged how objects can alter whatever takes place onstage — by simply making things different.

"Personally I think props do not necessarily enhance or take away from work, they just make the work different. Like anything else they are important but also just a choice, to be treated with both delicacy and abandon," she said, pointing out how that can be the case if you're talking about a performer, too.

"Once you put something on stage — a person or object — everything is changed. If there were an egg in the middle of a stage and nothing else happened in relation to the egg for the rest of the work, it would already be a completely different work than if the egg wasn't there."

Intermezzo is on Oct 18 and 19, 3pm and 8pm, Esplanade Theatre Studio.

da:ns Festival 2014 runs from Oct 9 to 19 at various venues at The Esplanade. Tickets from SISTIC. For more information, visit <http://www.dansfestival.com/> (<http://www.dansfestival.com/>)

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