



For his piece *Look Up* (above), Hong Kong choreographer Ricky Hu (right) is using a narrative style and adding speech for the first time, in a theme inspired by smartphone addiction

Global, local themes explored in NUS fest

CONTEMPORARY dance is about ideas, and the two ideas to be explored by the performances at the NUS Arts Festival will be a global phenomenon as well as a more Singapore-specific situation.

Ricky Hu from Hong Kong Ballet looks at smartphone addiction with his piece *Look Up*, while Taiwanese choreographer Chen Wu-Kang's *Elephant in the Room* is inspired by his reading of Kuo Pao Kun's *The Coffin is Too Big for the Hole*.

They're the two choreographers of *Overdrive II*, which is a continuation of the series started last year where NUS Centre for the Arts invited foreign choreographers to work with the university's dance students.

Hu is the winner of the 2012 Hong Kong Arts Development Award for Young Artist (Dance) and Chen, the 1999 Gold medal winner at the Creative Dance Competition organised by Taiwan's Council for Cultural Affairs.

Message through humour

Sharing about their works, Chen and Yeh Ming Hwa, his co-choreographer, tell how their piece was inspired.

"Kuo had this ability to bring out a deeper message through humorous and light-hearted ways. I believe this is also the style of our dance troupe, Horse. Through this method of choreography, we want people to perceive for themselves what the message of the dance is all about," describes Yeh.

With the NUS dance students, Chen shares about how they spend a lot of time "dancing and playing", which could be tough on them, but that's the process of creating.

"When I actually go in and start working with dancers, then the dance became a conversation," he adds.



Taiwanese choreographer Chen Wu-Kang (below) says he and the students (above) spend a lot of time "dancing and playing" while rehearsing for *Elephant in the Room*

Time is of the essence when he gets only two weeks to choreograph and rehearse with the students, but so far he has found that their diverse cultural backgrounds have resulted in equally diverse views.

"The multi-racial environment and culture in Singapore has fascinated but puzzled me at the same time," shares Chen.

As for Ricky Hu, he is using a narrative style in his production and adding speech for the first time, in a



theme inspired by the "the tribe that always keeps its heads down" (Chinese slang for people constantly looking at their mobile phones or electronic devices).

"Because the piece springs from



one's emotions, movement isn't the most important. The significant challenge is that I've added speech. In a medium that usually relies on physical movement or facial expressions, I think it is actually rather risky to add speech as well as it can be redundant," he relates.

Hardworking dancers

But it has worked well, he thinks, because the style of the words are genuine, sincere (and funky), without too many theatrical movements to exaggerate the speech. "NUS even invited a theatre professor to work with me and through that, I have learned a lot!"

Although Hu was initially concerned about working with students rather than professional dancers, he reflects that it has been an easy process - "They are extremely professional, hardworking and modest," he praises.

While Hu notes there's no one way to define contemporary dance style today, for him, it's about finding the best way to express his thoughts.

"It may be conveyed through motions or emotions as long as it is most comfortable (natural) to me," he concludes.

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Overdrive II will be held on Mar 20 and 21, at 8pm at the University Cultural Centre Theatre, NUS. For tickets of S\$19 and S\$22, please visit www.sistic.com.sg