

Dancers go into choreographed Overdrive

Review **Dance**

OVERDRIVE 2

Chen Wu-kang (Taiwan) and Ricky Hu (Hong Kong /China) with NUS dancers
NUS University Cultural Centre Theatre
Last Saturday

Lee Mun Wai

Overdrive 2, which is part of the National University of Singapore Arts Festival 2015, was a double bill featuring works by two award-winning choreographers, Chen Wu-kang from Taiwan and Hong Kong-based Ricky Hu.

The two contrasting works provided a perfect counterpoint to each other.

Hu's *Look Up* was rapid and relentless while Chen's *Elephant In The Room* had a placidity that tended towards the austere.

Both had clear choreographic visions. They knew their dancers' strengths and weaknesses and also had an acute sense of pacing and space.

In Chen's work, a long row of neatly lined up tennis balls and a tableaux of still dancers dressed in long johns greeted the audience. The work's structure played with the dynamics of movement versus stillness.

Watching it was like receiving bits of residual visual fragments of a much larger picture. Interest was piqued as the audience was teased with tiny glimpses into each performer's inner psyche.

Fragmentation was made even more apparent with a soundtrack consisting of three songs from Louis Armstrong so greatly distorted that it took some time



NUS dancers in *Elephant In The Room* by Chen Wu-kang.
PHOTO: KINETIC EXPRESSIONS PHOTOGRAPHY BY JINGKAI

to recognise that they were classic songs by the old-time jazz legend.

Like randomly floating dust particles catching the sunlight in a still room, gestural movement was performed with an easy energy, resulting in a slightly off-kilter sort of calm.

If the energy surged briefly on stage, it was not because the dancers launched into needlessly complicated steps, but because they harnessed the energy present in the space through direct means, such as scurrying from scattered positions to tight groups.

The added element of trying not to upset the line of tennis balls while dancing added an extra thematic quirk. As the work progressed, longer passages of solos danced by Wiing Liu and Chen Jiexiao offered more clues to the incomplete picture. The work closed with a visually stimulating climax where the dancers threw bright yellow tennis balls at a lone female dancer standing in the centre. Like energised atoms, the balls bounced off the walls and floor, sometimes hitting the dancer, sometimes whizzing past her, a final surge of energy to close Chen's work.

Hu's *Look Up* was a much less abstract, but no less engaging work that highlighted the audience's current fixation with social media.

However, the work, which incorporat-

ed dramatic elements with dance, got a tad literal. On the whole, though, it was one that had an engaging narrative brought to life by the razor-sharp precision of his choreography.

It was anchored by a main character danced confidently by Lee Si Lei, who moved and spoke about the frustrating amount of disconnect felt with technology that is ironically meant to connect.

She delivered her lines wholeheartedly. Her spot-on dancing imbued everything Hu is known for – fast and clean linear lines extending through lithe and agile bodies. A cast of six other equally strong dancers juxtaposed Lee's fragility by playing the social media mafia. Constantly looking down and averting the audience's gaze, they lifted, shifted and manipulated Lee's long limbs through the space like forces beyond her control to a soundtrack of strong pulsating beats.

If March's contemporary dance performances have been an indication so far, it is that young, locally based dancers are realising the benefits of sustained, long-term development.

Two weeks ago, it was Maya Dance Theatre. This past weekend, Overdrive 2 saw the NUS dancers rise to the occasion, tackling well-thought-out choreography from two seminal choreographers with aplomb.