

NUS productions bridge the gap between dance, science

SINGAPORE – The theme of this year’s edition of the annual NUS Arts Festival, which kicks off on March 10, is Brave New World. And if there is one thing the National University of Singapore (NUS) has in spades, it is people who are willing to journey to that brave new world — in this case, through the medium of the arts.

Two dance programmes, Remember When and Sambhavna 2.0, showcase unique, if odd, couplings.

“This is a place where two things that are so disparate can meet (and be) unpacked to a point that it will be more accessible to a wider audience,” said Thomas Harper, manager (marketing communications) at the NUS Centre for the Arts.

For the NUS Dance Ensemble’s artistic director and resident choreographer Zaini Tahir, dance is more than just movements of the body. It is also about geography — the place we live in, its history, and how that shapes our future. A changing Singapore guided the concept for Remember When, which will be performed on March 17.

“Things like the landscapes change so fast in Singapore, and this raises questions like, ‘What does that do to me as a person and as a Sin-



Sambhavna 2.0 by NUS Indian Dance and the Centre for Quantum Technologies fuses concepts of quantum physics with traditional Indian dance. PHOTO: KINETIC EXPRESSIONS PHOTOGRAPHY

gaporean’?” said Zaini. “I thought it would be interesting (to use) the concept of geography to add a bit more depth (to dance).”

Much of the pre-production work began last year, with Zaini doing research with a geography team — going to museums, visiting the archives — to “get an understanding of it all”.

“The biggest question we’d like to pose with this show is: With the quick development of Singapore, are we los-

ing anything — any sense of soul — and at the end of the day, is it worth it?” said Zaini.

One big challenge was trying to get the dancers — “most of whom are quite young,” and had never seen Singapore’s vast geographic transformation — to imbue such ideas into their movements.

“The time period featured in the dance is 1975 to 1995, because (that was a period of) the most change in Singapore’s landscape,” he said. “(The dancers had to) speak to their parents or elders to get an idea of what it was like back then.”

The dance will also incorporate “a lot of music and oral interviews with people as soundscapes” to form an aural backdrop; as well as a multimedia element.

DEVELOPING DANCE AND QUANTUM THOUGHT

The future is something those at NUS’ Centre of Quantum Technologies (CQT) know quite a lot about. And they are helping the NUS Indian Dance group shed some light on it with a performance called Sambhavna 2.0, on March 24 and 25.

It is a sequel to last year’s Samb-

havna, the experiment to capture the complexity of quantum physics through traditional Indian dance, which was created by Cultural Medallion recipient Santha Bhaskar.

This year’s work “weaves the delicate movements of classical Indian Bharatanatyam, fundamental concepts of quantum physics, and the richness of language in spoken text”.

Roland Marrero, a PhD student from Venezuela studying at CQT and helping out with the production, explained how the show was conceived. “We had monthly meetings with Mrs Bhaskar and talked about what was weird or exotic about the research we do in quantum mechanics,” he said. “She chose quantum entanglements and developed it into a dance.”

“If you come out of the show being curious about quantum entanglement — that’s what this show is about, creating that spark of curiosity,” said Jenny Hogan, associate director, outreach and media relations at CQT.

“If you say to people, we want to teach you quantum physics, they’re going to say, it’s too hard or too boring. Working with the arts is a way to create that sense of wonder that exists in science — in a different format.” **CHRISTOPHER TOH**

● The NUS Arts Festival runs from March 10 to 25. For more information, visit http://www.nus.edu.sg/cfa/NAF_2017/index.html