

Review: SIDES 2019 by Frontier Danceland



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MAY 14, 2019

 COMMENTS 0



A double bill of work to mark Frontier Danceland's latest mid-year production.

Once again presenting their annual mid-year production, Frontier Danceland's latest edition of SIDES features a double bill of work, choreographed by renowned choreographers Edouard Hue and Shahar Binyamini for the company's artists.

SIDES began with Edouard Hue's *Into Outside*, previously performed for the Ecole de Danse Contemporaine of Montreal in 2018. Exploring the concept of wanting to belong and be a part of a group, *Into Outside* considers how our desire to be a part of a larger group affects our individual behaviour, and how each person in turn contributes to the group identity via their own unique personalities. *Inside Outside* begins as Keigo Nozaki stands alone onstage, moving his body and feet in time to

rhythmic, yet suspenseful music by Charles Mugel. He is then joined by dancer Mark Robles, and the two pair up, mirroring each others' moves. Yet, each dancer still remains distinct, owing to the unique clothes donned by each one, casual wear that any of them might have worn while heading out of the house.



Now, other 'entities' (dancers Faye Tan, Ma Yueru and Sammantha Yue) join the duo, and begin to perform the moves in unison, as if embarking on a journey together. One sees them almost like a group of cells as they bump into each other, imitating each other as more and more join in and 'fuse' with the group, the new cells slowly but surely learning from the existing ones about what to do to be accepted as part of the whole. While the performance space was wide and expansive, the dancers subverted convention by huddling together and congregating tightly instead, making it more evident that they existed as a single entity.



It is interesting how in spite of the pre-established structure that choreographer Hue has set in place for this dance, there remains enough free rein for them to choose their own natural movements and means of expression. The dance unexpectedly ends on a twist – the music changes and a kind of organised chaos ensues. The high energy music splits the dancers, each one embarking on their own individual, distinct styles and dance moves, yet still maintaining a fixed pattern and arrangement onstage. The dancers are at their limits here, expending all their energy as a group so much that one could even feel it from the audience, till at last they are exhausted, sweating and panting as the last high octane beats fade away. We hear a collective group sigh of relief as the lights dim, released together, yet individually distinct, cementing how even within a group, one can remain an individual.

After a brief intermission, the dancers returned to perform Shahar Binyamini's *Wet Ostrich*. In a rare instance where the title literally reflects what the performance is about, *Wet Ostrich* features the dancers clad in bodysuits and underwear, the nude illusion contributing to their image as a herd of ostriches. With music by Daniel Grossman, we imagine ourselves in the middle of a savannah, as rain patters down during a heavy storm. The dancers are bird-like, stretching and elongating their bodies to mimic the behaviour of actual ostriches. There is something primal, sensual and sexual above their movements, moving to the drumbeats over the backing track. It becomes difficult to tell them apart due to the similarities of their bodysuits.



Dealing with the fine line between joy and insanity, *Wet Ostrich* is simple in concept, yet excellently choreographed and executed. There is exuberance that emanates from the dancers as they take in the rain, pure joy shifting into maniacal insanity as it radiates off of their movements. As the flybar holding the lights lowers down, the dancers' silhouettes are spotlighted and put into perspective, and their moves accentuated and defined more strongly.



As the ostriches enter a state of delirium, they stop suddenly, and stare straight at us with crazed eyes, a terrifying moment as they embody the animal spirit of the ostriches completely with their intensity, proving that a lot of work has gone into the research of ostrich attitude and behaviour. To go from madness to stillness leaves their hearts racing, and honestly, takes a lot out of the dancers to shift gears as quickly as they do. The music, metronome-like with its regular beat, begins to slow to a halt. The sun 'sets' as the lights fade, and we return to a state of calm, darkness and serenity as *Wet Ostrich* draws to a close.

For SIDES 2019 then, Frontier Danceland has presented two works that deal with themes of groups and the primal energy that drives their emotions and movements, and have once again proven the capability of their dancers, always pushing them to their physical limits while ensuring that the works staged possess clear artistic vision and innovation.

Photo Credit: Justin Koh

Performance attended 11/5/19 (3pm)

SIDES 2019 played at the SOTA Studio Theatre from 10th to 11th May 2019.

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