

Review: LEAP 2021 by Frontier Danceland



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Youth dancers take on Frontier Danceland dancers' new choreographies.

In the 11th edition of LEAP, the latest batch of the M1-Frontier Danceland PULSE Programme (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Nx45YcUg54>), graduates made their mark with five works that showed off the results of their training. Taking inspiration from the movement of birds, the performance opened strong with Mark Robles' *AviuMotus*, seeing the dancers dressed in traditional, cultural garb. One could practically imagine them as avian creatures beside a waterfall, as they spread their clothes in an attempt to catch the winds and the waters.



Moving as a single tribe, there is both grace and balance in their movements, not only a homage to nature and Robles' cultural heritage, but also a testament to their discipline as dancers. Mesmerising in their poses and graceful in body, the curtain opens up to reveal a mirror behind them, in an almost magical moment that gives the illusion of a larger space. We are reminded of the beauty that exists in the world around us, and are left tempted to join them in their journey, their smooth movements promising peace wherever they migrate to.



Frank Bretschneider's 'A Soft Throbbing of Time' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dt9E0LGHX6g&ab_channel=borowies), acts as the backing track for Kay Lee's *SPACE*, where we feel the vibrations of the music reverberating around the space. We are reminded of the smallness of the space, and how the dancers constantly want to push at it and create more space of themselves. While it initially begins with just two dancers, the others join them onstage as their movements expand and fill the stage. They create space by lifting each other, taking on vertical space instead of horizontal, and attempt to evoke the idea that anything is possible. Yet while the concept and intent was there, the difference in the dancers' skill level prevented the piece from being fully realised.



Tan Xin Yen's *Me With My Pet Dinosaur* takes a leaf from her childhood and inspiration from a well-known Penang mural (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/102175485266605511/>), as she imagines the idea of toys and using our imagination to make them come alive. In a way, this piece acts as a breather for the dancers, with the sense of fun coming through strongly. Messy and chaotic, there are no rules to this performance, as the dancers regress to their childhoods and let their energy run wild.



Neo Yan Zong and Ng Gek Theng Keryn find the beauty of togetherness in *Solidarity*, as their dancers come onstage one by one, welcoming each other with a warm embrace. It is a reminder of the importance of community, after a year of isolation, before they begin to dance, fuelled by the human touch. There is evidently plenty of time that went into rehearsals as they interact and react to each other, navigating the changing tensions in their relationships. They are assisted by the lighting to create uncertainty in the atmosphere, ebbing and shifting, as if the changing environment affects the way they relate to each other. Perhaps this refers back to how time and space changes us as people, changing our perception of the world. We imagine this almost like a tower of Jenga blocks, with the fundamental structure of the piece transforming with every movement. Yet the dancers still push and battle against all odds to maintain their solidarity, staying together despite all odds.



In the final piece, Zhuo Zihao's *In The Aisle* explores the negative space between seats, from the aisles of planes to the aisles in theatres and church. As the performance begins, we hear the residual environmental sounds of chatter and conversation hanging in the air, while the dancers pull seats onstage. We hear 'pre-flight announcements', and think about how things have changed so much since the pandemic began, and how aisles themselves now indicate this idea of safety via distance. Chaos has begun to erupt, as a 'conductor' attempts to organise things, his arms flailing about, and we hear Mendelssohn's wedding march. It is these gaps that metaphorically represent our distance from each other, and what literally keeps us apart, as the dancers question the significance of the aisles through abstract, absurd movements, leaving us to wonder when we'll fill those gaps and come together once more.

Photo Credit: Justin Koh

LEAP 2021 played from 18th to 20th March 2021 at the Goodman Arts Centre Black Box.

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