

Singapore report

by Filomar Cortezano Tariao

The Span of Us, choreographed by artistic director Low Mei Yoke, marks Frontier Danceland's inaugural performance in the Esplanade Theatre, as part of the Esplanade da:ns Festival, October 2021. Photo: Bernie Ng, courtesy of Esplanade, Theatres on the Bay.



More than a year after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Singapore dance scene has rebounded and found ways to persist amidst very challenging safe management measures (SMM). In Singapore, where the vaccination rate is already 85% as of this writing, performers still have to produce a negative Antigen Rapid Test (ART) for COVID-19 before being allowed to perform onstage.

Low Mei Yoke's Frontier Danceland presented its yearly *Dancer's Locker* with works from its company artists: Sammantha Yue, Mark Robles, Ma YueRu and Tan Xin Yen. Intimately set at the Aliwal Arts Center, the performance became more meaningful given the select number of people allowed to view the pieces due to the stringent event protocols.

With the gradual easing of SMM from a Phase 2 lockdown in June, dance and fitness classes were finally allowed indoor mask-off activities in July. The mandate limited activities to groups of two with no more than 30 participants safely distanced from one another in any venue. These calibrated measures made conducting in-person dance classes more challenging for studio owners. However, this did not dissuade Dance Edge Academy owner Elizabeth Lee from finding alternative methods of teaching. "Social distancing has been a blessing in disguise because it has forced me to change my approach to teaching," said

Miss Lee. She teaches Progressive Ballet and Contemporary Techniques in her studio which opened its doors in March 2021.

August brought in a variety of dance workshops and master classes in the dance studios around the island, with The Dance Place offering fusion contemporary workshops and dance-theatre classes from local industry leaders. Similarly, in-person academic dance training resumed at the Lasalle College of the Arts and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) Dance Programmes. The month also ushered in Jenny Neo and Benedict Soh as the new artistic and creative directors respectively of the Singapore Chinese Dance Theatre (SCDT). The digital premiere of *The Susurrations of the Tree*, a full length piece by the artistic duo, accompanied this transition of leadership within the locally-grown company.

Rising numbers of infection in KTV and market clusters resulted in the retightening of SMM's in the city state in September. Undeterred, SCDT launched its installation *MidAutumn Celebration Online-Togetherness*, while the NAFA Dance Programme's *Dancers@Work* presented eight dance creation works-in-process by five BA (Hons) Performance Making students. The informal showing, organised by senior lecturer Gillian Tan, also saw Dance students manage production aspects of the performance.

In October, with travel restrictions still preventing international dance companies from visiting Singapore, the Esplanade Da:ns Festival pivoted its focus to the local dance scene under the programme In Good Company – A Spotlight on Singapore Dance Companies. Under Esplanade's distinctive durian-inspired architecture, Chok Productions, Frontier Danceland, P7:1SMA, Raw Moves, and The Human Expression (T.H.E.) Dance Company shared two weekends in the main indoor theatre, while Singapore Dance Theatre debuted at the outdoor theatre with a triple bill of contemporary works entitled *Forces of Dance*. All the performers were maskless while the audiences were masked and safely distanced from one another.

The festival also highlighted productions of the local preprofessional dance institutions. According to LASALLE programme leader Melissa Quek, "The recent highlight for LASALLE College of the Arts was filming *Civic Bodies* for the festival. The film features choreography by alumni Dapheny Chen, Yarra Iletto and Pat Toh, Melissa Quek and choreographer Germaine Cheng, who worked with film producer and LASALLE alumnus Jeremy Chua to refine their approach to the medium."

Meanwhile, the NAFA Dance Programme showcased Singapore's diverse talents with a live performance film, *Nāṭaya*, by Supatchai Lappakornkul, a NAFA alum. Dr. Caren Cariño, Head of NAFA Dance Programme, says of the choreographer,



"Supatchai returns dancers and musicians to their bodies and instruments, to present his Thai heritage through a contemporary perspective. Thai dance movement and children's games are married with ballet and contemporary dance... With this work, Supatchai embraces new technologies to further, but not replace, the physical celebration and expression of our human experience and imagination."

The rest of the year looks hopeful with a majority of the population being fully vaccinated. Riding this wave of optimism is WDA Singapore's preparations for its next virtual conference on dancers' well-being, with speakers from Singapore, Australia, United States and Hong Kong. WDA Events in this edition has more information.



1. Singapore Chinese Dance Theatre in *The Susurrations of the Tree*, which premiered online, choreographed by co-artistic director Jenny Neo.
2. Students of LASALLE College of the Arts in the dance film *Civic Bodies*, presented in the Esplanade da:ns Festival in October 2021. Photo: Crispian Chan for LASALLE College of the Arts

About the World Dance Alliance Asia Pacific

Our Mission

WDA serves as a primary voice for dance and dancers throughout the world, and encourages the exchange of ideas and the awareness of dance in all its forms.

World Dance Alliance operates via its regional centres with an overarching Global Executive Committee, and a Secretary General, bringing the regions together in matters of policy and global projects. The current regional centres are

- WDA Americas
- WDA Asia Pacific
- WDA Europe (being re-formed)

WDA also has partnerships with other international organisations such as WAAE (World Alliance for Arts Education), International Dance Committee of International Theater Institute ITI /UNESCO (ITI), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), and daCi (dance and the Child international).

Our Goals

- To promote the recognition, development and mutual understanding of all forms of dance.
- To facilitate communication and exchange among dance individuals, institutions and organisations interested in dance.
- To provide a forum for discussion of matters relating to dance.
- To encourage and support the research, education, criticism, creation and performance of dance.
- To liaise, co-ordinate and participate in activities with other dance organisations in the world.

Our Founder

Carl Wolz

Our Background

This independent, non-profit, non-political organisation began as the Asia-Pacific Dance Alliance in Hong Kong in 1988. In 1990, the global body, World Dance Alliance (WDA), was founded at the Hong Kong International Dance Conference. In 1993, the name of the Asia-Pacific Center was changed to WDA Asia Pacific to reflect its relationship to the global body.

WDA Asia Pacific is one of the regional centres that make up WDA. The other is WDA Americas <<https://www.wda-americas.net/>>.

Membership

Open to any organisation or individual interested in furthering the objectives of the society.

Membership benefits

- Biannual newsletter *Channels*
- Annual regional assemblies
- Triennial global assemblies
- Participation in the WDA Asia Pacific Networks
- Discounts to certain member events
- Privileged access to WDA Americas services and activities
- Networking opportunities

Types of membership and annual subscription fees (subject to change)

- Chapter / Organisational US\$ 200
- Associate Organisational (to be advised)
- Associate Individual US\$ 20

To join

Contact your Chapter Head (contact list on back of this issue) for details on how to join the local chapter.

Visit our websites

www.worlddancealliance.org

www.wda-ap.org

www.facebook.com/WorldDanceAlliance/

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