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Dance review: From orchids to rice in a striking, scattered Dancers' Locker



Mark Robles' Bayhana ventures beyond the studio and to the outdoor stage in the fold of Goodman Arts Centre's circular block. PHOTO: BERNIE NG

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Dancers' Locker 2022

Frontier Danceland

Frontier Danceland Studio and Goodman Arts Centre Amphitheatre, July 8

Annually, Frontier Danceland turns its studio into a stage, providing opportunities for its artists to present new choreography at Dancers' Locker.

This year's edition - a triple bill of work by Sammantha Yue, Mark Robles and Chia Poh Hian - brims with striking images of bodies being engulfed by what surrounds them.

Yue's Sunlight Rhythm mirrors the new life of an orchid she has been growing with the renewal of her body after six years spent dancing with the company.

Inside a translucent white cube, she begins to emerge. At first, her arms are like roots burrowing into the ground, then become young shoots climbing skyward.

Darren Lee's lighting veils Yue in her own shadows, and before long, Sunlight Rhythm goes dark with the audience catching mere glimpses of the dancer in full bloom.

Robles ventures beyond the studio, situating Bayhana ("woman" in Bisaya, the main language spoken in southern Philippines) on the outdoor stage in the fold of Goodman Arts Centre's circular block.

The statue of John Baptist De La Salle by Brother Joseph McNally towers over the site like a totem, as a cast of three female dancers put on a display of fortitude in fluidity. Momentary pauses punctuate the swaying of shoulders and hips, but ultimately, the work's folk dance motifs are drowned out by stock contemporary dance vocabulary.

The final piece on the programme, Chia's One In A Million, is a visual spectacle. One dancer sets out to count the number of grains in a cup of rice, standing up to make tally marks for every ten. This cup does not even make a dent in the 350kg of rice grains that Chia reimagines as snow, sand and rain.



One In A Million by Chia Poh Hian at Dancers' Locker by Frontier Danceland. PHOTO: BERNIE NG

The dancers exude a playful despair as they cavort through the grains, their feet making imprints on the topographic sculptures of rice. In a particularly poetic conclusion, dancers Yue, Robles and Tan Xin Yen take turns to rise and fall, their bodies shaping the rice as much as one another's.

In her solo segment, Chia grasps at the grains, then watches helplessly as they stream between her fingers. That is what much of *One In A Million* - and, for that matter, most of *Dancers' Locker* - feels like: a profusion of stunning, wildly varied imagery that does not transcend its visual impact.
