

# THE STRAITS TIMES

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## Dance with a political edge



Shahar Biniamini's Flat has minute gestures spliced with expansive shifts through space in exciting fashion. PHOTO: TAN NGIAP HENG

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### REVIEW / DANCE

#### SIDES 2016

Frontier Danceland

Sota Studio Theatre

Last Friday

It is perhaps a thought that does not cross one's mind frequently when watching a dance performance, but rarely has a dance show sounded as good as Frontier Danceland's latest edition of Sides, its mid-year showcase of choreography by artists- in-residence with the company.

The performance features an almost madcap soundtrack that is befitting of the absurd, disquieting and mostly memorable performance.

As with Frontier Danceland's work in recent years, the pieces in this triple bill by Shahar Biniamini, Lee Mun Wai and Sita Ostheimer comprise a range of short vignettes interjected with swift blackouts. Such choreographic structures allow the audience to fill in the gaps with their imagination, but they also run the risk of incoherence.

Biniamini's Flat falls into this trap. It begins strikingly with Adrian Skjoldborg, clothed in a sheer bodysuit with polka-dots, sculpting his body into odd poses that are seemingly impossible for his long, slender physique. This physical vocabulary is based on the Gaga movement technique, which emphasises sensation over form and it sees the Israeli choreographer splicing minute gestures with expansive shifts through space in exciting fashion.

But the countless unpredictable modulations soon grow tiresome because the tableaux do not coalesce into a larger whole and the work gradually flattens out, perhaps as Biniamini intended.

Singaporean independent artist Lee portrays flattening of a very different nature in his socio-politically inspired piece Innocent Until Proven Guilty (2), which is set to the well-known revolutionary anthem, Do You Hear The People Sing from the musical Les Misérables.

The work speaks of authorities squashing differing opinions and insisting on the ways of old, conveyed, for example, by dancer Joy Wang, who repeats the same languorous extensions and undulations, regardless of what unfolds around her.

The song is first played live by Hwa Wei-An on a guitar and then hummed. His lips are pursed together and his entire body is tight with the tension of resisting imaginary powers that be as he staggers backwards.

Lee then cleverly turns the tables with a chorus that projects an air of authority, singing the melody in a mocking tone. As the song is sung, Wang reappears in one fluorescent dress after another, arms outstretched in haughty dominion over the stage until the other performers carry her off stage. Power to the people, you say?

The closing piece, Mangata, answers that question with a roaring yes.

German choreographer Ostheimer creates very much in the folk-rock mould of the acclaimed Israeli choreographer Hofesh Shechter, with whom she has worked with for a number of years. Shechter often addresses subjects that are notionally political and Mangata, when viewed after Innocent Until Proven Guilty (2), appears to do the same.

To a thumping bass by Adrien Casalis, the dancers are powered by raw energy, sinking into deep lunges under the weight of oppression. The ensemble dances in unison until the illusion of order boils over and its individuals erupt, flinging their limbs in wild angst.

Ostheimer's style is familiar to the audience in Singapore, who have seen these jaunty flinches and predatory lopes in previous stagings of Shechter's superlative work here. Yet, it is nonetheless thrilling to see Frontier Danceland surge through the hard-hitting physicality.

Dance, as in politics, cannot be taken at face value and the sociopolitical themes surfaced, intentionally or otherwise, through Sides 2016 are nudging dance in Singapore to wade into new waters.