

# ★★★★☆ Review: Dancers' Locker 2022 by Frontier Danceland



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(<https://bakchormeeboy.files.wordpress.com/2022/06/screenshot-2022-06-19-at-2.35.10-pm.png>)

*New edition of Dancers' Locker explores nature, culture, and features innovative use of space.*

In the wake of the pandemic, local dance company Frontier Danceland has come through with a slew of new skillsets, from performing onscreen to further developing their technique and poise. Now, returning to fully-live performances, they've taken their experiences from the pandemic and transmuted it into new works for Dancers' Locker 2022. Presenting works by Company Artists,

Sammantha Yue, Mark Robles and Chia Poh Hian, *Dancers' Locker* 2022 not only featured diverse choreographies capturing their creators' varied philosophies and musings, but also made full use of Goodman Arts Centre's spaces for exploring such ideas.



The performance began at the Goodman Arts Centre Black Box, where Sammantha Yue presented her work *Sunlight Rhythm*. Reflecting on the process of plant care and growth, Sammantha's little 'garden' allows for audience members to sit wherever they want, allowing us to consume and experience the performance in our own personal way. An image of a plant is projected onto a silkscreen, while the soothing soundscape evokes a peaceful afternoon lounging in the garden.





*Sunlight Rhythm* plays with light and illusion, and when the performance begins, we see an image of Sammantha onscreen, identical to her outfit in real life, where she dons a leafy mask with floral adornments. The onscreen Sammantha mimics the real life Sammantha's movements, and creates a surreal effect, like we're given two perceptions and viewpoints to interpret. Blood stains are visible on her top, and seem to reflect the painstaking efforts taken towards caring for her plants.





In presenting her as both plant and plant owner, we consider ideas of growth and life, both literally and figuratively. The initial serenity of the performance quickly turns dark when, rooted to a pot, the captive plant seems to be suffering by being unable to move, or even escape her fate. Inspired by traditional wayang kulit, Sammantha's shadow is now cast onscreen, and we can see all sides of the plant. We realise that we can never really tell how effective we are at plant care until it's too late, as the music fades and the lights go down on, and the grim reality sets in that this plant is not at all happy.





Moving to the Goodman Arts Centre Amphitheatre outdoors, Mark Robles presents *Bayhana* (“woman” in Bisaya), where Robles presents his own personal history, folk dance and elements of Philippines mythology through movement. Walking about the space and set constructed by Allister Towndrow, Annie Vigier and Franck Apertet, music fills the air, and we see dancers Sammantha Yue, Tan Xin Yen, and Chia Poh Hian dressed in ‘ceremonial robes’ as they dance to the atmospheric music, filled with chants.





Their flowing movements feel like a ritual, as they swirl their long black skirts, their bodies and gestures precise. These women are elegant, yet also showcase poise and strength. Moving the platform across the 'ocean', we think of patterns of migration and movement and travelling in the course of history. Heavy drumbeats now feature into the soundscape, and we see two warriors making eye contact with each other. The two seem to be co-operating, working as fast as the other to efficiently get the job done, understanding each other completely.





As operatic voices come in on the soundscape, there is the sense of spiritual healing and redemption. Emerging from the jungles, we reach the beach, and we imagine the dancers having arrived at Cebu, the breeze bringing things From the jungles, we are not at the beach. At Cebu, with the wind whirling, their hard work paying off as they dance with the sunset.





In the final work of the evening, Chia Poh Hian presents her work *One In A Million*, in collaboration with performers Mark Robles, Sammantha Yue, Stanley Ian Cuneta, and Tan Xin Yen. In the work, Chia considers the juxtaposition between abundance and scarcity, as presented through movement and 350kg of rice onstage. The dancers arrive and begin scooping rice into a massive octagonal bunker. On the other side, another dancer is painstakingly counting every grain of rice, bunching them in groups of 5, and recording down the number onto a chalkboard.





As the dancers enter the rice bunker, they begin to carelessly spread the grains all over, even spilling over into the audience area. One dancer attempts to spread her body across the bunker, looking like Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, and even trying to bury herself underneath. As she moves. The familiar sounds and scent of rice fills the auditorium. The more she tries to immerse herself in the rice, the more disgusted we feel at the pure greed she displays, gleefully 'wasting' it by flinging it around without a care in the world, in stark contrast to the other dancer cherishing every grain on the other side.





As we listen to the sounds of rice being sieved, the dancers begin trying to collect the rice, visibly struggling from the effort. We hear every grain as they're collected in the vessels, and it feels like the dancers are paying homage to the rice fields and the land where rice was cultivated. Each grain embraced, they look at it with love and gratitude, thankful for what they have, no matter how little. The sound of the rice is almost therapeutic, and as the rice is gathered once again, one begins to fear the cycle repeats itself, and the gap between the rice-rich and rice-poor will never close.

Through the works of Dancers' Locker 2022, Frontier Danceland has once again utilised this platform to address a myriad of issues, from the personal to the global, each work showcasing innovation in presentation and well-thought out choreographies and music that work together to evoke emotions and make audiences care about the subjects covered. Peering into the minds of these company dancers, we are moved by their creative process and presentations, and the power of dance.

**Photo Credit: Justin Koh**

*Dancers' Locker 2022 ran from 7th to 9th July 2022 at Goodman Arts Centre Amphitheatre and Frontier Danceland Studio.*

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