



NORHAIZAD ADAM

GOOD MOVE

Dancer/choreographer Norhaizad Adam fuses traditional Malay dance with contemporary moves to break down perceptions. BY JOEL TAN

FOR NORHAIZAD ADAM, DANCE IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE WITH IDEOLOGY AS WELL AS THE JOYS AND LIMITATIONS OF TRADITION. Case in point, the recently staged *Belon*.

In it, dancers, moving in a style both contemporary and recognisably rooted in traditional Malay dance, explored ideas of entrapment, repression and the burden of tradition. Throughout, they remained attached to ethereal, oversized balloons, a theatrical metaphor for vulnerable ideas and beliefs, easily destroyed in a hostile environment.

This kind of edgy, deeply poetic contemporary dance is the backbone of Norhaizad's work. The 29-year-old emerging talent is the artistic director/choreographer of new dance company, P7:ISMA (pronounced Prisma), which presented the abstract and visually striking *Belon*.

Norhaizad's beginnings in dance lie with a hip-hop dance crew back in secondary school. But it was his first encounter with traditional Malay dance that sparked something in him.

"Back then, I didn't know anything about Malay dance. Only that they were performed on TV shows. And that the dances could be quite abstract," he recalls.

The dance company that caught his attention was the Azpirasi Dance Group, which specialises in contemporary Malay dance.

On a whim, Norhaizad joined the group and instantly fell hard for the form. He gained his early dance training there, and Malay

Norhaizad explains, noting that many traditional Malay dance groups inherit a burden to educate audiences on Malay culture and tradition.

"It got kind of frustrating for me, because when I choreograph, I introduce ideas that can be quite controversial. Some people think it ruins tradition. But for me, it's about self-expression." So while Norhaizad still actively works with Azpirasi, he now runs his own company, P7:ISMA, which he started with his partner, also a dancer. For Norhaizad, it's a platform to create a new dance language, and to use dance as a way to interrogate the world without the pressures of working within tradition.

"Many people are confused about whether we are a contemporary or traditional company. I don't care. My body and practice are grounded in Malay dance, so I use that as my medium. But my work is about whatever I've been through that inspires me, and how my body relates to that."

Up next for Norhaizad is a piece that draws on his time as a barista. "Right now, I'm doing research on the coffee industry and exploitation," he says. "I like to take simple things, and find the hidden complex messages. In life, we are forced into a way of seeing, but I'm interested in looking behind that mask of comfort. And there's always something wrong going on." **A**

dance became his primary dance vocabulary, even as he continued to explore other dance forms. Over the years however, he found himself longing for more. "Azpirasi is quite contemporary, but it still very strictly conforms to the traditional form and philosophy. Whatever we do, we still have to base the work on Malay tradition,"

