

<http://www.criticaldance.org/2014/11/02/scene-in-singapore-october-2014/> Stephanie Burridge

Flamenco Sin Fronteras (FSF) is unique in Singapore. The flamenco based company is led by internationally renowned maestro of the art, Antonio Vargas, and dancer/choreographer Daphne Huang. It explores the intersection of flamenco and Asian dance forms keeping to the tradition of the Spanish form where the integration of dance, music, hand clapping and story are intertwined. The company stays close to its flamenco roots while delving into the stylistic elements of contemporary dance and Asian narratives. It has carved a niche in Singapore and is rapidly gaining ground as a company of quality and creativity exploring new aesthetics, crossing boundaries and the expectations of flamenco. The new multi-disciplinary choreography, “Breaking Silence” embodies this endeavour through the quintessential ferocious foot stamping and hand clapping of flamenco combined with drama and contemporary dance. Directed by Antonio Vargas and made in collaboration with the Singapore Association of Mental Health (SAMH) it incorporated interview material gleaned from an 8 week gestation process with company dancers and SAMH patients.

Identifying four types of mental illness, (schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder, bi-polar and depression), the dance theatre choreography explored these through the development of characters and shadowy ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ selves. The production featured dancers from Flamenco Sin Fronteras, contemporary dancers Bernice Lee, Kai Eng Er, Jared Koh and Butoh dancer Syv Bruzeau, with original musical composition by Yong Kai Lin and Antonio Vargas in collaboration with flamenco guitarist Jorge Padilla.

FSF has been extremely innovative in its approach to the topic through the choice of performers who come from a variety of movement backgrounds, the incorporation of sensitive, often taboo material for the narrative and the commissioning of a composer. This combination resulted in a dynamism that brought the message across in a truthful but imaginative way. As the characters evolved and struggled with their illness, the choreography captured a glimpse of their lives through a neutral stance that avoided the melodramatic, or overplaying of scenes. While one episode unfolded, the other performers remained on the perimeter like caretakers of those exposing themselves to the audience – it was an extremely intimate and absorbing format well supported by a set made of cubes that could be pushed around to suggest safe havens or focal points for the action. A plus for the group is that FSF director and dancer Daphne Huang Vargas is a medical doctor and well able to work in this increasing popular field of artists working with people with special

needs. This sensitivity comes through in the performance. Another important factor was the unifying thread of the music throughout composed by Kailin Yong which not only created an atmosphere but underpinned the narrative/characters and provided dance cues through changes in rhythms and melodies. The music did much to maintain continuity and ‘glue’ the disparate sections together. Although quite raw in parts, “Breaking Silence” is a powerful work that opens up the sensitive subject matter with subtlety and compassion.