

FREE

RAW Moves

3 – 5 July 2014, Goodman Arts Centre Black Box

Production information

FREE is a new dance work from RAW Moves, a company that promotes inter-disciplinary collaborations and dance in the Singapore community. Set up in 2011 and led by Artistic Director Ricky Sim, the company merges dance with different art forms, using artistic innovation and research.

Under this year's Research & Development Platform, Sim focused on making a movement research work based on the one-word theme 'free'. His explorations questioned the bridging of one's own decisions with representations of free will, whilst also inquiring into the act of displaying and play. Sim explored these with his most personal language – through dance and with his company of dancers - intending to demonstrate the passion and energy involved in decision-making.

Featuring eleven (11) dancers, whose contribution was warmly acknowledged by director and choreographer Ricky Sim, the work included original music composed by Ho Wen Yang, with lighting by Lee Kong-Shen.

(Synopsis and Theme)

FREE – the ability to act freely, not limited or controlled, cost nothing, not busy, not attached, self-ruling, open and honest...

We all have an identity – one that may perhaps be fabricated through various contributions, practices, understandings, beliefs and know-hows. But, are we familiar with the intricacy of such data?

An allegorical theme provides a spring to question deeper, its real existence, whilst exploring the creative process with the performers on the on the significance of 'free'.

CAST

Company Dancer	.....	Germaine Cheng
Company Dancer	.....	Matthew Goh
Company Dancer	.....	Kong Wei Jie
Company Dancer	.....	Lai Weivien
Company Dancer	.....	Neo Hong Chin
Company Dancer	.....	Heather Ou
Project Dancer	.....	Ardella Bang
Project Dancer	.....	Melyn Chow
Project Dancer	.....	Abigail Huan
Project Dancer	.....	Michele Loke
Project Dancer	.....	Melissa Quek
Project Dancer	.....	Lian Sutton
Intern Dancer	.....	Joanna Oh

PRODUCTION

Artistic Director/ Choreographer	.....	Ricky Sim
Music Composer	.....	Ho Wen Yang
Lighting Designer	.....	Lee Kong-Shen
Production Manager	.....	Chiew Peishan

Stage Manager	.....	Keira Lee
Technical Manager	.....	Lee Kong-Shen
Ticketing/ Front-of-House Manager	.....	Randy Lee
Front-of-House Crew	.....	Sheena Mak
Graphic Designer	.....	Rachel Chong
Publicity Team	.....	Germaine Cheng, Matthew Goh, Joanna Oh, Heather Ou
Finance Manager	.....	Sim Siew Yee

Photos of Cast and Production (appearing in the documentary photographs)





Ho Wen Yang



Abigail Huan



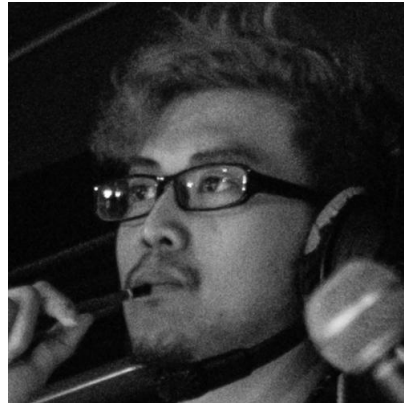
Kong Wei Jie



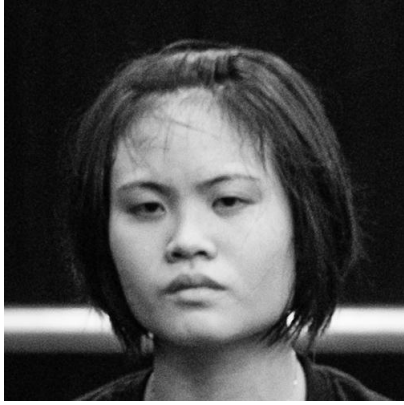
Lai Weivien



Keira Lee



Lee Kong-Shen



Michele Loke



Neo Hong Chin



Joanna Oh



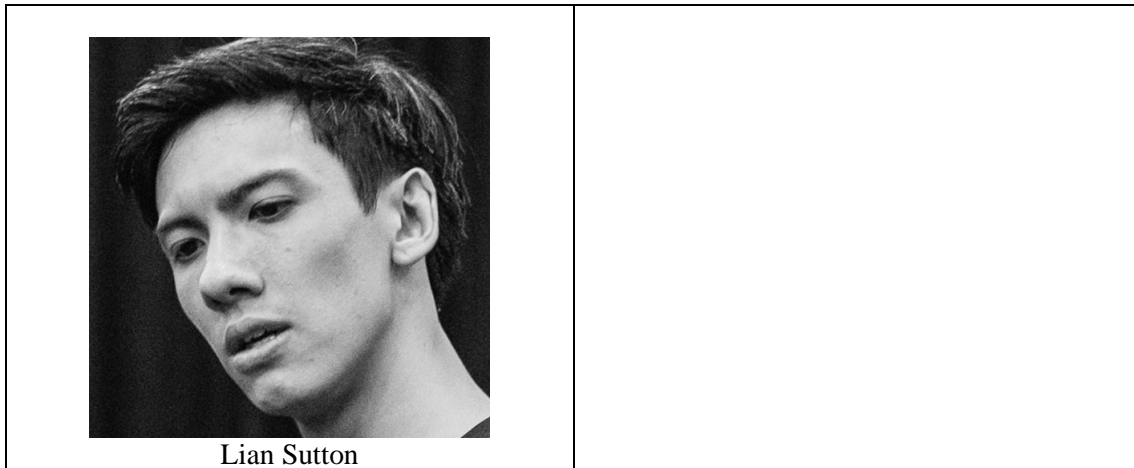
Heather Ou



Melissa Quek



Ricky Sim



PROCESS NOTES

Statements from *FREE*'s programme:

I sometimes experience in my life, a duality, between who I am and the one I aim to be. There is almost an engineered gap between these embodiments of myself. Hence, doubting at times, on the free will or freedom in fulfilling one's level of realization based on individual choices.

Can free will be a contradiction in conditions, because no will is entirely free? (It may be regulated by circumstances over which it has no control and to which one may be subordinated) Or, is free will stipulated by external elements and by the state of our own evolution, freedom... within a restricted range?

My interest throughout the investigation is on the course of change, when circumstances happen during rehearsal while viewed from different perspectives – the performer and the audience.

Ricky Sim

RAW Moves' *FREE*, by Dr. Caren Carino

Process (Creation):

Ricky Sim, Artistic Director of RAW Moves and choreographer of *FREE* began with a personal investigation. His research-based process commenced with endeavouring to understand the concept of being 'free'. Sim began with simultaneously reading and reflecting on the definition of 'free'. This eventually led to his physical research – beginning on his own body, he explored the notion of being released from habit, routine and ritual. He shares in the programme booklet of *FREE*:

FREE [fre] the ability to act freely, not limited or controlled, cost noting, not busy, not attached, self-ruling, open and honest...

An allegorical theme that provides a spring to question deeper, its real existence for me, whilst exploring the creative process with the performers on the significance of 'free'.

I sometimes experience in my life, a duality, between who I am and the one I aim to be. There is almost an engineered gap between these embodiments of myself. Hence, doubting at times, on the free will or freedom in fulfilling one's level of realization based on individual choices.

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While continuing to research, Sim auditioned for project dancers to augment his stable of company dancers for the project. Eventually Sim used a qualitative research method with the dancers whose occupations ranged from part-time dance teacher, nurse, solar engineer, doctor's administrative assistant, dance programme leader, diploma graduate (dance and theatre), national serviceman, mother and unemployed. He asked the dancers to reflect on what being 'free' meant to them by writing a 'letter'. While their individual stories revealed differences based on their unique experiences and personal perception of their environment, the dancers generally had something in common – they were all wanting a 'voice' and a 'choice'.

Following a one-to-one talk with most of the dancers¹, Sim then employed structured movement improvisation, a creative approach to unleashing movement possibilities within a given framework. Sim calls this physical exploration process for *FREE* that transpired over three months, 'movement research'. Sim assigned a movement exploration task to each dancer, based on their definition of being 'free' or the associated concepts of 'freedom' and 'free will'. Each dancer was encouraged to push their own boundaries to uncover both emotional and physical responses.

The dancers' thoughts and movement exploration assignments by Sim included the following. (Each dancer is represented by an alphabet to protect their identity).

- a) Thought: There is no such thing as freedom. It is a preconceived idea. No one is free – we are all guided by rules and regulations.
Exploration: Define an imaginary grid, i.e. draw the parameters and pathways) then break up the grid.
- b) Thought: Freedom is 'heaven and earth' - an infinity.
Exploration: Combine the sky world and ocean world.
- c) Thought: Freedom means to have no obstruction.
Exploration: Move from one spot to another with no obstructions and negotiating obstructions if the situation occurs.
- d) Thought: Being confident, self-assured and organised allows one to be free and take chances.
Exploration: Organise and reorganise. Discover obstacles along the way.

¹ A few dancers were not involved in Sim's research-based practice since they joined later in the process during the rehearsal stage.

- e) Thought: Freedom means finding an emotional balance in a life with limitations.
Exploration: Without the use of arms or legs, express a range of emotions towards finding an emotional balance. Use sounds to depict emotions.
- f) Thought: Being free is feeling the wind. (This dancer was inspired by roller coaster ride)
Exploration: Allow the body to respond to the wind produced by a standing electric fan.
- g) Thought: Free means to release.
Exploration: Let go, relax, and float.
- h) Thought: Freedom is about self-control.
Exploration: Imagine a rope - release and pull.
- i) Thought: Freedom means hope.
Exploration: Recall moments of false hope.
- j) Thought: Freedom is only realised when it is gone or missing.
Exploration: Use gestures or function-based movement to describe 'missing'.

Together with Sim, the dancers developed movement phrases based on their movement investigations. Besides solos, Sim formed small groups and ensembles based on the dancers similarities in exploration, e.g. pathways, balancing, environmental and etc.

Eventually, Sim developed a choreographic structure which included some set movement phrases as well as structured improvisation moments.

1. Walk in a circle
Movement exploration by dancer (c) developed into an entrance and exit sequence.
2. Take off shoes
Remove shoes and place them in a pile.
3. Form a circle
Interlock arms and lean out - counter balance and all talk simultaneously about what it means to be 'free'.

4. Collapse and form three lines in a triangular formation
One dancer from each of the 3 lines walks to the centre and poses in one of 3 set individual poses that each created to represent freedom. Repeat 3 times and from the fourth time stories develop through interaction.
5. Marching
Break out of order and call out numbers randomly.
6. Put on shoes, form a line then dance in ensemble
7. 'Soccer story'
Dancer (i) highlighted.
8. 'Rope dance'
Dancer (h) highlighted.
9. 'I want to break free'
Focus on dancer (i) who is physically crowded while singing.
10. 'Fan dance'
Dancer (f) highlighted.
11. 'Body stickers'
Each dancer sticks 'price tags' somewhere on their body.
12. Taped to the Wall
The dancer with the most stickers is taped to the wall.

Practice (Rehearsals and Classes):

In April 2014, rehearsals were typically three times per week. During these rehearsals, the dancers shared their stories and explored ideas. In May 2014 rehearsals increased to four times per week. Sim began putting ideas together – finding a common thread between the individual movement stories. In June 2014, rehearsals intensified to five times per week. During this final rehearsal period, sections of the piece were more or less finalised.

Rehearsals, particularly in the later stage, focused on the refinement of performance execution, both movement and voice, that was more about artistic/aesthetic concerns (e.g. Sim instructing 'too much placement'; 'careful that you are not belting' (referring to use of a dancer's voice); 'show committed you are') rather than technical matters. Sim's rehearsal process included demonstration, explanation, a combination of demonstration and explanation as well as dialoguing between himself and the dancers. Sometimes *FREE* was rehearsed from beginning to end without a break and at other times in a stop and start manner, i.e. stopping to clarify or correct movement or structure. However, at times

rehearsals were not necessarily a linear process. Rather, particular sections were worked on. At other times individual dancers were corrected on their execution. The process was sometimes with recorded sound and at other times without sound or counted verbally by Sim.

A class for the dancers were sometimes conducted by Sim before each rehearsal. However, the class was not focused on dance technique. Instead, it was more about improvisation that focused on a personal search; freeing up the body; moving in more neutral and organic way; prepare mind; and getting in touch with oneself without the restriction of technical execution. Classes were eventually reduced, leaving the dancers responsible for their own preparation before rehearsals. However, during production week, Sim resumed classes.

Researcher: Dr Caren Carino, 23 August 2014

General Editor: Aubrey Mellor, 06 January 2015