

It was 9 o'clock, Monday morning. The metropolis was just starting to gain momentum from the lackadaisical week most city-weary souls spent out of town. But there I was trying to make sense of the strange turns in the conversation I had clumsily started with "So what do you think of dance in the Philippines. Has it changed much since the last time you were here?" thinking it has been a decade since he was last home, not knowing he was here the day Chavit Singson made that historic testimony that marked the end of a presidency.

Enrico Labayan didn't seem to mind such a "typical" question, however. He turns pensive and says quite a mouthful in between sips of brewed coffee, "In my younger days I would have answered differently but not that I'm older I'd say it has changed. Change is always good, whether good or bad. What's dangerous is being stagnant. At least with the good you can learn, with the bad you can learn. (Some of them) are doing a lot, with Myra (Beltran) having these strong, independent ideas. The institution-aimed companies, of course, have their own thing, which is more the assembly line type...But

people are ready (for new ideas), it's just that they're being fed with what is usual. Dancemakers

have to know and be brave enough to present new things without fear that people won't understand. The audience will understand because they will experience. Experience-to-experience is the quickest form of communication between humans."

Before I knew it, the preternaturally youthful-looking ballet master, dancer and choreographer who doesn't make a big deal of his being "already in his golden years" was letting me in on the creative process that has enabled him to offer nourishment to a world starved for new, fresh expression. He's adamant: "First you need to have something to say because steps put together is not choreography; beautiful movement is not choreography. You need substance, a *raison d'être*. And you have to do it with a noble intention." He calls it the trinity within which man's duality must work: Substance, noble intention, honesty found in the heart, mind and spirit.

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DEFINING, DEFYING

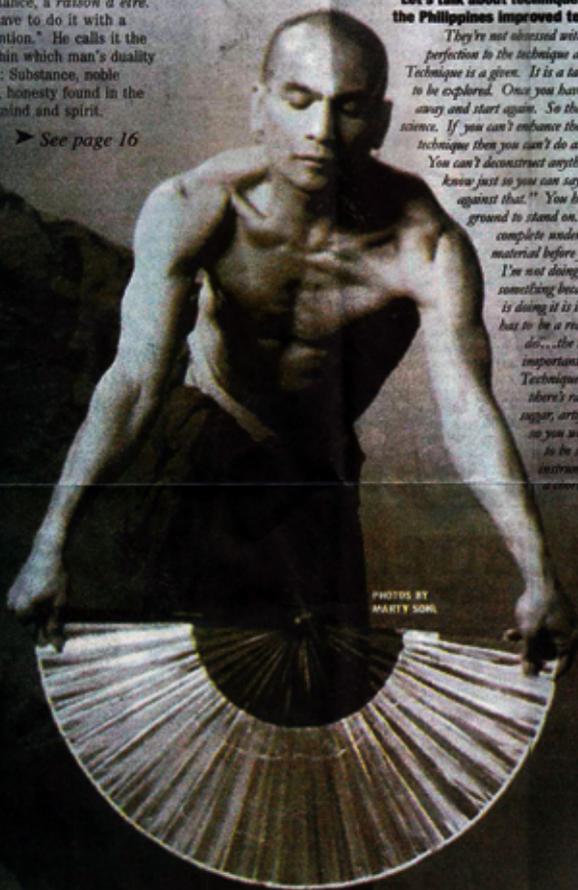


DANCE

By Ditas P. Bermudez

Let's talk about technique. Has dance in the Philippines improved technique-wise?

They're not obsessed with the closest to perfection to the technique as they can get. Technique is a given. It is a talent. But it needs to be explored. Once you have it, you throw it away and start again. So that technique is a science. If you can't embrace the science of that set technique then you can't do anything about it. You can't deconstruct anything that you don't know just so you can say "I'm trying to be against that." You have to have a solid ground to stand on. You have to have complete understanding of the material before you can say, "No, I'm not doing that..." Doing something because everybody else is doing it is indulgence...there has to be a reason for things you do...the why are more important than the how. Technique is like sugar—there's raw sugar, refined sugar, artificial sweetener—so you want that technique to be such a first-hand instrument so you become



PHOTOS BY MARTY SOMI

LIFE

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