

# TRUTH THROUGH DANCE

by ROMMIE ASI RAMOS

**"I** SEE a performance as a shared experience, not as mere entertainment. There is always a way of performing, where you put on a show and entertain an audience. I was always against that although I like the idea of ballet. My idea was to create your own experience, to have it real and embodied in your truth, and have people look in your world — as voyeurs, so to speak — not to dazzle or manipulate them, but to get as close to your truth as you can."

At 37, choreographer, dancer and teacher Enrico Labayen has come to terms with his art. He now sees it as a means of sharing and embodying truth.

"I revolt against decorative dance where aesthetics comes first, where scenery and costumes are the foundation against a dance image. My dances are abstract, ripped bare, yes, but pure dance which is nothing but movement. Geometric lines and purified designs take shape before your very eyes, for here each step has its own raison d'être in a whole and unity is always a collection of points, in the same way the dancer speaks unpretentiously of the relationship with another. These are the voices of a new body dancing, the soul at work. 'The human body is the most beautiful thing for me. Neither does illness or shortness bother me nor I put too much attention on proportion. Each body has its own color at one can play with,' says Labayen who has performed a wide range of choreography with companies like American Ballet Theater, Lucas Hoving, Joanna Haigood, Howard Villeda, Alvin Ailey, Melissa Hayden, Alonzo King, Andre Eglevsky and George Balanchine."

Labayen, who hails from Baguio, trained on a full scholarship at the American Ballet Theatre School, Harkness Ballet, American Ballet Center, American Ballet

Center and the School of American Ballet.

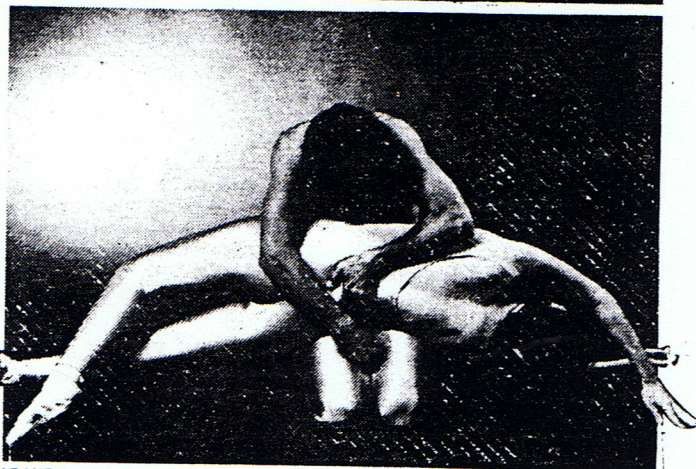
He was a Beaux Arts Society of New York awardee for dance in 1982. Six years later the California Artist Series commissioned him to choreograph a pas de deux.

In Manila, he was guest ballet master for Ballet Philippines and in the latter part of 1990 premiered his *Hommage* and *Mindstorm* for the company's 21st gala.

Labayen admits to being very physical in choreographing. "I don't just sit, I show. Talk is cheap. If the students don't get the idea immediately, I repeat. I listen to the highest intent of the composer as much as possible and forget about the metric breakdown. One can count from 1 to 8 to 1,000 but that's pure mechanics. I want the dancers to be one with the music, not in it."

Mechanics, craft, technique and intelligence can get in the way of the creative process, he explains. "They all take you to a certain point, but they also leave you there. I am obsessed with developing artistic intuition, a reference from another kind of knowledge, not something derivative. I'd like to have work that anyone can see, the way they see a sunset or another human being and recognize themselves or relate to what's taking place."

From April 11 to 14 at the Cultural Center of the Philippines' Tanghalang Aurelio Tolentino,



LABAYEN goes physical (with Sofia Zobel in bottom photo): The human body is the most beautiful thing.

Labayen will seek to ignite the development of a Filipino art form through *The Lab., Projekt*, a collaboration of dance and other disciplines of art such as theater, music, performance art, visual installations and photography.

The *Lab., Projekt* will be a distillation of classical ballet and ethnic and modern dance and will use the multi-gravitational technique which Labayen defines as an exploration of space (between ceiling and floor) and manipulation of time, ei-

ther to slow down or speed up time or suspend it to infinity.

New Age Filipino music (synthesized and natural sounds) and props such as rope, scaffolding, ladders, trapeze, bamboo and other indigenous materials will complement the choreography.

Joining Labayen in the project are visual designer Santiago Bose, composer Shant Verdun, violinist Gilopez Kabayao as musical arranger, and Corazon Pineda and Ballet Philippines II.