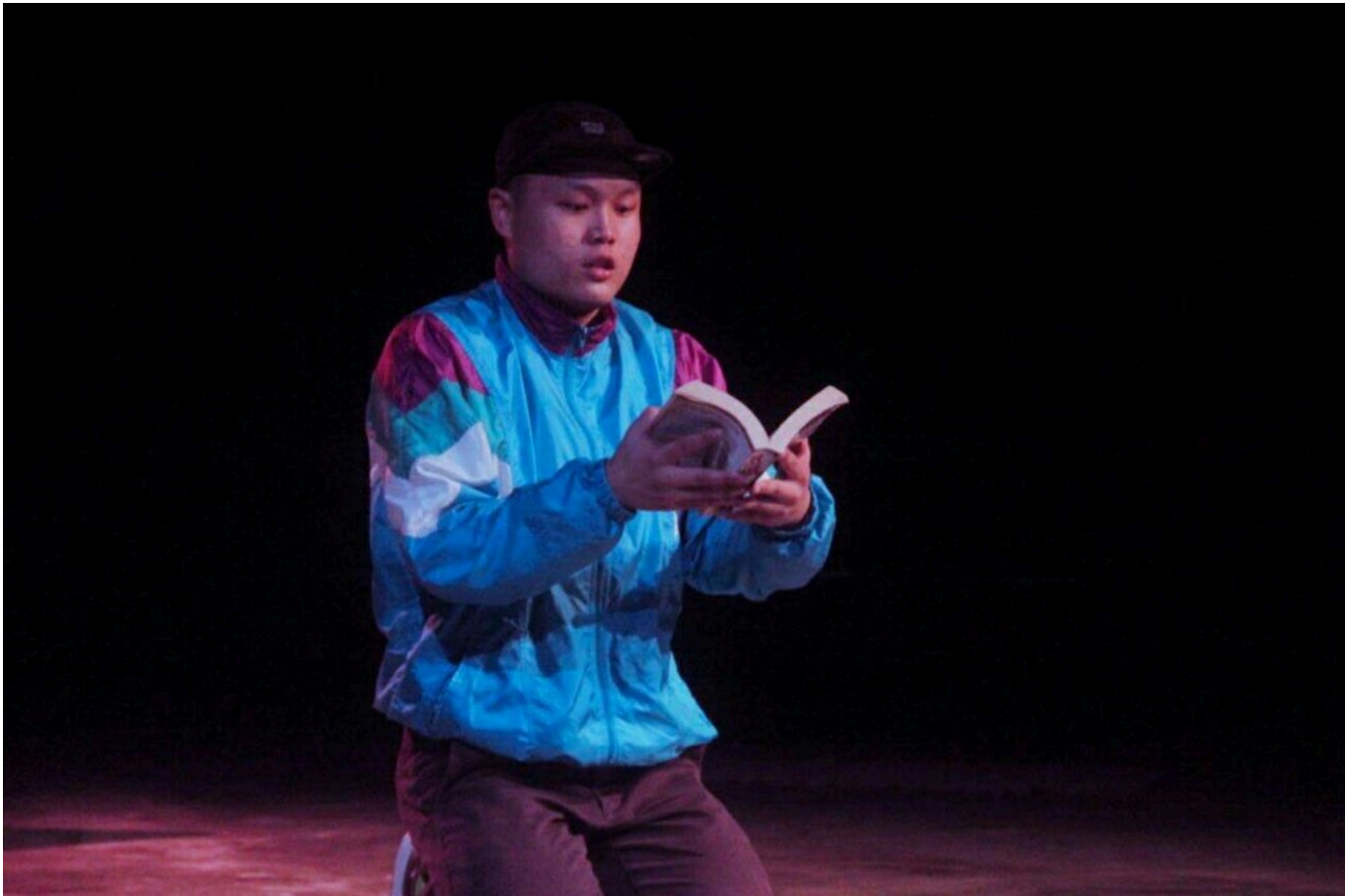


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Bhumi Collective's DWTB: Power in its Honesty and Movement

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Bhumi Collective's Singapore debut of ['dead was the body till I taught it how to move](https://popspoken.com/arts/2018/07/dead-was-the-body-till-i-taught-it-how-to-move) (DWTB) is an earnest and personal performance performed by b-boy and actor **Dominic Nah (Dom)** and directed by **Adeeb Fazah**. Performed within an intimate in-the-round staging at **Aliwal Arts Centre**, DWTB holds audiences captive through a stirring narrative that writer **Edward Eng** has consolidated and cleverly inter-spliced with b-boy and dramaturg **Michael Ng's** movement and dance direction. Heavily emotional but always truthfully vulnerable, the show reminds us of the power of honest storytelling, and how some stories do not simply pass or get lost in our personal histories, but are ones that we must continue to live with and confront daily.

DWTB is based largely on Dom's struggle with a tumultuous journey trying to comprehend the acts and death of his late father while simultaneously pursuing his passion for breakdancing via a pilgrimage to the Bronx. The play itself is a gripping pilgrimage of a wounded heart healing, and what it means to cope. It is a brave confrontation about the parts of our lives we are ashamed of that still haunt us – one that requires a great deal of strength to confront the inherent darkness within that comes from having wronged and having been wronged.



The Actor and B-boy

Dom easily impresses from the get-go with smooth moves on the stage-cum-dancefloor under Michael Ng's direction. Movement-wise, this is a treat for both dancers and non-dancers alike. Transiting from narrative monologue to dance sequences – both of which delivered at varying levels of emotional intensity – Dom displays both passion and proficiency at the art of breaking. In one segment of monologue, he tells the audience about the history of breaking with the likeness of a child's youthful excitement, awakening the very passions we have loved and lost so long ago. As this narrative is intensely personal, Dom lays bare not just his passion but lays down his pride and shows us how beautiful vulnerability can be in the face of struggle.

"It is a way for me to get (these issues) all out in the open and neutralise it by laying it all out there," Dom says, "I'm just trying to make a good thing come out of the bad. In the grand scheme of things, it is also getting through my own (story) so I can be in service of other stories after."



The Direction

"Laying it all out in the open" was made possible by the nurturing support of Adeeb Fazah's direction, reminding us how beautiful collaboration in theatre-making can be.

"I hope that audiences would be able to not just hear but witness Dom telling his story through movement — the very movement that helped him through the toughest of times, as well as the discovery and experience of the (hip hop) culture and the universe that makes b-boying," Adeeb says, "and that breaking is a legitimate, soul-enriching and life-affirming dance form, and something like this can be a platform and a superpower for someone who might grapple with the complexities and cruelties of life."



The Storytelling

The play's structure takes after a song (think 1h remixes of your favourite song on youtube you find yourself studying or doing work to): the narrative is the music, the dance comes at several designated music breaks, and each chorus is accompanied by a haunting flashback to what Dom recalls of his past — childhood moments spent with his father. For playwright Edward Eng, what started out as a work of fiction with biographical elements turned into the unravelling of a personal narrative during the conceptualisation process that required a shift in focus to tell Dom's story as compellingly as possible.

"At heart, the writing was an experiment with bringing a kopitiam chat to life," Edward says, "as opposed to a biography written months before an audience actually receives it. The kopitiam chat should be of the present and ongoing in order to bring a new sense of live-ness."

Indeed, the most compelling thing about DWTB is its sense of continuation — that precisely because of the autobiographical nature of this play, there is nothing but truth in the storytelling, and what Dom brings to the stage is inevitably what he must and is still learning to live with in reality every day.



The Key Is In The Moving

A poignant moment in the play is the epilogue — a fast and furious dance battle resembling a b-boy dance-off where two breakers stand on either side facing each other. This breaking segment is longer than the others within the play, and there is something considerably different about it that is both disconcerting and that gives a note of finality — but not necessarily closure, to the play.

"Dom always said he wanted to do this piece because he wanted to bury his father and finally move on," movement director Michael Ng says, "he was never able to do that with words. So this one's a (breakdance) battle, and it allows for a kind of aggression within a liminal space – that feeling of wanting to eat the opponent alive just within that moment. Breaking holds space for that."

But what audiences see is not a duel – we see only Dom breaking in that space facing demons only he can see in the best way he knows how. Perhaps then, it is true that we only really lose someone when they are gone. Death takes away, and what keeps them alive to us are the images and memories of them that we keep in our minds. In that final battle, we see Dom facing his not merely his father anymore, but his past, his memories, and ultimately, himself.

Bhumi Collective's 'dead was the body till I taught it how to move' runs at Aliwal Arts Centre until this Saturday, 14th July. Get tickets [here < https://www.bhumicollective.com/deadwasthebody>](https://www.bhumicollective.com/deadwasthebody).

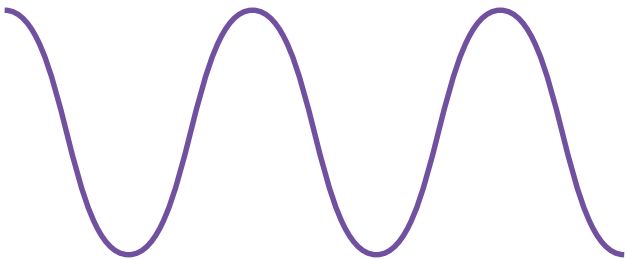
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