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Going Malaysian

Witness everyday Malaysian life as told through dance

By **FAIZAL NOR IZHAM**
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WHAT does it truly mean to be Malaysian? Maybe dance can teach us just that.

Lakshman Balakrishnan, 30, grew up watching Tamil films and doing Michael Jackson impersonations. Today, the resident choreographer at the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLpac) is part of KIV's fourth annual dance series, with the theme, *Dancing the Malaysian*, in conjunction with Malaysia's 56th Independence Day.

KIV began in 2010 as a platform for contemporary choreographers and dancers to explore their creativity and experiment with new ideas and perspectives.

But unlike previous years, KIV 4 presents a microscopic look at Malaysian culture, quirks and daily routines by translating them into dance form.

"Contemporary dance is usually very abstract, and so many people don't understand it. We're attempting to 'merakytakan' it in a way that people can relate," says Lex, as Lakshman is fondly called.

Directed by Joe Hasham, KIV 4 will be co-choreo-

graphed and co-danced by Akmal Ayob, Ezdianie Omar, Fairuz Tauhid and Nazri Zahauddin.

All five dancers (including Lex) were in the same graduating batch at Akademi Seni Budaya dan Warisan Kebangsaan (Aswara), but all currently work in various fields in dance.

"We'll be exploring Malaysian habits and quirks, such as our obsession with food. Our dance won't be too technical technical, though. For example, we'll be creating rhythmic patterns to imitate making roti canai at a mamak table."

Other typically-Malaysian quirks explored will be the need to eat 'cili potong' with everything, slowing down to observe car accidents on roads, motorcyclists putting their handphones in their helmets to talk, hunting for free wi-fi in eateries, watching Korean dramas, as well as food porn (food photography).

"Also, we'll explore cultural assumptions that tend to favour form over content. Such as the assumption that wear-

ing a tudung automatically indicates a person's character," he adds.

Growing up, Lex himself often had to deal with cultural taboos as dancing full-time, he says, is still rarely considered an option.

"It was hard at first, since I've been dancing since secondary school and my father was previously in the army.

"I feel that not many know much about local art forms but are more familiar with K-Pop and Gangnam Style. We can often identify Russian ballet, Chinese lion dances and Indian dances. But what makes a truly Malaysian-type dance?"

"We're not rebelling against certain trends or Western techniques either, but are using them as a tool. And the final product is Malaysian.

"We're asking Malaysians to come and literally see themselves onstage, as well as support our local arts scene for 60 minutes."

KIV 4 will be held on Thursday and Friday at 8.30pm, and on Saturday and Sunday at 3pm.

Guest performers of various dance groups will also be fea-

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tured each day. Tickets are priced at RM20 each, but if you buy 10, you'll get one free. For more information, call KLpac at 03-4047 9000, or visit klpac.org or ticketpro.com.my.



WE ARE DANCING THE MALAYSIAN: Akmal, Ezdianie, Fairuz and Nazri

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**‘LEX’ LAKSHMAN BALAKRISHNAN
DANCER, CHOREOGRAPHER**

Pic by ZURANEEZA ZULKIFLI