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MUKA SUR

Dancers do Malaysia proud

IT WAS hardly believable, the form, the lucidity of movement, the tentative exploration of roots: and it was all local!

It looks like Malaysia can at last celebrate a group that can hold its head up high in the world of contemporary dance.

No doubt the recent press preview was only the first performance put together by the Akademi Seni Kebangsaan's ASK Dance Company.

However, if the three items were anything to go by, the group of six dancers surely did their country proud at the third Indonesian Dance Festival yesterday.

The company is a marrying of a talented lot: *Bhuto* exponent Lena Ang and Federal Academy of Ballet dancer/teacher Joseph Gonzales need no introduction.

However, Aida Redza, Joe Takahashi, Suhaimi Magi and Dayang Mariana Abang Bolhassan are bright, bold rising stars who are demanding and can command attention.

It is strange that the group, all dance tutors at the academy, should make their debut in another country. However, there is a sad trend of artistes needing to first prove themselves overseas before even daring to test local waters.



The dancers of the ASK Dance Company are leaping to grand new heights. — Picture by ANUAR RASHID

And contemporary dance is anything but well-known in this country.

What these choreographer/dancers are doing though, is in step with the long-term *Gelombang Antara Etnosi* programme by the National Cultural Complex to create a national dance form with a Malaysian identity.

Beautifully did Suhaimi meld the native dance steps of Sabah into the long classic contemporary lines of Cunningham. Yet the raw essence of ritualistic movement was preserved, and exaggerated to a new realm.

Of the dancers, Aida comes across as most adept at both western and eastern dance; she exudes earthiness yet leaps with the abandonment of a free spirit.

Even as her fascination with energy comes in through the fireball that is her choreography, her perfect foil comes in the ephemera that is the sensual Lena.

It is these dancers who are the teachers of the next generation. Judging from this first showcase, Malaysia can look forward to art of a high quality indeed. — By S.L. Wong

Cultural Centre director, the cultural advisor to the Singapore Arts Centre as

ing been trained in the United States, has a style contrasting with that of

it interesting, says Mondy Anis during the Press pre-ly.