

Form and light in 'Flatland'

by [sharmilla ganesan](#)



Out of the box: The contemporary dance performance Flatland by performing arts company TerryandTheCuz is based on the 1884 satirical novella of the same name by Edward Abbott which is set in a completely flat world of two dimensions where all inhabitants are geometric shapes and are indoctrinated to think their planar world is all there is. — GLENN GUAN/The Star

Contemporary dance and audio-visual technology give shape to an allegorical tale of social hierarchy and politics.

YOU'D be forgiven for being slightly confused about what exactly local performing arts company TerryandTheCuz does. Glancing at its varied list of projects – a stand-up comedy show, a murder mystery play, a dinner theatre production and a radio production, among others – you're likely to think this is one outfit that has its finger in every arts-related pie there is.

And you wouldn't be too far from the truth. In fact, its latest project, *Flatland: An Adaptation In Dance*, a contemporary dance production, only cements this notion.

It may seem like a far cry from TerryandTheCuz's previous shows, which includes stand-up comedy gig *My Lingam Speaks* in 2010, *Klue, Doh!* in 2011, and *The Bee Project* last year; upon closer examination, however, what becomes apparent is that all these efforts are the result of its passion for creating unusual and challenging performance art that redefines the genre while also attracting a more diverse audience.

Born out of a desire to combine TerryandTheCuz's unique, technology-centric staging concepts with movement and a strong narrative, *Flatland* sees the company working with local choreographer and dancer Suhaili Micheline to stage a contemporary dance performance based on the 1884 novella of the same name by Edward Abbott. Together with longtime collaborator The Rubix Cube from Australia, the production aims to create a multifaceted stage experience that combines strong dance language with equally effective audio-visual design.

TerryandTheCuz spokesperson The Cuz (as he prefers to be known) says they started off wanting to work with Suhaili, and to explore the ways in which technology and movement could come together.

"We wanted to create a work that would give new appreciation to contemporary dance, and showcase it in a different way. We were really interested in seeing how we could infuse technology into dance and where we could go with that," he explains.

They realised, however, that these ideas needed a solid narrative to hold them together. That was when they stumbled upon the satirical novella *Flatland*; set in a completely flat world of two dimensions where all inhabitants are geometric shapes and are indoctrinated to think their planar world is all there is, the story is a sharp commentary on the class system and politics of Victorian-era society.

Realising how neatly the story paralleled many aspects of the Malaysian cultural make-up, TerryandTheCuz decided to use it as the inspiration for their show.

"What's amazing about the book is that, it was written about 120 years ago, and yet the issues it talks about are so relevant to Malaysia today, with its observations on societal classes and the politics of culture," says The Cuz, adding that it has been particularly interesting to see what the novel evoked in Suhaili in terms of choreography.



Suhaili Micheline

This being her first full-length choreography work, Suhaili is excited to be working on such a unique project.

"Working on *Flatland* was different for me. Since the idea was given to me by someone else, I initially had difficulty connecting with the concept. Then, I familiarised myself with the book and a movie adaptation of it, and

my passion grew from there. My choreography was driven by a need to explore the ideas presented in the novella,” she says.

The hour-long dance work will feature Suhaili alongside a group of local up-and-coming male dancers: James Kan, Lu Wit Chin, Syafizal Syazlee, Syaffiq Hambali, Joshua Gui, Pengiran Qayyum, Amandus Paul, Fahezul Azri and Hariraam Tingyuan.

“Shows like these help establish our homegrown dancers’ identities, which is really important, because we have such great talents here in Malaysia,” she adds.

Equally important to the show is its audio-visual components, an aspect that has been part of the development process from the very beginning; rather than simply adding razzle-dazzle, the technological aspects are essential parts of the show’s narrative.



Rob Stewart

Audio-visual and sound designer and co-creator Rob Stewart points out that the show gets fleshed out through its audio-visual components.

“They are physical presences onstage, the driving force behind many parts of the show. The book itself obviously has a strong sense of geometrical design, which was fun to play around with when it came to visualising it onstage,” he says.

The Cuz admits that *Flatland* may come as a bit of a surprise to existing followers of their work; similarly, those in the dance field may find TerryandTheCuz’s leap into the arena rather odd.

“What we’re hoping for, though, is to bring these two separate followings together, and to connect people with aspects of the performing arts they may not usually be open to,” he says. “We want to affect people, stun them visually and intrigue them choreographically. We want people to come in and experience dance in a way they never have before.

> *Flatland* will run at The Actors Studio @ KuAsh Theatre, Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Kuala Lumpur, at 8.30pm on Dec 6 to 8 and Dec 10 to 14, and 3pm on Dec 8 and 15. A preview will be held on Dec 5 (8.30pm). Tickets,

priced at RM53 (adult) and RM38 (concession) are available at TicketPro (www.ticketpro.com.my), and at The Actors Studio @ KuAsh, Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (Kuala Lumpur) and PenangPac @ Straits Quay (Penang). For more information, call 03-4047 9000, e-mail info@terryandthecuz.com or visit www.terryandthecuz.com