



Children's Dreams (above) features fairytale characters that are brought to life in a light installation. PHOTO: MICHEL DJAOU

Dancers in the dark

Dazzling performers, light installations and earlier show-times will help draw bigger audiences to this year's Night Festival



Corrie Tan

Head to this year's annual Night Festival at Bras Basah and you will be in for a splashing time – above your head as you walk across the Singapore Management University Green, four dancers will be sloshing around in a translucent, shallow pool of water.

In a street nearby, confetti will flutter down around a performer lifted aloft from a crane, as a mix of musicians from Singapore play a rhythmic accompaniment on the ground.

On the Green, two dancers will twirl and tumble through the air against a huge, billowing silver curtain. The foil curtain is likely to be about 15m in height and 22m in length, a bit larger than the size of a tennis court.

These spectacular 10-minute acts are all part of Fuerzabruta, an Argentinian performance company known for creating mesmerising, interactive acts that give audience members a sensory overload.

They are headlining the Night Festival, now in its fifth year, which takes place tomorrow and Saturday and the next. The festival boasts a popular mix of light installations and outdoor performances – all for free.

Visitors can also enjoy late-night free admission to the National Museum, together with the Peranakan Museum, the Singapore Art Museum and SAM @ 8Q, which will be open from 6pm till 2am during the festival.

For non-night owls, things are more visitor-friendly this year, with earlier shows at 8 or 9pm, compared to those scraping midnight in previous years, and

the 10-minute acts from the blockbuster Fuerzabruta will be repeated through the evening. This means that visitors can take public transport home after, without having to miss out on the action.

The festival drew a record 220,000 visitors last year, more than three times the 64,350 for the inaugural edition in 2008.

Other eye-catching displays include one by Singapore multimedia artist and film-maker Brian Gothong Tan, 32, who will turn the facade of the National Museum into a giant, dynamic multimedia display for both festival weekends.

He will project his work, *We The People*, onto the building's walls and columns. The title of the work is a play on the first three words of the national pledge, "We, the citizens..."

His six-minute video loop includes abstract animation, colourful images with hints of wayang kulit, French post-impressionist artist Henri Rousseau's famous jungle scenes and a sequence of archival images of Singapore including scenes from pivotal events such as the country's separation from Malaysia and the 1960s racial riots.

Tan, who worked with award-winning composer and musician Philip Tan for the piece, says of his video: "There's a hint of patriotism but I wanted to be a bit more open than that. Especially with a lot of talk of new citizens, it's also a reminder that we are also a 'rojak' society, a society that blossomed because of the insistence of mixing."

"It's not about the purity of each race, it's more about mixing cultures – that's what's Singaporean."

While Tan's piece is on a museum, it is separate from a signature part of the festival – the Night Lights – where the interiors and exteriors of the Singapore Art Museum and the School of the Arts are given a makeover in video, light and shadow.

In one installation by European design studio WOKmedia, 30 pairs of gleaming animal "eyes", modelled after the eyes of birds, fish and reptiles, will seemingly peer out from the shadowy corridors of the Singapore Art Museum @ 8Q.

In another titled *Mimoid II*, by France-based artists Stephane Beve, Milosh Luczynski and Philippe Rizzotti,



In the Fuerzabruta performance (above) to be held at the Singapore Management University Green, dancers will slip and slide above the heads of the audience in a suspended translucent pool. PHOTO: OZONO PRODUCCIONES

Singapore multimedia artist Brian Gothong Tan's video loop on the facade of the National Museum, titled *We The People*, features a kaleidoscope of images from wayang kulit to abstract animation.

the facade of the Singapore Art Museum will be transformed into a riot of colour by way of a dynamic video display that explores the evolving architecture of a building.

For the festival, Armenian Street will be closed instead of the usual Stamford Road in front of the National Museum of Singapore. The Land Transport Authority had recommended that the board keep a single lane in Stamford Road open, so

there would not be any disruption to public bus services. The board decided to keep Stamford Road completely open and close Armenian Street instead.

The festival will also occupy a larger swathe of the Bras Basah area. This should help ease traffic bottlenecks and also spread out the crowds.

For instance, the Vanguard Building in Stamford Road has offered its space for one of the light installations. There are also activities going on at The Cathay, such as a free running demonstration.

This was in response to audience feedback. "One of the main things people wanted was more options. People wanted the choice to curate their own experience," says Ms Angelita Teo, 40, the National Heritage Board's director of festivals and precinct development.

She adds: "It's about creating a buzz in the precinct, but also a national platform for local performers to collaborate with foreign acts. It is part of the celebrations for National Day this month and it's another opportunity for Singaporeans to celebrate."

Festivalgoer Ho Shuyu, 27, who works in a statutory board, appreciates the change of timings and introduction of repeat shows. She took a taxi home after the festival last year, which she did not mind, but says that with the new timings, she can save on taxi fare and not miss out on festivities.

She adds: "There was only one performance (for the main show) last year. There were many people so if you were not close enough, you might be blocked by the trees."

Advertising and promotions manager John Pang, 41, started attending the festival two years ago. He enjoys the aerial showcases and says: "It's nice to end the night with a bang. You watch it and get a warm, fuzzy feeling, and then you go home."

Of the entire festival, he adds: "I would liken it to our Formula One (night race) because it's something unique that happens at night. It's something the National Heritage Board has developed and made a part of the Singapore arts scene, something tourists and locals can enjoy."

Fuerzabruta's artistic director Diqui James, 47, is looking forward to the festival. He tells Life! over the telephone from his home in Buenos Aires, Argentina: "I like this sort of festival, with all these people around, walking on the street and having a good time, and sharing an experience together. It's a really good atmosphere."

✉ corriet@sph.com.sg

For more information, go to www.brasbasahbugis.sg/nightfestival

Facing page: Map of festival highlights