No break anywhere for these nomadic dancers

BY JESSICA LIM

BREKDANCERS — B-Boys or B-Girls — used to strut their stuff in the underpass linking the Esplanade and CityLink Mall, but the heat there is now driving them away.

The dancers, who number around 100, started using the atrium-like space in 2002. They have since turned to other informal performance areas like the Singapore Management University (SMU) concourse and the Mezzanine Floor at Sengkang MRT station.

But lately, a clampdown by the authorities has forced them to either return to the underpass or seek out other areas. Some have created a niche for themselves in public parks in the heartland; others fork out $20 an hour for studio space at community centres.

Said hip-hop dancer Jacky Lam, 19, who was chased out of the SUU concourse by a security guard three weeks ago: "The Esplanade underpass was a stuffy mosh pit of sweaty bodies. It was especially bad when we had to fight for space not just with other dancers but skateboarders too."

Another dancer, Gwendalyn Cho, 19, said the underpass was "sto-ppe-bad" but that she and eight other dancers had "no choice but to return to it" after being ejected from SMU.

Although the lack of ventilation is too much for dancers, sleepers

find the enclave cosy, as The Sunday Times recently reported — and activity that both the Land Transport Authority and The Esplanade do not condone.

When contacted, SMU said that while it was "very supportive of promoting arts, cultural and youth activities on campus", the "security and well-being of students" were its priority.

The university was put on guard after "several instances of vandalism to the emergency breakglass at the concourse exit doors" and "complaints from students of external groups obstructing the concourse". Dancers can also rule out practising at MRT stations.

According to SBS Transit, dancers have been "caught" at stations on "several occasions" and "complains from students of external groups obstructing the concourse".

Said Ms Tammy Tan, corporate communications director of SBS Transit: "As a general rule, we do not allow members of the public to use our stations for anything other than commuting. This is partly due to security reasons."

Meanwhile, dancers are worried that the dance culture here will be adversely affected.

Said Aaron Aw, 19, who stopped dancing in public since he was sent packing from SMU two weeks ago: "When there is no communal space for dancers to come together, it is hard to develop a dancing culture. It is more than just about space."