

# Community Brief

*An occasional bulletin of projects, events and engagements that underscore ITI's commitment to and involvement with the wider community in and outside Singapore*

September 2011

## Outreach Programme.....

### Singapore School Project

Jul – Aug 2011



ITI launched the Singapore School Project to bring the art of theatre-making right into the classroom of Singapore schools. Inspired by “I like to move it, move it,” the hugely successful project initiated in Linz, Austria when Linz was selected the European Cultural Capital 2009, it is a creativity and education programme that integrates creativity into the school curriculum, through process and content using the tools of performing arts.

The pilot run of the Project this year saw the participation of four classes in three schools – Elias Park Primary School, Raffles Girls’ Primary School and CHIJ St Joseph’s Convent Secondary School. Students, teachers and parents all felt that it was an immensely rewarding and valuable experience that went beyond academic learning in the classroom. In the process of making art, the Project allowed the students to express themselves creatively, developed their thinking and learning skills, raised their enjoyment of learning, sharpened their self-awareness, and encouraged team work amongst the students. Says Amber, a student, “You taught us so many things like to express our imagination, to have confidence in ourselves and to be vocal.”

Artists from diverse backgrounds and disciplines were involved in the process: Raka Maitra (contemporary Indian dance artist and choreographer), Chan Sze Wei (dancer and choreographer), Benjamin Ho (puppetry artist and Director of Paper Monkey Theatre Ltd), Gene Sha Rudyn (stage actor and Director of Keelat Theatre Ensemble), Zulkifle Mahmod (sound artist and composer), Seng Soo Meng (theatre practitioner from Malaysia) and Aporup Acharya (voice artist and actor from India).

Teachers from the three schools also participated in a series of workshops conducted by the artists during the course of the Project. The workshops were about empowering teachers with the process and giving them a first-hand experience of the Singapore School Project. They go on to adapt and apply the insights gained to their teaching, after the 8-week run, even as the Singapore School Project moves on to other schools next year.

## Events & Speaking Engagements.....



### **“Performative Body: Performing Body from Randai to Performance”**

**16 – 20 Sep 2011**

This workshop, jointly organised by Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) and ITI, with guest teachers from Institut Seni Indonesia Padangpajang, was held as part of the NAFA New Asian Imaginations Symposium. The workshop sought to explore the complexities surrounding the notion of Body whenever a set of actions and movements have been translated by traditional aesthetics with contemporary meanings to produce the material effects of the performance. These complexities were explored within Randai, the folk theatre/performance tradition of the Minangkabau people (Minang or Padang), who are indigenous to West Sumatra in Indonesia. The form, usually performed as a part of ceremonies and festivals, is a seamless combination of singing, drama, storytelling, martial arts (silat) and dance.

The workshop culminated in a presentation at the symposium, performed by the participants, who are students of NAFA. In a post-show discussion, students spoke of the value of what they have learned, in particular a genuine understanding of Southeast Asia through the practice of Randai in Minang culture.

### **A Reading of *The First Emperor’s Last Days***

**27 Aug 2011**

Read by T. Sasitharan, Karen Tan, Lim Kay Tong and Lim Yu-Beng, this presentation was held in conjunction with TheatreWorks’ premiere of Tan Tarn How’s new work, *Fear of Writing*. Tan is also the playwright of *The First Emperor’s Last Days*, which was first staged in 1998. The play imagined four writers tasked – under detention and surveillance – to pen a posthumous biography of a country’s first great ruler. The reading, directed by Ong Keng Sen, is part of TheatreWorks’ efforts to introduce Singapore writings to new audiences.



## Man Singapore Theatre Festival, The Art & Life Sessions: “On Morality – The Good, The Bad, and The Referees”

20 Aug 2011

Held in conjunction with the play *Family Outing* at the festival, this forum was moderated by ITI Director, T. Sasitharan, and featured a panel comprising Glen Goei, Associate Artistic Director of Wild Rice, Vijay Chandran, Chairman of the Media Development Authority’s Films Consultative Panel, theatre practitioner Nurhashida Bte Mahadi and undergraduate Joel Tan. The discussion addressed questions such as “Who decides what our core values are?”, “How are they affected by factors such as Victorian morality in our legal codes and religious revivalism?”, and “What is socially acceptable in Singapore today?”

## Other Events

ITI was at other events in the recent months including **“Harnessing the Power of Impact Investing”**, a panel discussion led by Dr Judith Rodin, President of the Rockefeller Foundation, organised by Impact Investment Exchange Asia, the Rockefeller Foundation and INSEAD; a **welcome reception for the US Embassy’s new Public Affairs Counsellor, Eric Watnik**, to meet alumni of US exchange programmes; **“Family Philanthropy in Asia: Past, Present and Future”**, a presentation of the UBS-INSEAD Study on Family Philanthropy in Asia; **NAC’s Sharing of Work Plans 2011**; and the symposium **“Making a Great Art Museum: Contending with Southeast Asian Modernities and Art”** by National Heritage Board Academy and Institute of Policy Studies.



**The Straits Times: “Theatre scene gets a boost”**  
**3 Sep 2011**

**Lianhe Zaobao: “Theatre Training & Research Programme changes name and reopens after obtaining grant from National Arts Council”**  
**4 Oct 2011**



The launch of Intercultural Theatre Institute and renaming of the Theatre Training & Research Programme was announced in August and reported in *The Straits Times* and *Lianhe Zaobao*. The three-year professional actor training programme offered by ITI is now known as the Professional Diploma in Intercultural Theatre (Acting), in line with the new regulations of the Council for Private Education.

In the ST article, a spokesperson from NAC said the ITI curriculum “plugs a gap in the provision of formal practice-based professional training in Singapore.” Key arts community players welcomed the restarting of ITI and NAC’s support. Alvin Tan of The Necessary Stage observed that “what the institute offers is dynamic and relevant and puts Singapore on the international arts platform in an organic way, and in a way that reflects Singapore genuinely.”

In the LHZB article, Sasi noted that NAC has acknowledged ITI’s important contributions to local theatre. Sasi further highlighted that ITI can supplement theatre courses by other tertiary institutions, by providing deeper training in acting on top of foundational training.

Applications for the January 2012 intake are open. Six scholarships with different values covering up to 80% of course fees are available. Funding from the National Arts Council will cover 30% of ITI’s budget for three years and four of the scholarships. The other scholarships are funded by the Kuo Pao Kun Foundation and a private philanthropist.

Epigram designed ITI’s logo, which comprises the three words of the institute’s name, viewed from different perspectives, interlocking at different angles, and in a spectrum of colours. These aspects of the design signify ITI’s openness to different theatres, and intercultural approach to theatre training that uses a diverse mix of theatrical forms from different cultures. The logo design has been shortlisted for the President’s Design Award 2011.

### **BBC: *Weekend World***

**25 Sep 2011**

*Weekend World* gives a glimpse of upcoming programmes on the BBC. This episode highlighted *Peschardt's People* with an interview with Professor Tommy Koh about the entertainment industry and the rise in interest in Asian contemporary art. Sasi was asked to give a broader view of the arts and cultural scene in Singapore.

Sasi concurred with Prof Koh that the arts and cultural landscape has changed. Sasi noted the rise in the number of arts venues, museums and arts schools as well as the people engaged in the arts. However he also pointed out that the arts cannot be defined purely in quantitative terms, "The arts have a fundamental role to play in the social fabric of a country, in the body politic of a country, in education, in shaping the national consciousness. In these areas, in the qualitative areas, development has been much slower; it has been much more circumspect."

When asked about the perception that Singapore is regimented and whether this stifles creativity, Sasi said that there was still a degree of fear but while "censorship, regimentation, repression stifles creativity... artists often use that as an impetus to work." He acknowledged that "there has been change" and he was "optimistic that there will continue to be change." This will "come because artists, ordinary Singaporeans, because the people want to more expression, freedom of expression."



### **The Straits Times: "Station in transit"**

**8 Sep 2011**

A feature by Adeline Chia on The Substation celebrating its 21st anniversary discussed its relevance in Singapore's art landscape today. The Substation's founder, Kuo Pao Kun, was also co-founder of the Theatre Training & Research Programme, which is now ITI's acting programme. Sasi was artistic director at The Substation from 1996 to 2000, and is a director on The Substation's Board. Chia noted that notwithstanding The Substation's age and challenges, "it is still the most welcoming space for artists of all stripes... Many artists and artsgoers say it is still the place to go for subversive, boundary-pushing work."

Such work and events may have been controversial but according to Chia, supporters argued that "this 'troublesome' space that is messy and raw is where art emerges." In relation to this point, Sasi was quoted in the article that "art is not something that can be pre-determined. It comes out of conflict and that's what makes it interesting." But he sees negotiating and explaining "not as an administrative duty but as a point of social contact."