

**INTERCULTURAL THEATRE INSTITUTE PRESENTS**

**DIRECTOR**

Sankar Venkateswaran

**PLAYWRIGHT**

Henrik Ibsen



**WHEN  
WE DEAD  
AWAKEN**

**"I GAVE YOU MY YOUNG,  
LIVING SOUL. AND THAT GIFT  
LEFT ME EMPTY WITHIN."**

DRAMA CENTRE BLACK BOX | 15-17 MARCH 2018, 8PM; 17 MARCH 2018, 3PM  
TICKETS AT [IBSEN.PEATIX.COM](http://IBSEN.PEATIX.COM)



## SYNOPSIS

*"I gave you my young, living soul. And that gift left me empty within."*

The last Ibsen.

ITI presents a reimagining of *When We Dead Awaken*, the final play by acclaimed Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen.

Arnold and Maia Rubek are an emotionally distant married couple. On a resort vacation, Maia finds herself attracted to the energetic Ulfheim, while Arnold rekindles a relationship with an old muse, Irene.

Ibsen's final work is an introspective epilogue on art, loss, and finding final restitution.

Director Sankar Venkateswaran weaves the show together from speech and dance, letting the language of the body tell Ibsen's tale of reawakening.

## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Henrik Ibsen subtitled *When We Dead Awaken* a "dramatic epilogue". He might have meant it to be an end to his series of plays which started with *A Doll's House*, or as a conclusion to his last set of plays which started with *The Master Builder*. When people assumed it was going to be his last written play, he vehemently denied it while he was alive. Today, we know that it was indeed his last play. He was growing old and weak while writing it, and was probably also rushing to finish it before the dark Norwegian winter set in.

While writing the play, Ibsen remarked, "If only my powers could last. But they must, they must! The play will be the best and biggest I have ever written." He finished it by the later half of 1899 and it received mostly positive responses after it was published. Some authors, such as James Joyce, thought it was indeed Ibsen's best work. The production histories, on the other hand, tell us that it was not as successful onstage as many of his earlier plays. When it premiered in Copenhagen, a critic wrote, "The play is good enough, big enough. The actors were too small." Michael Mayer, Ibsen's biographer and his definitive translator, wrote about his surprise at the brevity and inadequacy of the play. It was also Ibsen's shortest play.

*When We Dead Awaken* consists of a few final episodes in the life of an aging sculptor, who has achieved fame at the expense of personal happiness. More than that, his fame also came at a cost to those who inspired him to make his art. In his old age, the artist has lost his inspiration; he wanders around aimlessly and has stopped producing artwork; his marriage with his young wife is on the verge of a breakdown. He comes across a deranged stranger, a lady who claims to be dead, and realises that she was once his muse and the model for his most famous work of art. He had used her as a model in his youth, but failed to see the human being beneath the shape and texture of her body. While his interests were only artistic, her unrequited love has killed her soul. The artist's wife breaks free from him to find life and love with a bear hunter, while the artist and the model dig through their difficult past to realise that the life they once led is irretrievable. All of this is seen by the judgmental and witnessing gaze of a Sister of Mercy, who, at times, also slips into the shadow of the model.

### WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN COMES CLOSEST TO BEING A SELF-PORTRAIT OF ITS PLAYWRIGHT.

*When We Dead Awaken* comes closest to being a self-portrait of its playwright. Ibsen modeled *A Doll's House* on the life of a woman he knew, against her wishes. The play became a masterpiece, but her life was plagued by scandal. It is probably this guilt that Ibsen is dealing with in this play. He puts himself right in front of the striking end of his hammerhead, the hammer which he always used to

break and shape society. He is merciless in directing his critique towards himself as an artist, as a human being who forgoes humanity for the sake of art.

### WHILE WRITING THE PLAY, IBSEN REMARKED, "IF ONLY MY POWERS COULD LAST. BUT THEY MUST, THEY MUST!"

So the questions are: why should we care about this play and these characters today? And how do we approach them and this play? I think these characters are like us, in all their selfishness, denial and ego. They destroy their own lives and the lives of others because they fail to see others around them, being all too preoccupied with themselves. They are unable to come to terms with their own morality and they fail to love.

My answer to the second question leads to another difficult question. What if we deny the author of his words and rhetoric, in the same way that the sculptor refuses to acknowledge a life beneath his model, thus turning her into a statue? When we do that to this play, we are left with a phantasmal envelope of silence where bodies move like ghosts and speak their silence. This might start to provoke our imaginations beyond the spoken, and we might start to see the irretrievable. We may begin to ask ourselves: are we awake? Are we dreaming? Or are we dead? Do we need to wake from the dream or death? What happens when we dead awaken?

### MY ANSWER TO THE SECOND QUESTION LEADS TO ANOTHER DIFFICULT QUESTION. WHAT IF WE DENY THE AUTHOR OF HIS WORDS AND RHETORIC?

**Sankar Venkateswaran**

Director of *When We Dead Awaken*



## CREDITS

Professor Arnold Rubek, an ageing sculptor	Lakshmana KP
Maia Rubek, his young wife	Pooja Mohanraj
Ulfheim, a bear hunter	Yazid Jalil
A Stranger Lady	Caroline Chin
A Sister of Mercy, shadow of the Stranger Lady	Hau Guei Sze (a.k.a. Zizi)
Director	Sankar Venkateswaran
Playwright	Henrik Ibsen
Assistant Director	Alex Beard
Choreographer	Urs Dietrich
Voice and Speech Consultant	Simon Stollery
Choreography and Movement Consultant	Lim Chin Huat
Set and Props Designer	Chan Silei
Lighting Designer	Aaron Yap
Production Manager	Abel Koh
Stage Manager	Stella Cheung



Caroline's journey began during her secondary school days when she took the Drama Elective Programme course. From then, Caroline was certain of her love of theatre and even took a gap year after junior college to explore theatre and dance more deeply.

During that time, she worked with Drama Box and was also part of Maya Dance Theatre's MOVE Programme (2015), where she co-created an original work, *i have nothing to do with explosions*, most recently featured in the M1 Contact Contemporary Dance Festival's Off Stage Programme (2017). She has also trained in butoh under Yoshito Ohno at the Kazuo Ohno Dance Studio in Yokohama, Japan.

Post-graduation, Caroline hopes to collaborate with those of different backgrounds and art forms to explore how differences can find harmony through art. She is also keen to further her studies and hopefully deepen her training in one or more of the traditional forms she's been immersed in during her time at ITI.

*Caroline is a recipient of the ITI-William Teo Scholarship.*



Guei Sze (a.k.a. Zizi) found her passion for theatre at the very first drama lesson she received in secondary school.

In 2013, Zizi trained and performed under Pitapat Theatre (Sabah). She then furthered her studies in Taiwan from 2014 to 2015 in performance and theatre.

Zizi has worked extensively with Pitapat Theatre, appearing in various productions such as *The Wanted* (2013), *An Enemy of the People.At the Moment* (2015 & 2016), *Theatre in Kampung-Island Shade* (2016), and *Kakak* (2017). *An Enemy of the People.At the Moment* toured to Damansara Performing Arts Centre, Kuala Lumpur (2016). *Kakak* was performed in Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre, Black Box KK, Sabah and later toured to Tua-Tiu-Tiann International Festival of Arts, Taipei (2017).

In Singapore, she has performed in *The Moonlit Smile* at the Esplanade Moonfest (2016) and Speak Cryptic's *The Tribe* as part of Club Malam at SIFA O.P.E.N 2016.

After ITI, Zizi plans to continue her practice, exploring the intricacies of voice production and character work.

*Zizi is a beneficiary of the Möbius Fund, which provides loans for actor-students*



**LAKSHMANA KP (India)**  
lakshmana1.kp@gmail.com

Lakshmana KP is an actor, director, writer and teacher from Karnataka, India.

He graduated from Ninasam Theatre Institute in 2012 and has been travelling across India, working in various productions with different theatre groups. He has performed in Bharat Rang Mahotsav and in Mahindra Excellence Theatre Awards (META), both international theatre festivals in Delhi.

Lakshmana has also worked in professional theatre, and theatre-in-education with children and young adults. He has taught in Adima Kolarand Rangayana Shimoga and repertory theatres in Karnataka.

In Singapore, he was in Chowk Productions' *The Second Sunrise* (2016), *Pallavi in Time* (2017) and *from: The Platform* (2017) as an actor, dancer, musician and technician.

Lakshmana is also a published poet and an activist concerned about the marginalised people and cultures of Indian society.

*Lakshmana is a recipient of a scholarship sponsored by a private philanthropist and a beneficiary of the Möbius Fund.*



**POOJA MOHANRAJ (India)**  
mohanraj.pooja@gmail.com

Hailing from Kerala, Pooja is an actor, director, translator, voice artist, and theatre educator.

Prior to ITI, she trained with G. Venu, David Zinder and Chandradasan, and attended workshops by Richard Schechner and Alex Pinder.

Pooja has worked with acclaimed directors such as Chandradasan, Kumara Varma and Neel Chaudhuri. Her major productions include *Egle and Cleopatra* (a solo play), *Andorra and Balcony*. She directed her first play, *Sorry Dad but I Have To*, for the Collegiate Theatre Festival for New German Writing by Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller in New Delhi. She has collaborated on *The Bowl Project* with multidisciplinary artists from Korea and *The Eleven Project* with French artists, and has also been a facilitator for theatre-in-education programmes for schools in India. In Singapore, she has performed in *Pathy Nimidam*, a Tamil theatre festival by Ravindran Drama Group.

Pooja holds a Masters in Theatre Arts from the School of Drama and Fine Arts, Thrissur.

After ITI, Pooja hopes to create her own theatre projects, get involved in collaborative work and work towards using theatre as a tool for social change through her new arts and cultural organisation, Talir.

*Pooja is a recipient of the ITI International Scholarship and a beneficiary of the Möbius Fund.*



**YAZID JALIL**  
(Cohort of 2015, invited performer)

Yazid graduated from the Intercultural Theatre Institute in 2015.

Yazid has received theatre training in France at the École Philippe Gaulier under the Singapore National Arts Council Residency Programme. He has also trained under the Singapore Repertory Theatre's youth wing, the SRT Young Company.

He is presently working as an actor, physical performer and multidisciplinary artist. Recent theatrical works include: *The Malay Man and His Chinese Father* (2018, International Theatre Festival of Kerala), *Sanctuary* (2017, Singapore: The Necessary Stage, Japan: Hanchu-Yuei), *from: The Platform* (2017, Chowk Productions/ Esplanade Kalaa Utsavam Festival), *Mark* (2017, Singapore International Festival of Arts), *Fatimah and Her Magic Socks* (2017, Esplanade Playtime), *Itsy The Musical* (2017, The Finger Players), *Geylang* (2016, Wild Rice/Singapore Theatre Festival) and *Lord of the Flies* (2016, Sight Lines Productions).

Yazid was nominated for Best Supporting Actor in the 11th Life! Theatre Awards for his role in *Charged* (2011, Teater Ekamatra). He also shares two Best Ensemble Nominations with his cast members for *Pretty Things* (2012, Patricia Toh/ The Substation) and *It Won't Be Too Long: The Cemetery* (2015, Drama Box, SIFA 2015).

Yazid believes in sharing knowledge and training and aspires to teach movement full-time one day.



Photo: Bernie Ng



# CREATIVE TEAM

## Sankar Venkateswaran

### Director

Sankar Venkateswaran is a theatre director and dramaturg from Kerala, India. He graduated from Calicut University School of Drama and Fine Arts, and pursued his post-graduate training at Theatre Training and Research Programme (now Intercultural Theatre Institute), Singapore.

His directorial works include *INDIKA, Tage der Dunkelheit (Days of Darkness)* for Munich Volkstheater, *Criminal Tribes Act, UDAL URAVU (Body/Source)*, Shogo Ohta's *The Water Station* and *Sahyande Makan - The Elephant Project* for Theatre Roots & Wings, the company he founded in 2007. Currently, Sankar has set up a cultural space in Attappady, Kerala, and works with the indigenous communities of the region.

He is a recipient of the International Ibsen Scholarship 2013 (Teater Ibsen, Norway) and Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar 2011 (Government of India). Sankar also served as the artistic director for International Theatre Festival of Kerala (2015 and 2016) and was a jury member for Zurich Theater Spektakel 2016.

## Chan Silei

### Set and Props Designer

Silei is interested in crafting spaces. She has taken on various roles in stage design, as well as stage and production management for over a decade.

Silei has designed spaces and sets for *I Am LGB* (2016, Loo Zihan for Singapore International Festival of Arts), *Red Sky* (Nine Years Theatre, 2016), *With/Out* (2015 M1 Singapore Fringe Festival) and various productions under Esplanade's The Studios 2017 season. She has also assisted local and international designers and artists in realizing their concepts.

Silei was also a Production Manager for Singapore International Festival of Arts from 2015 to 2017.

## Aaron Yap

### Lighting Designer

Aaron's interest in theatre design formed during his teenage years, when he attended shows and began wondering why sets were designed in certain ways, or why spaces were lit in other ways. The wonderment led him to pursue a full time course at LASALLE College of the Arts. He graduated in 2011 with a B.A. (Hons) Technical Theatre programme.

Over the years, he has designed sets, costumes and lighting for different theatrical genres: from Chinese opera to ballet, plays to musicals. His more notable works include: *FRAGO* (set design: Checkpoint Theatre, 2017), *Fatimah and Her Magic Socks* (costume and props design: The Esplanade Co. Ltd., 2017), *Butterflies Awakening* (set and lighting design: Sim Siew Tin Hokkien Opera Troupe), *Life's a Stage* (set and costume design: Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan Dance Theatre, 2016), *MOSAIC* (set design: Take Off Productions, 2015), *The Merry Widow* (set design: Singapore Lyric Opera, 2014), *Lucky Stiff* (set and costume design: LASALLE College of the Arts, 2014), *Of Babies (Not Really) and People* (lighting design: TheatreWorks, 2013), *Attempts on Her Life* (set design: LASALLE College of the Arts, 2012) and *The Nutcracker* (set and costume design: Singapore Dance Theatre, 2011).

Aside from theatre productions, Aaron has also worked on set decoration on several MediaCorp drama serials.

# ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

**Henrik Ibsen (20 March 1828 – 23 May 1906)** was a Norwegian playwright, theatre director and poet. An influential dramatist whose career spanned half a century, Ibsen was widely acknowledged as a pioneering exponent of realism in theatre. The psychological depth of character, naturalistic dialogue and use of subtext in Ibsen's plays were hugely influential on modern drama. His best-known works include *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *An Enemy of the People* (1882), *Hedda Gabler* (1890) and *The Master Builder* (1892). *When We Dead Awaken* was his last play, written in 1899.



# THANK YOU FOR BEING A PART OF ITI'S JOURNEY

## FRIENDS OF ITI

Abel Van Staveren  
Adrienne Kouwenhoven  
Alvin Lee  
Arumugam Pradeepan  
Caroline Fernandez  
Daniel Teo  
Eddie Ong  
Graeme Wilson  
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*And other Friends who wish to remain anonymous*

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## ABOUT ITI

Intercultural Theatre Institute (ITI), based in Singapore, trains artists who want to make original, impactful contemporary theatre. ITI is shaped by theatre doyen Kuo Pao Kun's vision of intercultural learning that draws from a matrix of traditional theatre systems and modern theatre-making.

The school began as the Theatre Training & Research Programme (TTRP), founded in 2000 by renowned dramatist, Kuo Pao Kun (1939–2002), and current Director, T. Sasitharan – both Cultural Medallion recipients.

The core of ITI's offering is a three-year, practice-based, professional actor training programme founded on a rigorous, intercultural learning methodology with a view to producing original, contemporary theatre.

ITI's distinguished alumni include Peter Sau, recipient of the 2011 Young Artist Award and the Life! Theatre Awards; Yeo Yann Yann, winner of the 2013 "Best Supporting Actress" Award for her role in *Ilo Ilo* at the Golden Horse Awards, the Vladivostok International Film Festival, and the Asia-Pacific Film Festival; Felimon Blanco, recipient of the 2013 Most Outstanding Zambosurian Award (Philippines); and Sankar Venkateswaran, recipient of the Aditya Vikram Birla Kalakiran Puraskars (India) presented to young, contemporary artists for outstanding achievements.

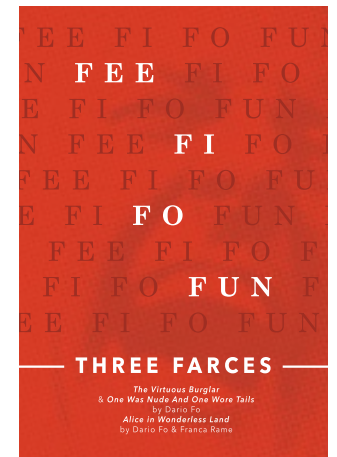
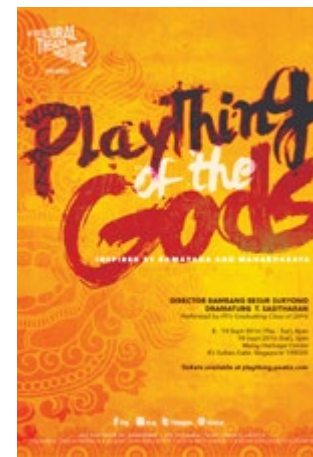
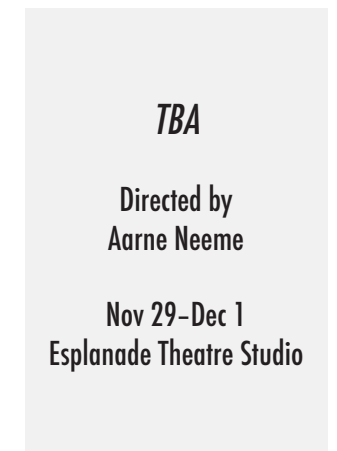
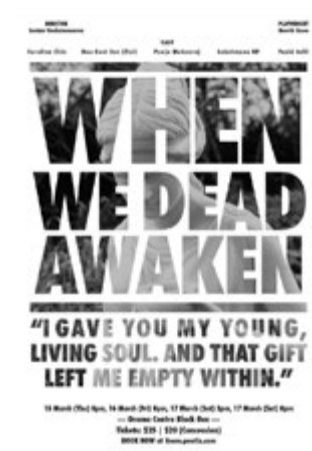
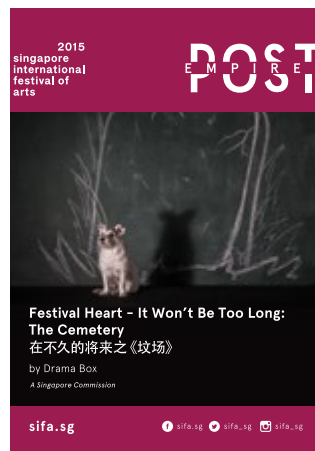
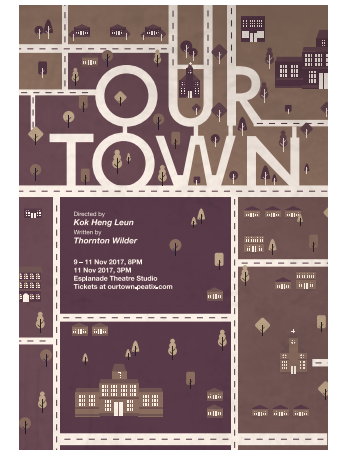
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