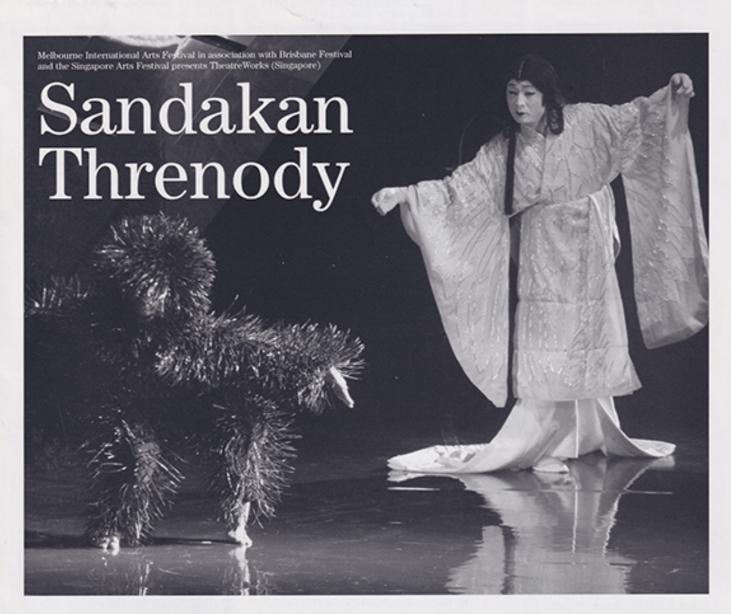
Melbourne International Arts Festival

7-23 October 2004



the Arts Centre, State Theatre

Thu 14 Oct at 8pm Fri 15 Oct at 8pm Sat 16 Oct at 2pm

1hr 30min no interval

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Sandakan Threnody

Director

Ong Keng Sen

Composer

Jonathan Mills

Consultant/Initial Researcher

Lou Weis

Collaborators/Performers

Matthew Crosby, Tim Harvey, Lok Meng Chue, Gojo Masanosuke, Rizman Putra, Kota Yamazaki

Producer

Tay Tong

Set Designer Justin Hill

Lighting Designer/Video Artist

Margie Medlin

Collaborating Video Artist

Choy Ka Fai

Associate Director

Lok Meng Chue

Soundscape Designers

Steve Adam & Jonathan Mills

Narrative

Ong Keng Sen

Choreography/Text

Matthew Crosby, Tim Harvey, Gojo Masanosuke, Rizman Putra, Kota Yamazaki, Ong Keng Sen

Body Installations

Rizman Putra

Cameras

Choy Ka Fai & Margie Medlin

Recorded Voice (Poem)

Dr Frank Mills

Technical Manager

Lennie Lee

Stage Manager

Kathryn Hindley*

Sound & Video Technical Manager

Micha Meliani

Tour Manager

Rosemary Hinde

Marketing & Publicity

Traslin Ong & Eileen Chua

Assistant to Producer

Vivian Lee

Gojo Masanosuke's Dresser

Taiji Yashiro

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Produced by TheatreWorks (Singapore)

PHOTOS: BOB LOW

The music for Sandakan Threnody was performed by Jamie Allen [tenor], Cantillation [Chorusmaster, Paul Stanhope] and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra conducted by Richard Gill, with Riley Lee [shakuhachi] and Wang Zheng-Ting [sheng]. Produced by Steve Adam, Jonathan Mills, Russell Stapleton and Jane Ulman. Orchestral recording produced by Owen Chambers and Yosi Gabay. Additional recordings produced by James Atkins, Jonathan Mills and Russell Stapleton. Recorded in April and May 2004 at the Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House, and ABC Studios Australia, Ultimo and Southbank.

Sandakan Threnody was inspired by a work for tenor, choir and orchestra of the same name by Jonathan Mills.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Lou Weis.

With thanks to: Singapore Arts Festival and The National Arts Council, Singapore; staff of Melbourne International Arts Festival 2004, Robyn Archer, Kara Miller and Rosemary Hinde; Brisbane Festival, Tony Gould; Australia Council; Arts Victoria; Bob Weis and Tao Weis; Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Helen Lynch, Libby Christie, Franco Bottone and Richard Gill; Australian Broadcasting Corporation, John Crawford, Robyn Ravlich and Jane Ulman; Roxanne, Alexander and Marni Clayton; Eileen Naseby; Cantillation, Alison Johnston; Christopher Latham and the staff of Boosey & Hawkes; Sasha Soldatow; Helen Herbertson; Yuki Hata; Sam Sellima: Melvin Lim

Video archive footage courtesy of: Film Australia Ltd; Film World and Cinesound Movietone Productions; Imperial War Museum, London. Photo archive courtesy of Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

The Melbourne International Arts Festival season of Sandakan Thenody is generously supported by Alexander and Marni Clayton. Prologue: "This is all something I will never be able to forget."

The Body Transparent

Panorama 1

One of Six: Lance Bombardier W Moxham

Borneo Heroes

Account by Sue Moxham

Of Sons and Fathers: "The responsibility is mine. I take full responsibility for his actions."

Memories of an Old Woman

The Feet Opera

Panorama 2: "Trained to hate...we are animals dressed in suits."

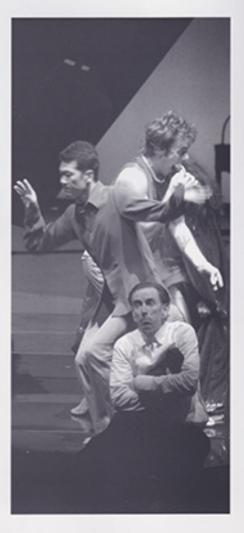
After Sorrow: The Bird

Merry Christmas Nana and Gramps

The Future: Happy feet. "Beriberi affected

the feet first.

Epilogue: Flight



Ong Keng Sen on Sandakan Threnody

How did it all come about?

Jonathan Mills, the composer, and I first talked about Sandakan in July 2001. We had met socially in Melbourne and we exchanged notes about what we were doing. I told him that I was directing a play about the Second World War and he said that he was also doing something about World War II. Jonathan told me that his father was very lucky to have been transferred out of Sandakan, as the whole POW camp was wiped out (2,000 men). There were only six survivors and they survived because they escaped. Jonathan was writing a new orchestral piece to be performed in Adelaide. I didn't hear about it again until he came by Singapore in the beginning of 2002. He asked if I was intereste in directing Sandakan Threnody, to translate the 30-minute orchestral piece into a theatre piece. I was intrigued by it and this began the two-year process of searching for funds and looking for festivals to commission it. Ching Lee Ifrom the National Arts Council, Singapore) and Robyn Archer (from Melbourne International Arts Festival) were very open to it from the beginning and we then had to find other Australian partners.

The play deals with the themes of war – why the fascination with war-themed pieces?

My work in the last decade has been concerned about giving voice to the voiceless, to those who have hitherto been unheard. After the War, there has been an obliteration of what happened in Sandakan. Some writers have called it a conspiracy of silence. I tend to see it as several conspiracies of silence, both in Australia and Japan, which have obscured stories of trauma and dignity. So I would like to float these human stories to the surface.

And we can see from the stories of the US army in Iraq how power can be abused; societies are still going to war, still fuelling the very human fear of 'the other'. Racial and cultural prejudice is still rife today, waiting to be manipulated by politicians and governments. There is an interesting Australian documentary - This is Japan made during the War, about how the Japanese were allegedly trained to hate from when they were young. Ironically, the documentary also taught Australians to hate the Japanese. I find this material endlessly potent. I know how one can be sucked into it as I can recognise it in the human condition - including myself. So as long as there is war, these pieces are still relevant, to discuss the darkness in our souls.

The body transparent...

There is a scene [Scene 2] that we have made about the transparent body. As the POWs marched on these death marches, they slowly wasted away on the mountain ranges of Mount Kinabalu. They walked 260 km in 17 to 28 days depending on their physical condition. Half to two-thirds of the men died in this manner. We were discussing how, as they marched, they began to defy their bodies in a strange way. As they dragged their bodies through the jungle, many of them were crawling like animals through the thick tropical jungle. They lost the ability to even stand, due to lack of food and the terrible terrain. They became in a strange way 'immortal'. Their physical bodies collapsed but, ironically, I think they were able to 'lift off' spiritually. It is always about how they find immense strength in the worst circumstances.

What or who is a hero?

Bill Moxham – one of the six survivors who came back with post-traumatic stress syndrome and killed himself in 1961? Captain Yamamoto – who was executed at the war crimes trials of Borneo and who said that he would take sole responsibility for what happened? The locals who died, but are not commemorated either in Koya-san, Japan, nor in Sandakan War Memorial Park?

Beauty and darkness

There are also the kabuki scenes in the performance. A male dancer impersonates a woman - the onnagata role. This is a symbolic role, of an old woman ravaged by memory: time flashes back into a past life where there is the joy of love and the tragedy of death. The woman is finally transformed into a bird, a symbol of hope for humanity. The kabuki presence is like a gold thread through the tapestry of war and pain. I am interested in the flip side of brutality and violence: beauty. The inspiration for these scenes came when I saw the 2,000 photographs of the POWs who died at Sandakan at the Canberra War Memorial. Some of them were just young boys but all of them were stunning, godlike in their smiles, invincible on the day of their enlistment. The beauty of these boys and the beauty of Japanese aesthetics are juxtaposed in the kabuki scenes, to tell about the waste of war, about the incredible darkness which erupted in Sandakan.

A suspended time and space

I have been fascinated with projecting the play beyond 1945. Two performers play out a scene at the end, which is suspended in time and space. Their antics are watched over by a Hairy Midget, who has danced a duet with the bird of hope, and a Narrator who is now a witness. I call this scene 'the future' - what happens after the War, perhaps when the 'last' Australian meets the 'last' Japanese? They are like the tragic clowns of Beckett's Waiting for Godot waiting for war wounds to finally be laid to rest. For perhaps we are still infected by the invisible virus of hatred and fear: the cultural war is still embedded within us, the legacies of the past continue. Ultimately there are three different journeys, which are being woven on stage: the live action, the music and the video. It is my role to pull these three strands together.

Is Sandakan Threnody different from your previous works?

Yes, as it is the first time that the many cultures in my work have significance in an immediate social, political context. I think it is no longer possible to talk about war through one culture. Sandakan Threnody is positioned at the crossroads of Japan, Australia and Borneo/Singapore/South-East Asia - the site of the War. It is not a typically patriotic piece. It talks about the descendants - both real (Sue Moxham, Tetsuya Yamamoto, Tim Harvey, Jonathan Mills] and metaphorical - of the War. Working with Tim to trace the past as he remembers his grandfather, a POW at Changi, brought home many immediacies, as did our Labuan-Sandakan-Ranau journey. On that journey, we traced the death-march route which is now a four-hour expressway ride on a bus. We managed to track down four local survivors who are all in their seventies now. Their stories were dignified, confusing and sobering - including the most shocking one, of some starving Japanese soldiers who hung up a white POW and slowly sliced his flesh off to be cooked while he was still alive. This story has now ended up in local mythology.

All in all, I feel I have a concrete responsibility towards the past and the future through working with collaborators from many cultures, and I wonder: is it possible to transcend cultural bigotry, which leads to war?

Jonathan Mills on Sandakan Threnody

"It is the destiny of the artist not to serve those who make history, but to serve those who are victims." Albert Camus

Sandakan Threnody is dedicated to the memory of Captain L C Matthews, GC, MC, executed at Kuching Prisoner-of-War Camp, 2 March 1944.

That the events surrounding the appalling treatment of Australian and British troops held prisoners-of-war in Sandakan and Ranau, North Borneo between 1942 and 1945 have been brought to light is largely due to the efforts of six Australian soldiers who escaped the marches from Sandakan to Ranau and lived to tell the tale.

Those who survived this dreadful ordeal were Keith Botterill, Dick Braithwaite, Owen Campbell, Bill Moxham, Nelson Short and Bill Sticpewich. None of these men are alive today. My father, Dr Frank Mills, was also incarcerated in Sandakan and Kuching as a prisoner-of-war during that period. Sandakan Threnody is also written as a tribute to his experiences in North Borneo.

Commissioned by the Centenary of Federation, South Australia Committee and at the suggestion of Robyn Archer, on the occasion of the return by the Australian Army of the Torrens Parade Grounds to the people of South Australia, Sandakan Threnody has been revised for performances by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and now as a theatrical version directed by Ong Keng Sen, of TheatreWorks Singapore.

In its original form, the music comprises three movements. Whilst not specifically

programmatic, each movement refers to a different aspect of the Sandakan story, and functions as a musical archetype. One movement is an instrumental overture, albeit one with references to both the subtle timbres of traditional Japanese music, such as gagaku, and the diverse, almost incongruous, often aggressive timbres of contemporary orchestral percussion. It is the shortest movement and its relative brevity is a comment on the brutality and shattering abruptness of war.

Another movement is a march that undergoes a series of disintegrating and occasionally defiant permutations. It is scored for solo tenor, chorus and orchestra. It uses two texts, Psalm 130 and a fragment of a poem by Anna Akhmatova. The core rhythmic motif of this movement is based on a morse code transcription of the words 'De profundis clamavi ad te Domine' ['Out of the depths do I cry unto Thee, O Lord']. It draws a connection between a 'dead' language, Latin, and a 'dead' technology, morse code, to express the tragic dimensions of a 'death' march.

Yet another movement is a lullaby. It is a setting of a highly lyrical poem by Randolph Stow for solo tenor and orchestra. The imagery of the poem is evocative of a quintessential Australian landscape, offering the possibility of repose and the hope of renewal.

Following the performances of the complete orchestral version of Sandakan Threnody by Jamie Allen, Cantillation, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Richard Gill in late April of this year, the work was recorded in its entirety and in a large number of short fragments. These fragments, particularly, have formed the basis of an entirely new version of the music for the theatre production of Sandakan Threnody.

Working with the sound designer and electro-acoustic composer Steve Adam, we have devised a series of elaborate 'soundscapes' which treat the orchestral material in various ways: enlarging, compressing, bending and breaking apart the inner fabric of the original material in a process akin to musical archaeology. From movement to movement, the sound score changes its role – sometimes supporting the dramaturgy and at other times propelling the stage action itself. The process has been quite challenging and revealing.

The title of the work derives from the Greek word threnos, which means grieving, but with an explicit emphasis on a public act of grieving. In contrast to the cathartic wisdom of ancient Greece, Australia seems to have a problem with public expressions of grief. For us, grief is a very private matter, with the result that tragedies like Sandakan are too often unknown, unobserved and unlamented.

It has not been my intention in writing Sandakan Threnody to make accusations. No culture or country has a monopoly on righteousness. The rituals of many cultures rely on the representation of a transforming journey, a pilgrimage or a path to enlightenment. By contrast, the marches from Sandakan to Ranau had no purpose and provided no enlightenment.





Biographies

Ong Keng Sen

Ong Keng Sen actively contributes to the evolution of an Asian identity and aesthetic for contemporary performance. His juxtaposition of different art forms and cultural styles has helped him to create a trademark epic style which has attracted acclaim in Asia, Europe, the USA and Australia. He is also known for 'docuperformances' that explore Asia's diversity and relationship with the world. He is the first Singaporean to receive both the Young Artist Award [1992] and the Cultural Medallion Award [2003] for Singapore.

Jonathan Mills

Jonathan Mills studied composition with Peter Sculthorpe and piano with Lidia Arcuri in Italy. He was Artistic Director of Melbourne International Arts Festival (2000 and 2001) and the Brisbane Music Biennial (1995 and 1997). His chamber opera, The Eternity Man, was co-commissioned by Almeida Opera and the Aldeburgh Festival, and received a Genesis Prize for Opera. — Future projects include a double concerto for piano and violin, a co-commission for Duo Sol with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and the London Sinfonietta. He is Director of Victoria's Alfred Deakin Lectures.

Matthew Crosby

Matthew Crosby graduated from the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in 1981. His theatre credits include The Chronicles of Macbeth for Playbox and the Adelaide and Tokyo Festivals (1992); Faust for Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC) and King Lear for Playbox and tours to Tokyo and Korea [1993]; Blue Hour for the Adelaide Festival and in Melbourne [1996]; Meat Party for Playbox at Melbourne International Arts Festival (2000); Tokyo DasSHOKU Girl for Adelaide Cabaret Festival and Hazama at the Japan/Korea World Cup Soccer Arts Festival [2002]; and in 2004, Undertow, for the State Opera of South Australia at the Adelaide Festival of Arts.

Tim Harvey

Tim Harvey earned a Bachelor of Arts in Dance and Drama at Deakin University. He has worked as a performer, teacher and choreographer in Melbourne and around regional Victoria. In 2001 he began working with the ongoing Plan Protean project with choreographer Shelley Lasica, and has also performed with Dance Works in Sandra Parker's Work in Progress and Symptomatic. He has created his own works including Sinking, Feeling and Rubber Runway and often facilitates movement workshops in schools. He joined BalletLab in 2004 and is currently developing a new work with director Philip Adams.

Lok Meng Chue

Lok Meng Chue has been involved in nearly all of TheatreWorks' productions between 1985 and 1995, including numerous performances on stage, both locally and overseas; and backstage as director, stage/production manager, workshop coordinator and administrator. After a five-year break from the stage she returned to performance in Ong Keng Sen's production of the late Kuo Pao Kun's The Spirits Play both in Singapore [2000] and Japan (2001). An associate artistic director of TheatreWorks, in 2003 she managed the company's Continuum Asia Project (CAP), a one-year project spearheaded by Ong Keng Sen, focusing on people-to-people collaboration.

Gojo Masanosuke

A leading dancer and choreographer of the Gojo school of Japanese dance, Gojo Masanosuke is one of Japan's most celebrated onnagatas (female impersonators) and has earned high praise for his dramatic expressiveness and technique in performing a wide range of classical roles. He has also engaged actively in the creation and performance of new works. In his capacity as a scholar of traditional music and dance at the Kunitachi College of Music and the Musashino Academia Musicae Graduate School, he conducts analytical workshops in many cities including Paris, London, Düsseldorf and Rome. He is also a lecturer at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music.

Rizman Putra

Rizman Putra graduated from Royal
Melbourne Institute of Technology
[LaSalle-SIA College of The Arts, Singapore]
with a Bachelors Degree in Fine Art, He is
co-founder of the multidisciplinary art
collective, Kill Your Television (KYTV). His
collages, installations and drawings are the
primary force behind his outrageous
performances. Well-known for his alter ego,
Manic Jango, which has taken different
forms in his solo performances, he is also
a singer-songwriter for the popular
Singapore indie-rock band, Tiramisu. He
is a committee member of art collective
The Artists Village and has been involved
with many of their shows abroad and locally.

Kota Yamazaki

One of Japan's most renowned contemporary dancers, Kota Yamazaki is best known for devising choreography that combines the essence of the Japanese avant-garde butoh, classical ballet and American modern dance. In 1995 he founded his first company, Rosy CO. He generally works with a different cast for each production, exploring new forms of human relationships and community. In 2002 he founded a new company, Kota Yamazaki Fluid hug-hug Co, which has already presented two dances in the butch style, Meronna and Night on the Grass. His most recent choreography was made in Senegal with the Jant-bi company.

Justin Hill

Scenographer and architect, Justin Hill, is a board director of TheatreWorks. He studied architecture at the University of Adelaide and has since worked extensively in opera, musical theatre, and drama in both Asia and Australia. A founding member of TheatreWorks, he has designed more than 20 productions for the company.

Margie Medlin

Margie Medlin studied Visual Arts in Sydney, lighting design at Yale School of Drama [USA], and Scenography and Advanced Computer Applications for Theatre Design in London. She holds an MA in Interior Design from RMIT Melbourne. In addition to her work for theatre she is a film and video installation artist, exploring the interrelations of dance and the moving image.

Choy Ka Fai

Choy Ka Fai graduated from LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts with a Diploma in Fine Arts, and works with video installation, short films and theatrical performances. Video is a point of collaboration in producing interdisciplinary works with visual artists, dancers and musicians. He is a core member of KYTV.

Steve Adam

Steve (Stelios) Adam studied composition and computer music at La Trobe University, Melbourne. His electro-acoustic works have been broadcast in Australia and performed in Europe, North America and Asia. He has taught sound, composition and technology at various institutions in Australia and in 1995 established the new programs and technical facilities in composition and music technology at Monash University, where he is a PhD candidate.

Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Sydney Symphony Orchestra is Australia's largest orchestra. Many of the world's finest artists have appeared with it, including George Szell, Sir Thomas Beecham, Otto Klemperer, Igor Stravinsky, Lorin Maazel and Charles Dutoit. Highlights this year include Verdi's Requiem with the Chorus of the Rome Opera, the return of violinists Salvatore Accardo and Vadim Repin, and a complete cycle of Sibelius symphonies conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy.

Richard Gill

Conductor

Artistic Director of the Sydney Symphony's Education Program, Richard Gill is also Artistic Director of OzOpera, Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Canberra Symphony Orchestra and Adviser for the Musica Viva in Schools program. An internationally respected music educator specialising in opera, music theatre, vocal and choral training, he is recognised globally for his work in developing and creating opportunities for young musicians. Richard Gill is conducting Sing Your Own Opera and Midnite for this year's Melbourne International Arts Festival.

Jamie Allen

Tenor

Jamie Allen joined the Opera Australia Chorus in 1994 and in 1998 became a member of the company's Young Artists' Development Program, He won numerous awards in the Australian Singing Competition and in 1999 he was awarded the Rémy Martin Scholarship. He has since appeared with Opera Australia in a number of roles, and also has extensive experience on the concert platform.

Cantillation

Chorusmaster, Paul Stanhope

Vocal ensemble, Cantillation, was formed in 2001 by Antony Walker and Alison Johnston. Its performances have included Adams's Harmonium, Sofia Gubaidulina's Now Always Snow with the Sydney Symphony and Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Its recordings include Fauré's Requiem, Orff's Carmina burana and Händel's Messiah.

Riley Lee

Riley Lee began playing the shakuhachi [bamboo flute] in 1971 and was given the rank of Dai Shihan [grand master] in 1980. He received his PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of Sydney. An East-West Center grantee in 1985–86 and a Japan Foundation fellow in 1988–89, he was made Honorary Fellow of the University of Western Sydney in 1997. He has published numerous scholarly articles in national and international journals. In 1995, he cofounded Australia's dynamic Japanese festival drum group, TaikOz, and also helped found the Australian Shakuhachi Society. He has released over 50 recordings.

Wang Zheng Ting

Wang Zheng Ting is a composer and master performer of the sheng (Chinese mouth organ). He graduated from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and performed extensively in China before migrating to Australia in the late 1980s. He has lectured and performed widely in Australia, New Zealand, Asia, North America and Europe, and is director of the Australian Chinese Music Ensemble. He has been very active in collaborations with non-Chinese musicians to create Australian cross-cultural music. His book Chinese Music in Australia: Victoria, 1850s to mid-1990s was published in 1997. He recently attained a PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of Melbourne.

TheatreWorks (Singapore)

TheatreWorks [Singapore] was established in 1985. Its works reflect a concern with cultural negotiation and artistic exchanges, through a network of traditional and contemporary artists from different disciplines.

This year TheatreWorks turns 20 and plans to move into its new home, the icaa (international centre of asian arts). It will position itself within a landscape of all the Asian arts it has engaged with in the last decade, returning to its roots of encouraging young Singaporean creativity as well as continuing its laboratory activities. The icaa will be an independent international centre that engages with inter-Asian creativity and networking, and where individuals from other countries will gain an understanding of working with the global Asian urban metropolis, tradition and artists. The company will also start SCAN (Singapore Creative Arts Nucleus), which will work with groups of young creative individuals known as 'scanners'

In Singapore, TheatreWorks supports and nurtures local artists and develops Singapore arts through programs such as The Writers' Lab, creating theatre that has a Singaporean voice; and education and outreach programs within schools and institutions. Last year this activity included the creation of works that redefine the boundaries between science, art and 'live'



performance. To date, the company has created and presented over 165 productions, which are important landmarks in Singapore theatre history.

The company also continues to develop productions and programs for international audiences. Developments such as The Flying Circus Project have turned into internationally sought-after laboratory processes. Its works have challenged accepted history through a genre of documentary performances. It continues to accept commissions from international festivals and institutions, as well as initiate new creative programs internationally. One example is the Continuum Arts Project [CAP], a capacity-building program in Laos that has helped revived the Laotian Ramayana.

In 1999 TheatreWorks initiated the Arts Network Asia, a network of independent artists and arts activists promoting regional artistic collaborations and exchanges.

Under the artistic directorship of Ong Keng Sen, TheatreWorks' concerns continue to extend beyond those of Singapore. The company sees a strong synergy between nationalism and internationalism – a philosophy that informs its works and outlook.

Sandakan Threnody – Source Materials

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