

### CAROLINA PERFORMING ARTS

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

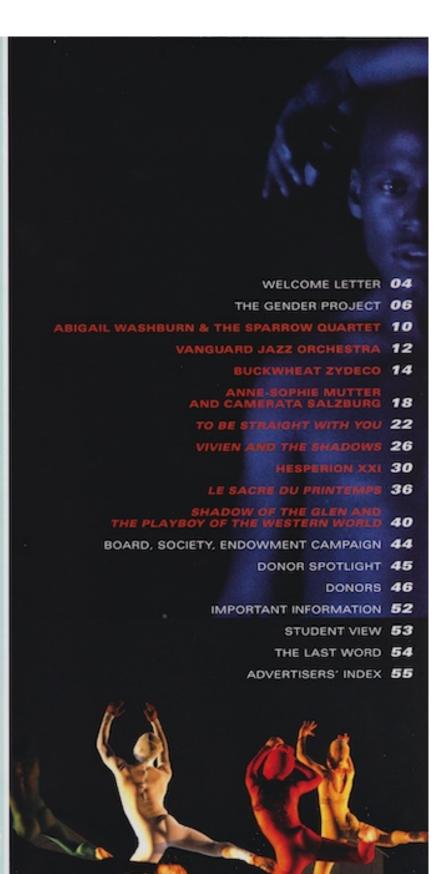
Carolina Performing Arts gratefully acknowledges the generous contributions of time, energy and resources from many individuals and organizations including the Office of the Provost, Office of the Chancellor, University Advancement, Department of Public Safety, the Faculty Council, Student Body Government and UNC News Services.

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# EXPERIMENTAL



world premiere

Vivien and The Shadows:

Ong Keng Sen/ Theatreworks

TUE, OCT 21 I 7:30PM



THE GENDER PROJECT

Conception, Direction: Ong Keng Sen

Collaborators/Performers: Charlotte Engelkes, Karen Kandel,

Julie Atlas Muz, Ong Keng Sen

Text: Chay Yew with additional text by company

Music: Kaffe Matthews Video: Brian Gothong Tan

Set: Justin Hill

Lighting: Scott Zielinski

Producer: Tay Tong

Production Stage Manager: Cindy Knight

Technical Director: Andy Lim Sound Engineer: Micha Meliani Project Manager: KC Hoo

www.theatreworks.org.sg

Theatreworks

72-13 Mohamed Sultan Road

Singapore 239007

Vivien and The Shadows is commissioned by Carolina Performing Arts, with support from the National Arts Council, Singapore.

### ■ TUE, OCT 21 ■ **7:30PM**

## "ONG KENG SEN IS ONE OF SINGAPORE'S... CULTURAL JEWELS"

(THE GUARDIAN, UK)

#### PROGRAM NOTES

I have always been fascinated by Vivien Leigh and Blanche Dubois; how the two women meld into each other in the popular imagination due to the great Hollywood film. I read the play as a teenager and saw the film around the same time; my fascination has not wavered since. The opportunity to create around this fascination presented itself when Emil Kang of Carolina Performing Arts invited me to make a new contemporary performance.

Vivien and The Shadows is inspired by the "taboo" concept of copying. Can we make something new when we copy? Is a copy an original? What happens when I ask a group of artist collaborators to come together to explore what is the copy in their individual practice of acting, writing, video/film, music, design? Personally, I am interested in the concept of copying as the road to perfection in Asian traditional theatre. There, copying is an established art form where a master will transfer his/her skills to a younger performer by having the latter copy the precise gestures, movements, singing, emotional trajectory, etc. In our workshops, we look at the mechanics of copying and also regeneration, through free reinvention of the original into new originals.

At the same time, Vivien and The Shadows embraces the idea of "dreaming the dream" – where one lives out one's fantasy and great hope, where one crosses the divide between the imagined and the real, where the imagined/fantasy perhaps makes living in the real world more bearable. This puts us on the slippery slope of Real vs. Artifice, the playfulness of an artificial theatre.

It leaves me to thank my accomplished collaborators, our production and technical colleagues, all of whom have contributed to the intricate layering in the performance. And of course, to Emil, Rosemary Holland and Carolina Performing Arts for their faith and vision; for making it possible to transform a fascination into a reality.

- Ong Keng Sen

#### ONG KENG SEN

An interdisciplinary performance practitioner, curator and researcher of artistic process, Ong Keng Sen has been the artistic director of TheatreWorks since 1988 and is artistic director of the newest creative space in Singapore, 72-13. Ong contributes actively to the evolution of an Asian identity and aesthetic for contemporary performance in the 21st century. His initiatives reflect his interest in performance that is intercultural, interdisciplinary and collaborative. His epic performance style of directing is seen in his Asian Shakespeare Trilogy (Lear, Desdemona and Search: Hamlet) and docu-performances (The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields; The Myths of Memory, Sandakan Threnody, Diaspora). His productions have toured internationally. For the U.S., his Silver River (2002) and Geisha (2006) were presented at the Lincoln Center Festival and Spoleto Festival; The Continuum: Beyond the Killing Fields was commissioned by the International Festival of Arts and Ideas (2001). In 1994, Ong conceptualized The Flying Circus Project (FCP), bringing together traditional and contemporary Asian artists from all disciplines and later including European, American and Arab artists. In 1999, he initiated Arts Network Asia to enable young Asian artists to collaborate and research across borders in Asia. Currently, Ong is the artistic director of a new festival, I AM HERE, THE TIME IS NOW, 2009 commissioned by the European Cultural Foundation, and is developing two projects with Linz, the European Cultural Capital 2009.

#### CHARLOTTE ENGELKES

Charlotte Engelkes, performance artist, vocalist, dancer and actress, uses a unique stage language somewhere between standup and variety show. Exploring the many facets of the human spirit, Engelkes' solo and ensemble pieces have gained her critical acclaim around the world. As a performer,



Ong Keng Sen

she has collaborated with Heiner Goebbels, Ong Keng Sen, Sasha Waltz, Raimund Hoghe, and Michael Laub/Remote Control, among others. Her own creations range from solos to ensemble pieces, such as Sweet, Miss Julie – the Musical and Miss Jekyll & Hyde. Her new performance Forellen and Me will be co-produced by Göteborg Dance & Theater Festival and Baltoscandal Festival (Rakvere).

#### KAREN KANDEL

Karen Kandel has appeared on and off-Broadway in addition to extensive tours in Europe and Asia. Previous collaborations with Ong Keng Sen included Geisha, Silver River, and The Global Soul. She is the recipient of three Village Voice Obie Awards, Drama League, Dramalogue, Connecticut Critics Circle, and Craig Noel Awards for performance. She is an artistic associate with New York's avant-garde troupe Mabou Mines, with whom she is participating in the Fox Foundation Resident Artist Program funded by the William & Eva Fox Foundation, administered by Theatre Communications Group.

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-The News and Observer



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### **EXPERIMENTAL:**

JULIE ATLAS MUZ

Julie Atlas Muz is an independent artist and burlesque star. The stalwart of the gender subculture underground scene in New York, she is known for her irreverent sense of humor, positive sexuality and glamour, addressing serious topics in a playful manner, championing the notion that performance in any context can challenge beliefs and change behavior. Her awards include Miss Exotic World 2006; Miss Coney

Island 2006; Paper Magazine Beautiful Person 2005, Whitney Biennale Award, 2004; and Worst Humiliation for Downtown Dance, Time Out NY, 2004. Muz has curated, produced, directed and performed at numerous venues including Andy Warhol Museum Treasure Box, 2004 Whitney Biennial; Noordercon Festival (Holland) 2008, Bumbershoot Festival (Seattle) and Teatro Circo (Portugal).

#### ON BLANCHE DUBOIS

**ELIZABETH NELSON** 



I remember falling for the ephemeral survivor Blanche DuBois. Born into an overcast Southern legacy of telling things as they should be rather than as they are, I was drawn to the way she played light and

shadow, spotlight and smokescreen, to construct a world within which she could make things beautiful. Blanche spun threadbare desperation into thickly protective illusions. She traded in desire. She conjured possibility with veiled illuminance and brightly euphemized macabre. Plus, I heard that Vivien Leigh played Blanche, and then went mad. This made me love her more.

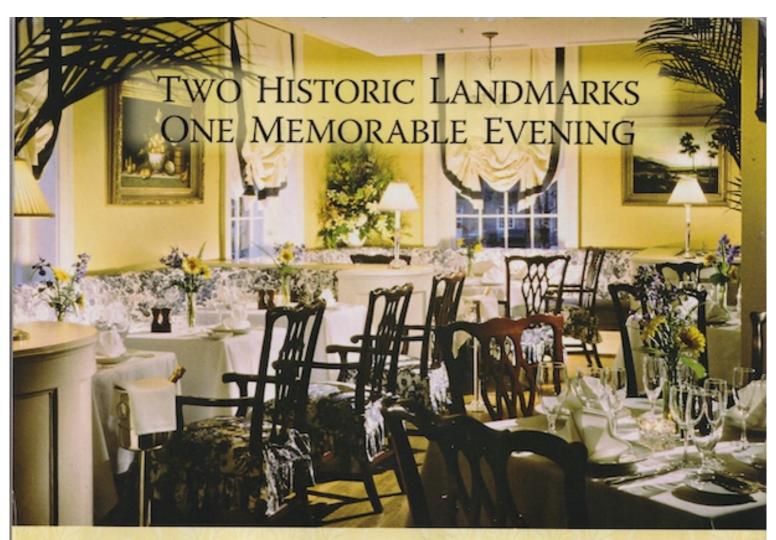
I read A Streetcar Named Desire during my own shadowy adolescence. An avid reader, I discovered many heroines to admire, but few to emulate. I could not identify with the essentially good girl heroines. Sexual violence, familial mental illness and the pervasive messages that my body was both too much and never enough foreclosed any possibility that pure love would conquer all.

I found solace in the arms of fallen women, antiheroines who transformed their stolen girlhoods into a ferocious imperative not just to survive, but to thrive, in a world that tried to contain them. They used their apparently irresistible bodies to get what they wanted on their own terms. Aggressive, erotic, resilient, glamorous and slightly mad, fallen women navigated the treacherous waters of womanhood with style. Some suffered a conversion into appropriate femininity, but most met a spectacular (and untimely) end. Personally, I thought a dramatic exit was the way to go. Blanche DuBois is one of these women. Beneath her delicate comportment and lyrical doublespeak, she is a survivor. Yet, she also embodies the fragility of desire that makes everyone breakable. In her darkly drawn world, obscured truths played under the rough sounds of the carnal everyday like the memory of song, or a gunshot. The fluidities, excesses and variations of femininity, masculinity and sexuality play with and against each other, in and out of time, with irreversible consequences. Her story reveals what kinds of truth push already excitable desires past ravishment and into madness.

Vivien Leigh is technically not one of these women, but she was to me. Her mythical beauty and shadowy life excited and terrified me. While I romanticized her bi-polar illness and fight to be taken seriously as an actress despite her beauty then, I respect her survival and success more contemplatively now. She survived beauty and made art of her pain. Plus, fantasizing about Leigh's Blanche pushed me toward my unspoken truth. I am both the delicate boy and fallen woman: insufficient and excessive, queer and slightly mad.

Ironically, it is Blanche's desire for innocence that is everyone's undoing. Her iconic dependence on the kindness of strangers may be a retreat to the shadows, or it may be a refusal to surrender light. Vivien and The Shadows challenges our perceptions of light and dark, identifications of self and other, and possibilities for embodiment and expression. In this world, we are both the paper lantern veiling the light and the radiant heat burning at the core of every fire.

Elizabeth Nelson is a doctoral student in Communication Studies with a concentration in Performance Studies.









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