



THEATREWORKS
PRESENTS

INCARNATION OF THE BEAST

BY JOAVIEN NG

A THEATREWORKS PRODUCTION

15 - 17 OCTOBER 2015 • 8PM

72-13

Visit our blog to find out more about our exciting creatives involved in *Incarnation of the Beast*

CONVERSATION WITH JOAVIEN NG

What was the genesis for Incarnation of the Beast? How did the idea for this work come about?

In 2013, Ong Keng Sen spoke to me and asked if I would like to create a new work. I answered him with a firm 'yes'. He asked me to send him a proposal. The months that follow after that conversation were basically me trying to sort my thoughts out. 'What would I do?'

In 2012, I made a *Life performance*, in which I created a utopia. I seriously believed that would be the last time I create and perform. It would be an end of my artistic journey but not by choice. At that time, my pessimism towards contemporary dance and the industry was at its peak.

I made a decision that I would attempt to find this utopia that I have created on stage in my real life. And that would only be possible if I could detach myself from any hope, wish or disappointment that I had been harbouring, be it in relationships, people, or the arts. I made a decision not to think about dance. I contacted other artist friends and asked them to involve me in any other artistic expression except dance. I wanted to do something else to fuel my creativity. I wanted to paint, sing, act, anything but dance. I stopped talking about dance. I wanted to forget dance.

Keng Sen's words came to me at that point in my life. That was the genesis of *Incarnation of the Beast*.

After saying yes to Keng Sen, I was quite lost for a couple of months. What do I want to do? The only thing I knew was that I wanted the revelation of the work to be organic. That it has to look for me and not the other way around.

So I started documenting my random thoughts, events or occasions I was in, websites that I surfed, articles, music, movies or news that caught my attention. I did this for possibly three or four months before I wrote the concept of this new work.

About two weeks before I was supposed to send in my proposal, I sat in front of my computer and started to describe an image I saw in my mind.

I saw a congregation of people. They had strange masks so I couldn't see any faces. They seemed to be discussing something but without words. I was very drawn to it. I wanted to know their conversations, but I felt awkward to intrude. Nevertheless, I watched them from afar, I was mesmerised by their mysterious and hauntingly beautiful presence.

Then I heard Mozart's Requiem.

Why are you interested in tragedy, rituals and death? What sparked that interest?

I was inspired by that image that came to my mind as mentioned earlier. But then again, that image came from my mind, so I guess I am responsible for it. From that image, I felt a mix bag of tragedy, ritual and death. But not in an epic way, it is almost mundane.

I think tragedy, rituals and death are closely weaved into one's life. You really can't decide whether you want tragedy or not, likewise for ritual and death. If a tragedy hits you, the world is not going to slow down for you to deal with it, you have to carry on.

I think these three words have been overrated and dramatised in contemporary lives.

As you were working with the nine performers over the past two months, how did their personal experiences shape the work? What did each performer bring to the table?

I believe all bodily shapes, muscular reflexes and movement have their history. The body is shaped by a person's personal experience. I never had the intention to make a work where everyone looks or moves the same way.

Before the process started in August, I had the image of the opening scene in mind. That was it. I did not plan any movements or scenes. I simply couldn't because this work uses their body, not mine. Unlike my other works where I performed in, I could anticipate the aesthetic of the movement. But not this time. I had to wait till I saw them in August.

The initial stage of the process was asking each performer to propose their individual ideas in movement in response to certain tasks or questions I post to them, e.g. make a choreography of a ritual they do. There were also some sessions where we create material based on their personal sharing of their life stories.

The most precious experience is how these nine performers bring themselves into this empty canvas of *Incarnation of the Beast* and bare it all with full commitment.



How would you like the audience to approach this evening's performance?

Sometimes, we want too much clarity and context. We want to understand and define things to the extent that it leaves us no space for sensorial experience and interpretation. It is an artistic decision to remove any narrative in the work. I hope the audience will simply come in and take in the experience of being in the space and bodies.

How does this work address Tragedy?

We tend to view tragedy as distant and epic. As Aristotle said, 'A tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious ... in a dramatic rather than narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish a catharsis of these emotions.'

I think the real tragedy is what we are experiencing in today's society, where civilization and humanity continue to retrograde. Tragedy entangles and manipulates us in a constant and mundane fashion.

Our bodies are ingrained with mirages of modern tragedy. A reflection of a seemingly obsolete human interaction.

Modern tragedy as a social phenomenon detaches who we are as a collective. Our innate body craves for superficial indulgence to desensitise our consciousness.

From the representation of epic heroes glorified in the sculptured bodies to the individual manifestation of our today's tragic experiences, our process surfaces the un-said and un-examined struggle to reconcile the habitual restless body and idle mind with the reality of today.

"There is chaos in stillness, and in the same time, to find calm in the midst of chaos. Thank you Joavien for reminding me that there is beauty in being imperfect. We are not only human. If we believe that the universe is within us, there's a lot to explore."

– Ali Anwar

"... to expose our bodies, idiosyncratic and native to ourselves, without the usual covers of posture or style and away from the smokescreen of 'performing'. What remains when all that's left is the body trapped within a series of tasks to be performed?"

– Bjorn Lee Varella

"Maybe I was being unrealistic, my body was in so much pain ... There were times when I felt I had taken possession of my body again. That it was no longer just this thing that I was trapped in. That was a very good feeling."

– Dana Lam

We are fractured spectres
reaching for a sky.

We are luminous tellers
with new answers to why.

– Deborah Emmanuel

"Contemporary art has always been a challenge to grasp let alone appreciate ... To drift with the moment and locate the life in enduring stillness."

– Hamzah Alsagoff

"It's tiring but exciting, working with the fabulous group, as we use our bodies to tell stories in ways I never imagined before. Joavien reads bodies in an incredible way."

– Isaac Lim

"Ouch. Ouch. WOW"

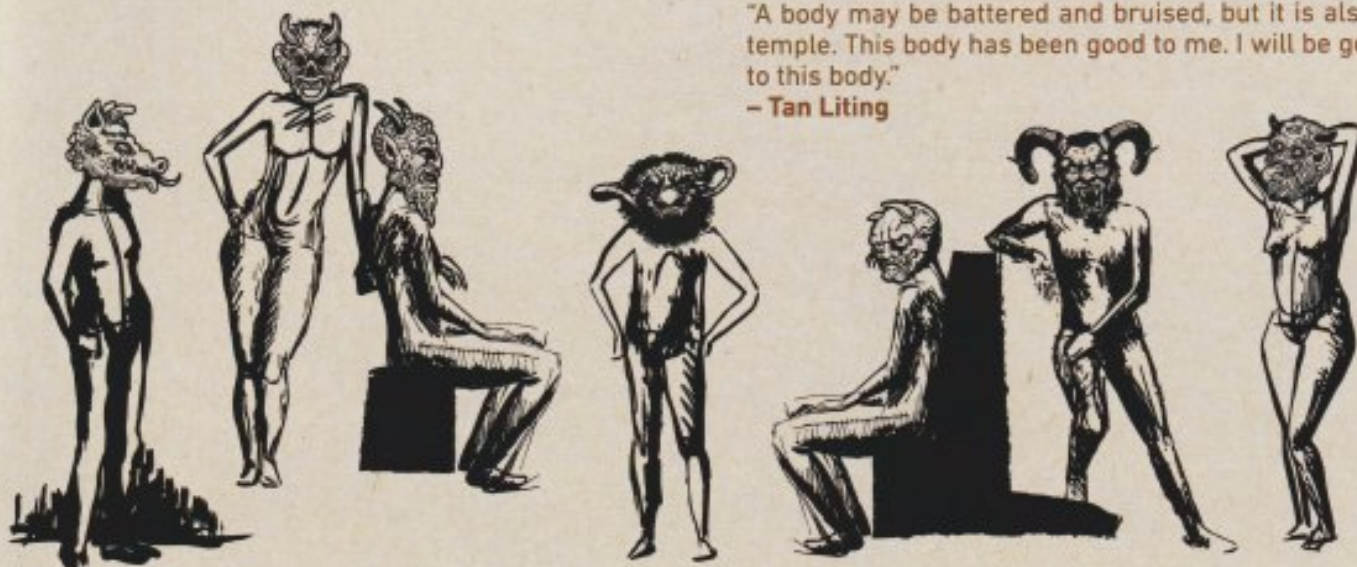
– Ivan Lim

"I never realized my body was capable of this."

– Riley Huang

"A body may be battered and bruised, but it is also a temple. This body has been good to me. I will be good to this body."

– Tan Liting



CREDITS

Conceived & Directed by: Joavien Ng

in collaboration with

Performers: Ali Anwar, Bjorn Lee Varella, Dana Lam, Deborah Emmanuel, Hamzah Alsagoff, Isaac Lim, Ivan Lim, Riley Huang, Tan Liting

Lighting Designer: Lim Woan Wen

Music Composer & Sound Artist: Darren Ng

Production Manager: Natalie Lim

Stage Manager: Natasha May

Technical Manager: Huang Xiangbin

Lighting Operator: Ben Ong

Technical Team: Ian Tan, Naziruldin Amzari Ahmad

TheatreWorks Board of Directors

Caroline Lim

Heman Chong

Justin Hill

Kalyani Kausikan

Lim Kay Tong

Monica Alsagoff

Ong Keng Sen

Sharon Lim (Chairperson)

Stephane Benoist

Tay Tong

TheatreWorks Team

Artistic Director (on leave of absence): Ong Keng Sen

Managing Director: Tay Tong

Administrator / Ticketing: Ong Soo Mei

Project Manager: Mervyn Quek

Engagement Executive: Brendan Tan

Marketing & Partnerships Executive: Ivan Chng

Finance & Accounts: Rosalyn Zaldua

TheatreWorks Intern (current): Michelle Kee

The presentation of *Incarnation of the Beast* is part of TheatreWorks' long established belief in developing and nurturing Singapore artists. It is also part of TheatreWorks' aim to present innovative contemporary performances and artistic expressions that offer Singapore audiences alternatives.

Its home, 72-13, is an incubator for artistic experiments by both artists and creatives, while being a consistent conduit for dialogues between disciplines and cultures.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

More details are on our website of the following productions happening at 72-13.

5 / 12 / 19 December 2015:

50/50

by Loo Zihan

17 – 20 February 2016:

RE/PLAY Dance Edit

By Junnosuke Tada

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With Support From



CULTURAL
MATCHING
FUND

a.r.t.s.fund

金基氏李
LEE FOUNDATION

Kuo Pao Kun
Foundation

Purple Sage

webvisions
www.webvisions.com

Engagement Programme Sponsors

Preferred Banquet Partner

New Media Partner

TheatreWorks (S) Ltd is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Major Grant for the period from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2016.

TheatreWorks would like to thank the following:

Members of the press and the media

All ambassadors and those who have made *Incarnation of the Beast* possible