



singapore arts festival

Presents



# GEISHA

TheatreWorks / Ong Keng Sen

9 & 10 June 2006  
Victoria Theatre

Geisha presents a vision of pop and traditional Japan with a tapestry of stories from geishas, maikos (apprentice geishas), clients, their wives, okamisans (mama-sans) and their offspring.

Commissioned by the Singapore Arts Festival, in association with the Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston and the Lincoln Center Festival in New York.





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# G E I S H A

TheatreWorks / Ong Keng Sen

**Conceived and Directed by**

Ong Keng Sen

**Electronic Music Composed by**

Toru Yamanaka

**Collaborators – Performers**

Karen Kandel

Gojo Masanosuke

Kineya Katsumatsu

**Text**

Robin Loon

**Costume Design**

Mitsushi Yanaihara

**Lighting Design**

Scott Zielinski



# Chairman's Message

Welcome to the 20th edition of the Singapore Arts Festival!

Under the Festival tagline of One Season, Many Faces, we are privileged to present some of the world's most riveting works. From the mainstream and classical, to the progressive and experimental, this is a Festival which promises to entertain, challenge and inspire.

It showcases no less than six world premieres, six Asian premieres and over 400 performances from Singapore, Asia and the world. In addition, there is an array of outreach activities including Asian Showcase, Arts on the Move, Kidsfest, Visual Arts, Special Events and Closing Celebrations.

On behalf of the National Arts Council, I thank our numerous sponsors and partners who offered their generous support to the Festival. I also extend our warmest gratitude to our audiences for your passion and valued presence at the Festival.

I wish you a season of multi-faceted experiences in the arts!

EDMUND CHENG  
CHAIRMAN  
NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL

# Oh, to be a Geisha!

"Kimonos were a special hit. Vienna was just the place; on long evenings at the winter-season balls, or on balmy summer evenings at garden-fetes. Princess Pauline Metternich demonstrated on these occasions that she always had plenty of good, entertaining ideas. Her many parties were always the high spots of Viennese social life. For example, a special attraction turned out to be her 'Japanese Cherry-Blossom Fest' in the Prater on three days in May in the year 1901. This popular Viennese amusement venue had been completely transformed into a Japanese landscape. Thousands of Viennese swarmed the Prater. On one day, it was even reported that more than 50,000 visitors were supposed to have turned up – geisha with their gentlemen friends.

Europe was enchanted by the geisha's powdered little face, by her fine dark slanted eyes, by her cherry-red painted mouth forever smiling, by her idiosyncratic movements. She wore colourful dresses embroidered with flowers and butterflies adorned her rich, shining black hair. She was new, and came into fashion, as it were, overnight. She was put onto the opera stage and into the marionette-theatre, she was painted on fans, vases and screens, she was modelled in china and bronze, she was cut out of wood, and today she is to be found in millions of examples throughout Europe, from the palaces of the mighty, to the most humble of dwellings. No prima-donna has ever been celebrated as much as this droll, whimsical little Miss Chrysanthemum."

This hysterical quote signals the high society's fascination in Austrian women costume-masquerading as geisha in the early twentieth century and geisha as a European fad. This hysteric removed me to reflect on how local society perceived geisha, not just American and European visions.

In Japan, I also found a fascination with the geisha in Japanese aesthetics. The geisha was the lead character in the repertory many a kabuki play or nihon buyoh classical dance. Further, Japanese aesthetics included many short songs (ko-uta) and specialised dances of the geisha. One of my memorable experiences was a spring in 1999 in Kyoto where I was introduced to the arts of the geisha. In those magical three days of a cherry blossom festival, I followed intimate sessions of chamber performances, exchanges and finally the kitsch miyako-odori which is the professional full length dance-theatre-concert created every year by the geisha for the general public.

Why has she fascinated the Japanese imagination?

This was the starting point to begin from classical Japanese aesthetics to piece together the public image of the geisha. Subsequently going beyond the painted image as much as the documentary interviews and the geisha allow us to peel away some preconceived notions to reveal other layers which remain equally elusive am I closer to understanding the geisha? Or perhaps she is simply another professional with a code of ethics human limitations trying to live life to the fullest potential?

In my dreams I am haunted by the face of an old woman, perhaps eighty years of age. Her eyelids are drooping, her lips are downturned, her face has transformed into a mass of folds, sagging skin. She is painted in full white make up, a cherry-red drop painted on her mouth, the black accents at the corner of her eyes heighten their shape. Her hair is kept in place austerely by a brilliant purple cloth acting as a hairnet. She is calm, strong, dignified. She is waiting. Both grotesque and compelling. The face of dorian gray which has collapsed in the blink of eyelid? Or is it the radiance which continues to glow beneath the artifice, the physical evidence of a life lived?

Central to the Japanese imagination is the geishas as part of the floating world, the water trade is a term used for the industry of geishas and other entertainment industries of the night. In this floating world, anything is possible because it is but an illusion which



would fade by morning. But during the early morning hours, the dreamtime is intoxicatingly real indeed. I am fascinated by this dreamtime with the geisha as our navigator. A central image of the performance is the construction of Karen Kandel into the geisha by the costume designer onstage. Fragmented elements coalescing into a whole, transforming into a silhouette world, the ultimate illusion is the suggestion. This is perhaps the symbol of the entire production.

I am indebted to a lighting designer in Tokyo who shared with me the dilemmas of modern society and the geisha world. This very ordinary conversation in a coffee house was the turning point in my understanding of the geisha world, personal desire and community obligation. And of course, Gojo Masanosuke, it was after all an early morning train ride together to the land of the sound of music, Salzburg, that gave birth to this production of *Geisha*.

Ong Keng Sen



# Lies and Truth

(Song of the love suicide)

Of lies and truth

Trying not to be deceived but yet deceived

After us the deluge

My feelings are because of you

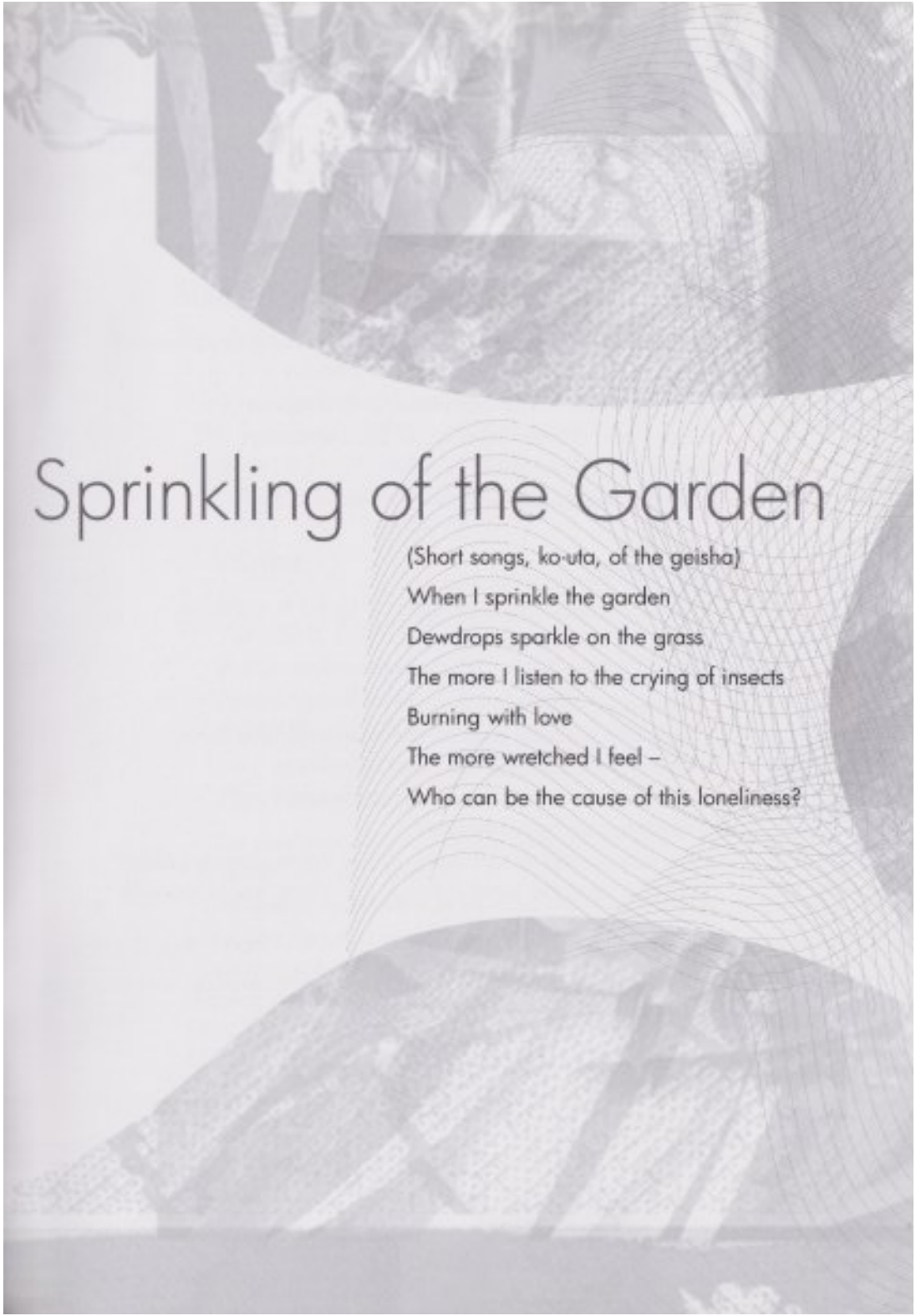
Inside the boat on Mitsumata River,

Please understand my profound feelings

"Acting as hosts, and not as maids, geisha are called upon to exercise initiative, individuality, and ingenuity in dealing with customers. They should be able to draw out a shy guest, turn the conversation toward subjects they know their customers are interested in, and generally be sensitive to the mood of the gathering as it develops. No one could accomplish such goals by being servile. Geisha are remarkably self-possessed women, I have found; and this, among other characteristics, sets them apart from the common bar hostess, who is likely to be a cynical panderer to the worst excesses of the Japanese male ego. The interaction between guest and geisha depends on mutual respect, and it is much less one-sided than many male-female interactions in Japan. A geisha usually gives as good as she gets. The older ones, especially, will brook no nonsense from rude customers."

Liza Dalby, *Geisha* (1983)





# Sprinkling of the Garden

(Short songs, ko-uta, of the geisha)

When I sprinkle the garden

Dewdrops sparkle on the grass

The more I listen to the crying of insects

Burning with love

The more wretched I feel –

Who can be the cause of this loneliness?



# The Seasons

## Spring

Have the plum blossoms come out? How about the cherry blossoms?  
A willow tree yielding to the wind  
A Japanese rose flirting and showing off its colour  
Which shall I choose, blossoms of plum or cherry?  
On the branch of a green pine tree  
I want to make plum and cherry blossoms bloom

## Summer

Crossing a pier with a lantern  
Walking with light steps  
Flowing away from Ryogoku  
Leaving for Ohkawa  
Aboard a pleasure boat on the moon-lit Sumida River  
Lowering the bamboo blind and whispering  
• We simply come closer and sit face to face  
"Boatman, we've got through"  
"We have arrived at Komagata. Oops! We're going to collide!"  
"When I hear the word Azuma, it reminds me of my wife"

### **Autumn**

Carrying a blade of silver pampas grass  
Tipsy in a pumpkin garden  
He's in a merry mood, having sake or dumplings  
The water trench is filled with thick algae  
Late into the night, enticing the rain  
Music from a distant village is heard, under the moon

### **Winter**

Snow is falling heavily around us  
The folding screen is the go-between of love  
A triple-layered mattress with plover patterns  
A nesting bird returning to its home tree  
It's still too early to leave

### **The New Year**

The new year—pines and bamboos on the gate  
Lobsters and sour oranges  
The serene voice of the south wind chasing the birds  
The Lion Dance to drive away evil spirits  
Bouncing a ball rhythmically  
Playing battledore and shuttlecock  
One, two, three, and four—wishing the world a good year  
As always, a long strip of dried seaweed attached to gifts



## Ong Keng Sen

Interdisciplinary performance practitioner, curator, artistic process researcher, Asian arts networker; Artistic Director of TheatreWorks since 1988 and is now artistic director of the newest space in Singapore, 72-13. Ong graduated from the National University of Singapore in law in 1987. In 1992, Ong did his post-graduate studies on intercultural performance at the Performance Studies Department, Tisch School of Arts, New York University, on a Fulbright Scholarship.

Ong directed the Tokyo premiere of *Lear*, in 1997, to critical acclaim. It went on to tour eight cities in Asia, Europe, and Australia, including a performance at Berlin's *Theatre der Welt* in 1999. Ong's works have been seen at various prestigious festivals and theatres, including The Lincoln Center (New York, USA), Joseph Papp/Public Theater, (New York, USA), The Kitchen (New York, USA), Spoleto Festival USA (Charleston, USA), Institute of Contemporary Arts (London, UK), House of World Cultures (Berlin, Germany), Kampnagel (Hamburg, Germany), Centre National de la Danse (Paris, France), Schauspielhaus (Vienna, Austria), Zürcher Theater Spektakel (Zurich, Switzerland), Schouwburg (Rotterdam, Netherlands), Kronborg Castle (Elsinore, Denmark), Dansens Hus (Stockholm, Sweden), Dansens Hus (Oslo, Norway), Adelaide Festival, Melbourne International Arts Festival, Hong Kong Arts Festival as well as Bunkamura Cocoon and the Morishita Studios (Tokyo, Japan).

Ong created, curated and was artistic director of *In Transit*, an annual three-week interdisciplinary arts festival in Berlin that debuted in June 2002. Since becoming a curator for The House of World Cultures (Berlin), Ong continues to curate and created *Insomnia 48*; in October 2004, a 48-hour non-stop event of Thai, Indonesian and Singaporean cutting edge young artists to open *Seni*, a visual arts festival in Singapore. He curated for the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London the *Insomnia* season, in February 2005, which focused on contemporary expressions in Phnom Penh, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia. In September 2005, opening concurrently with the Yokohama Triennale where he was exhibiting, he curated a three-month long exhibition about contemporary South East Asia in the House of World Cultures. Ong also curated the programme *Urban Fetishes*, at the Tanzquartier (Austria) in April 2006 and will lead a laboratory and symposium, *Connection Barents*, in the Nordic countries in June 2006.

Ong is a holder of several foundation fellowships, including the Japan Foundation, British Council, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and Asian Cultural Council (New York). Ong is the first Singapore artist to have received both the Young Artist Award (1992) and the Cultural Medallion Award (2003) for Singapore.

## **Toru Yamanaka**

Toru Yamanaka is born in Osaka, Japan. As a music composer, producer, club DJ and organiser, Yamanaka creates his works with various artists around the world. From 1984 to 2000, he joined the renowned Japanese group, Dumb Type, as a music composer and sound designer. While he has produced many albums, he enjoys and continues to perform 'live' all over the world, creating art with a strong relationship to the ever-moving society.

## **Karen Kandel**

Karen Kandel is a New York City based performer who thrives on intercultural artistic interaction. Although *Geisha* marks her third production with director Ong Keng Sen (*Silver River*, 2000 and *The Global Soul*, 2002), this is their first collaboration on a project from the beginning. As a performer, she has received three OBIE Awards, a Drama League, Dramalogue, San Diego Critics and Connecticut Critics Circle Awards. Kandel is an Artistic Associate with avant-garde theatre troupe, Mabou Mines. Kandel received an Asian Cultural Council grant to conduct performance research in March 2006.

## **Gojo Masanosuke**

Gojo Masanosuke is a dancer/choreographer of the Gojo School of Japanese dance. The Gojo School was founded by Gojo Tamami, a popular female dancer, who detached herself from the Hanayagi School in 1941 and created many new masterpieces that remain in the repertory today. Today, the Gojo School occupies a unique position in the world of Japanese dance with its double foundation in the classical repertory and the creation of new masterpieces.

A leading dancer of the school, Gojo Masanosuke has earned high praise for his dramatic expressiveness, which is backed by a sure technique, in performing a wide range of classical roles, including both female and male roles. Gojo has also carried on the spirit of the Gojo School by creating and performing new works, including *Nijinsky-sho* (Nijinsky Encomium), *Yoma Densetsu* (A Weird Legend), etc.

In his capacity as a scholar of traditional music and dance at the Kunitachi College of Music and the Musashino Academia Musicae Graduate School, Gojo conducts analytical workshops that have been consistently well received in many cities including Paris, London, Dusseldorf and Rome. He is also a lecturer at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music.

## **Kineya Katsumatsu**

Born in Gunma Prefecture in 1962, Kineya Katsumatsu started learning the shamisen when he was eight years old and studied Minyo (Japanese folk song) under Hidesuke Fujimoto and Hideo Fujimoto. When he was 12 years old, he started to learn Nagauta (long epic song) under Katsusyo Kineya and was given the name Ktatushoya Kineya. He studied more under both Katusaburo Kineya, the 7th headmaster, and Katukuni Kineya. He then studied kouta (ditty) under the second head master Shigeko Koroku and was given the name of Shigeya Koroku. He continued to study Kouta under the head master of Chie Senshi. Katsumatsu went on to learn Utazawa (a kind of Japanese popular ballad) under the 6th Shibakin Utazawa and succeeded to name of the 5th Katumatsu Kineya in 2005.

Katsumatsu has performed widely in Europe and has worked on many performances in Japan.

## **Robin Loon**

Currently an Assistant Professor at the Theatre Studies Programme at the National University of Singapore, Robin Loon has worked closely with TheatreWorks since 1990. A pioneer member of the TheatreWorks' Writers' Laboratory since 1991, Loon's collaboration with TheatreWorks include *Us in Singapore* (1993), *Longing* (1994), *Broken Birds* (1995), *SPH Festival of New Writing* (1996), *Destinies of Flowers in the Mirror* (1997), *Workhorse Afloat* (1997), *The Global Soul* (2003), *Shanty: Follow That Dream* (2004). He now hopes to nurture and encourage a new generation of adventurous and risk-taking writers for the Singapore stage.

## **Mitsushi Yanaihara**

Having graduated from Kuwasawa Design Institute in 1995, Mitsushi Yanaihara went on to established his own brand 'un per trop'. In 2001, Yanaihara established a new brand 'Nibroll about street' and have since launched various collections to good reviews.

With a brand concept of "making the dividing line unclear between daily life and less ordinary situations by putting the essences of less ordinary situations into an ordinary daily life", Nibroll about street intends to make clothes which erase the sense of distance between fashion and art. This is the first collaboration between Yanaihara and Ong Keng Sen.



## Scott Zielinski

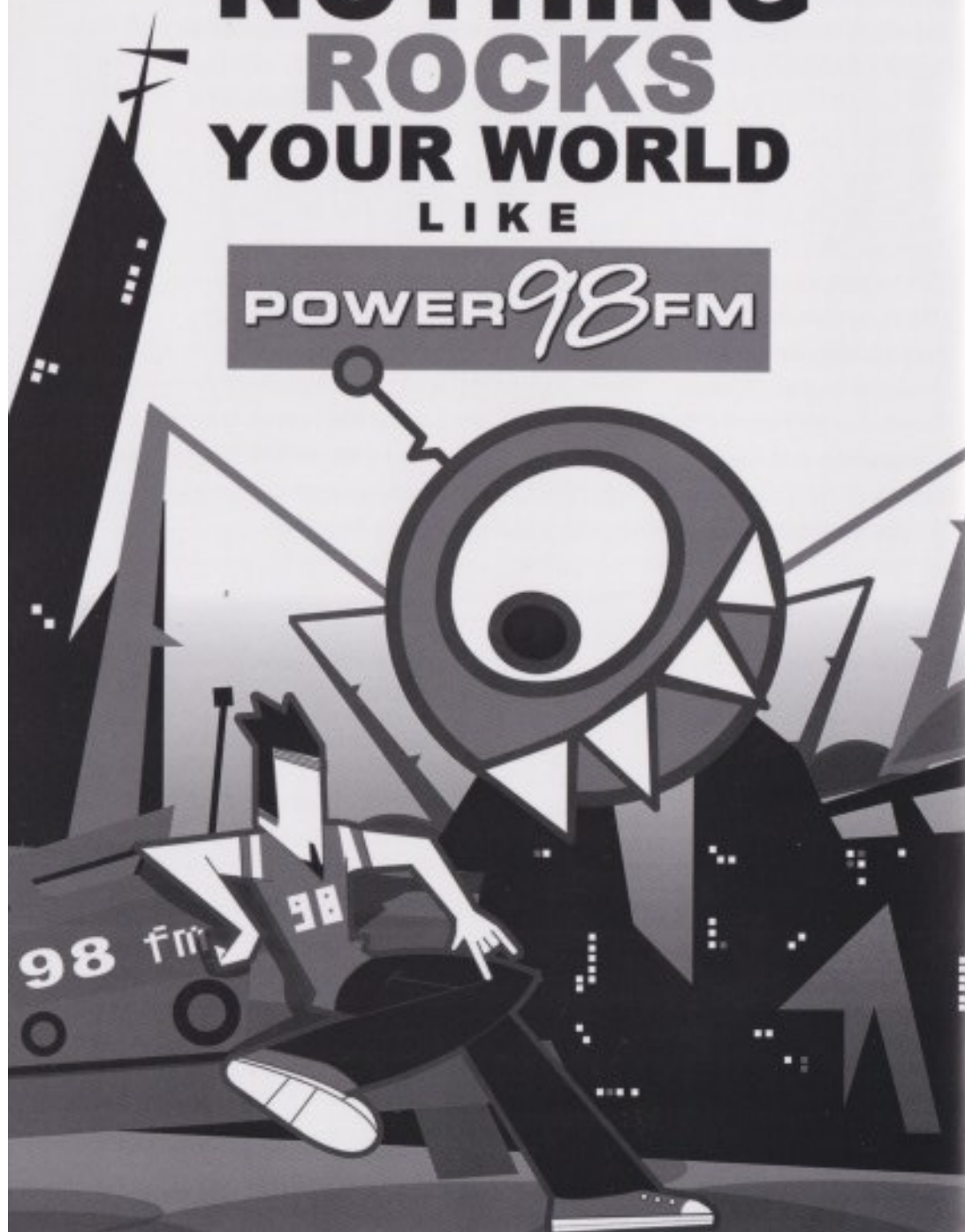
Scott has created lighting designs for theatre, dance, and opera throughout the world. His designs in New York include the Broadway production of *Topdog/Underdog* as well as productions for Lincoln Center Theater and The Joesph Papp Public Theatre, among many others. His designs have also been seen extensively throughout the United States where he has worked with many directors and choreographers including Robert Wilson, George C. Wolfe, Sir Peter Hall, Richard Jones, Ron Daniels, Tina Landau, Tony Kushner, Marion McClinton, Hal Hartley, Anna Deveare Smith, Mary Zimmerman, James Robinson, Twyla Tharp, Helgi Tomassen, and James Kudelka.

Work outside the US includes productions for the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain, Lyric Theatre Hammersmith (London), Edinburgh Festival (Scotland), Adelaide Festival (Australia), Theatre Neumarkt (Zurich), Schauspielhaus (Vienna), Sommertheater Festival (Hamburg), In Transit (Berlin), Asian Arts Festival, TheatreWorks (Singapore), and Fukuoka (Japan). Scott received his Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Design at the Yale University School of Drama. He is pleased to once again have the opportunity to work with long time collaborator Ong Keng Sen.



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# Production Team

**Producer**

Tay Tong

**Technical Manager**

Jim Larkin

**Stage Manager**

Kathryn Hindley

**Translator**

Sumida Michiyo

**Master Electrician**

Tom Pearl

**Wig Technician / Specialist**

Yuji Hasono

**Sound Engineer**

Sebastian Song

**Gojo Masanosuke's Dresser**

Teruo Miyazaki

**Karen Kandel's Wig Designer**

Tomoya Nakamura

**Toru Yamanaka's Assistants**

Akira Ishihara  
Rie Yamanaka

**Kabuki Costume Consultant**

Taiji Yashiro

**Publicity and Marketing**

Mervyn Quek

**Production Coordinator**

Nora Lim





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Staff of Victoria Theatre  
Members of the press and media

And all individuals who have helped in one way or another to make this production possible.



Justin Hill  
Lim Kay Tong  
Lim Siau Chong  
Ong Keng Sen

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**TheatreWorks** (Singapore) was established in 1985. Under the artistic direction of Ong Keng Sen, it is an international performance company based in Singapore, known for its reinvention of traditional performance through a juxtaposition of cultures, along with its cutting edge productions that set new benchmarks for artistic excellence. Its works reflect a concern with cultural negotiation and artistic exchanges with artists, through a network of traditional and contemporary artists from different disciplines.

In September 2005, TheatreWorks opened a new space, 72-13, at Mohamed Sultan Road. 72-13's primary purpose is to encourage collaborations, house residencies from artists around the world and to encourage hybrid creative expressions from young Singaporeans. The company also expanded to include the International Centre of Asian Arts (ICAA) and the Singapore Creative Arts Nucleus (SCAN). ICAA is a R&D Centre, a performance centre, a forum and a platform for Asia's expression and its relationship to the rest of the world while SCAN is an incubator for emerging creatives.

TheatreWorks continues to support and nurture Singapore artists and develop Singapore arts through its developmental programmes like The Writers' Lab that produces and promotes Singapore writing, creating a theatre that is Singapore and with a Singaporean voice; and the education and outreach programmes that work closely with schools and institutions, bringing the magic of theatre and drama to youths and the general public. To date, TheatreWorks has created and presented over 165 productions, which are important landmarks in Singapore theatre history.

Internationally, TheatreWorks continues to develop its various productions and programmes that have gained international recognition. Homegrown research and development projects like The Flying Circus Project have turned into internationally known and sought-after laboratory processes. Its progressive outlook results in works that have challenged accepted history through a genre of documentary performances. It continues to do commissions by international festivals and institutions, as well as initiate new creative programmes internationally. For instance, The Continuum Arts Project or CAP, a capacity building programme in Laos that 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. With funding from the Ford Foundation, it was hosted and managed by TheatreWorks for the first three terms, ending in 2004.



### **About 72-13** [www.72-13.com](http://www.72-13.com)

A converted rice warehouse, 72-13 is the new home of TheatreWorks ([www.theatreworks.org.sg](http://www.theatreworks.org.sg)). The space is flexible enough to be a gallery, a cinema and a theatre. Its primary purpose, through SCAN (Singapore Creative Arts Nucleus) and the ICAA (International Centre of Asian Arts), is to encourage collaborations, house residencies from creatives around the world and to encourage hybrid creative expressions from young Singaporeans. TheatreWorks, responding to the needs of the creative scene in Singapore, has consciously created 72-13 to have a wider and a more inclusive agenda. This is the first year of the soft opening of 72-13.



### **About International Centre of Asian Arts (ICAA)**

ICAA is a R&D Centre, a performance centre, a forum and a platform for Asia's expression and its relationship to the rest of the world. It recognises the cultural diversity of Asia, and looks at the continuum that is Asia. In particular, the ICAA is about collaborations, research, networking, dialogues across cultures and disciplines. It is a site where individuals from around the world, through residencies and projects, develop the diverse perspectives of a global Asian urban metropolis, its continuities and disruptions with Asian tradition, the multiple contexts of everyday life and how they interact with the practices of Asian artists.

### **About Singapore Creative Arts Nucleus (SCAN)**

Singapore Creative Arts Nucleus (SCAN) will take on the role of nurturing young and emerging artists. These artists will have 72-13 as an incubator and platform for their creativity and trans-disciplinary processes. SCAN will be an organic interface between the arts and the creative industries. International artists will be invited to be sources of inspiration and as role models to inspire Singapore creatives. These international artists will be leaders in their own fields and will dialogue with the local creatives to generate ideas as well as provide the necessary stimuli.

Organised by



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