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presents

TRIP TO THE SOUTH



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Written by **TONY PEREZ**

Directed by **NONON PADILLA**



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THEATREWORKS

presents

TRIP TO THE SOUTH

Written By
Tony Perez

Directed By
Nonon Padilla

Assisted By
Dawn Westerhout

With
Lok Meng Chue
Lim Kay Siu
Jacintha Abisheganaden
Neo Swee Lin
Lim Yu-Beng
Tan Kheng Hua
Alec Tok
Gerald Chew
K. Rajagopal
Ng Chin Han

Set Design
Justin Hill

Lighting Design
Kalyani P S Kausikan

Sound Design
Tan Choon Ping

and

Original Music Composed By
Mark Chan

22 August - 14 September 1991
THE BLACKBOX



ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

"Trip To The South" opens our Asean season. The seeds of this season were sown in Aug 1988 when TheatreWorks began a cultural exchange with Five Arts Centre in Kuala Lumpur. This exchange gave birth to a Singaporean "3 Children" and a Malaysian "Peter's Passionate Pursuit". It has extended into an exchange of ideology and methodology between 2 theatre cultures. It convinced us that the search for Singaporean theatre has to take us beyond the insularity of ourselves into the experience of our neighbours, that we do not always have to look West to learn.

Since 1988, we have produced 50 - 70% Singaporean writing every season, most of which were new plays. The Asean season marks a change, an extension of intentions. It is the realization that we are part of a greater region with a huge wealth of cultural resources to harness. It is a broadening of horizons and perspectives; a new wave of optimism which would hopefully result in cross fertilisation between the theatre cultures of this region.

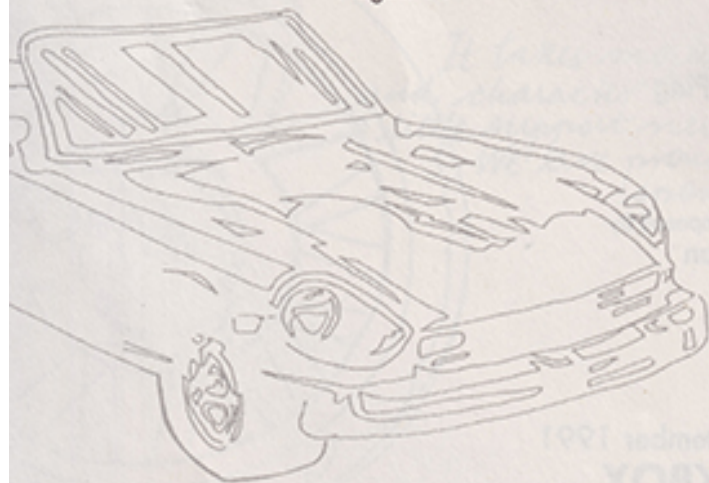
It is in this spirit that we welcome Tony Perez and Nonon Padilla, playwright and director of "Trip" to Singapore - a meeting of artists, diverse hopes, visions and dreams.

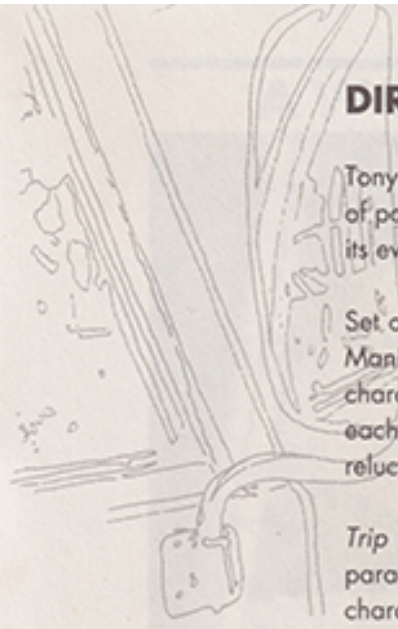
TheatreWorks has been able to take more risks in artistic decisions through the years, of which the ASEAN season is but one. This has been possible through the continued support of the audience, sponsors, press, MITA and theatre practitioners.

Thank you.

Ong Keng Sen

August 91





DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Tony Perez's play *Trip To The South* is a curious piece of theatre. Using elements of popular melodrama, Perez weaves a gothic tale about a Filipino family and its eventual disintegration.

Set on the road to Bicol, the farthest province in the island of Luzon, south of Manila, the play plots out the virtuous ascent or vicious tragic descent of each character (brothers and sisters and their in-laws) crossing the highways as they each reflect on the Valle Patriarch (Papang) who has just died and whom they reluctantly but eventually and dutifully bury.

Trip To The South is a drama about the act of reflection filled with unusual paradoxes. In theatrical terms, the challenge of the play is to present these characters in cars travelling cross-country, and present their static progress as they race and accelerate into the bosom of Bicol province. Perez is clearly using these metaphors to paint the portrait of Philippine society in multiple levels of meaning.

On the mythical level, Perez utilizes the primordial theme of incest not to dwell on its horrors but to push the mind into dangerous waters of thought and action.

It is the individual acts of reflection which each character does that propels the real action of the play. Each character grapples with his past in a polyphonic mixture of memory and desire, of past traumas and present yearnings. We become witness to the metamorphosis of tortured souls dramatically pulsating into human beings conscious of sin and responsibility, malice and consent, suffering and love.

On the psychological level, the fatalist view is clearly defined in Act One only to be re-defined and finally un-Freudianised by Act Two where each character confronts his conscience and guilt and reveals his or her true self in concrete acts of self-abdication. All the characters confront the absolute in an accident scene at the end of the play where Perez finally pushes the level of meaning into the realm of mystery and metaphysics.

One of the questions the play raises (especially to Filipino audiences) is not the hackneyed question of identity but a deeper and more serious question on being Filipino. It is our firm belief however, that the play transcends our national boundaries. For Perez's dramatization of a local Filipino tragedy can be seen on the universal level, very human in scope transcending cultural oddities, religions or ideologies.

We are very honoured indeed to collaborate with TheatreWorks on this pioneering project of producing original Southeast Asian plays. It always takes courage to put on new, unknown plays to a public constantly distrustful of quality.

We trust this initial sharing will contribute to the development of a modern Asean aesthetic responsive to our realities while forging the deepening cultural relationship between the Philippines and Singapore.

NONON PADILLA

August 1991



- HAMLET
- AIDA
- METAMORPHOSIS
- SWAN LAKE
- THE RITES OF SPRING

Through the years, these artistic pieces have evoked a deep response from audiences. Whatever the response – consolation, joy, awareness, inspiration – audiences have come away from such performances with new perspectives on art and life.

Drama, dance, music, opera – all are art forms which can contribute to a wider appreciation of life. They add quality to our lives.

We, at Glaxo, believe in quality. As one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies dedicated to the discovery, manufacture and marketing of safe, effective medicines of the highest quality, we seek to improve various aspects of human lives.

Beyond the boundaries of our business, we also look to improve the life of the community as well. Through our continuing support and sponsorship of the performing arts in Singapore, we hope to do this.

Our commitment to play a positive role in enhancing the quality of life is part of the Glaxo tradition which we are proud to maintain.

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A WORD FROM OUR SPONSORS

TANGS STUDIO

Tangs Studio is proud to announce its continuing corporate sponsorship of TheatreWorks' upcoming "The Asean Season" for 1991/1992. This will mark the fourth year of affiliation between the two companies.

With "The Asean Season", TheatreWorks has opened channels for artistic dialogue between Singapore and her neighbouring countries. In these times when there is an increasing need for interdependence between countries in the Asean region, we see the exchange of artistic knowledge as a symbol of the harmony which can be achieved.

In the four years of Tangs Studio's sponsorship of TheatreWorks, we have witnessed their increasing contribution to the local performing arts scene. Through the years, their commitment to the arts and faith in themselves has remained admirably steadfast. We are proud to once again provide them with our support for their endeavours.

GLAXO

Glaxo is pleased to support TheatreWorks in its 1991/1992 season and to remain as its corporate sponsor for the third year in succession. This sponsorship is part of Glaxo's community relations programme for this year and its belief in supporting the local performing arts.

TheatreWorks, Singapore's first professional theatre company, has excelled with outstanding performances since its formation. The theatrical professionalism displayed, inspite of having only one full-time actress, must be attributed to the many busy executives and students who have pooled their acting talents and sacrifice much for the love of drama.

Through its support of TheatreWorks, Glaxo hopes that it will assist in making theatre a viable art in Singapore. This allows acting talents to flourish while providing the local audience with opportunities to enjoy local drama.

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Since its opening in 1986, The Westin Plaza has supported many artistic and cultural events including the Festival of Arts. It was the Festival's Official Hotel in 1986, 1988 and 1990. The Westin Plaza also supported events such as the 4th Singapore International Film Festival held earlier this year, the Toronto Symphony Performance, Van Gogh Art Exhibition, the Plácido Domingo Concert and TheatreWorks' David Hwang Festival.

The Westin Stamford and The Westin Plaza were recently presented the Friends of the Arts Award by the Ministry of Information & the Arts. The award recognises contributions made by the Westin Hotels towards the promotion of cultural and artistic activities.



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THE TRIP

"...Bicol is such a fantastic place, 'Drel
You'll fall in love with it, for sure!"

- Nona Perez-Valle, Act I Scene I
Trip to the South



The trip by the Valle family brings them to south Bicol. The region comprises the southern-most provinces of Luzon: Camarines Sur, Camarines Norte, Albay, Catanduanes and Sorsogon. Its principal centres, with Naga, Daug and Legazpi City among them, however, still retain the familiarity and parochialness of provincial towns.

Bicolanos are well-known for their artistry with abaca and other fibres, and they speak Bicol, a language distinct from the other seven major Philippine languages.

The region is mostly devoted to coconut and rice planting, the lives of the people, their customs and beliefs, their food and shelter, revolve around these industries. For example, Bicolanos unlike any Filipinos, have a penchant for spicy dishes cooked in coconut milk.

Like many "provincianos", Bicolanos are gregarious, fun-loving, family-oriented, and conservative people. They are proud of the fact that many prominent men in government and the private sector are from the area.

The two Camarines provinces are known for their rich deposits of gold, while Albay is home to Mount Mayon, a volcano with probably the most symmetrical cone in the world. According to legend, long ago, a girl named Magayon (which literally means "beautiful") had many suitors, and fell in love with a Tagalog named Ulap. Her father agreed to their marriage, but Paptuga, one of her Bicolano suit-

ors, refused to her rejection. He kidnapped and threatened to kill Magayon's father unless she reconsidered and agreed to marry him. Ulap appeared at the wedding ceremony and slew his rival, but he and Magayon were also slain in the resulting fight. Magayon's father buried the lovers together in one grave. The grave shook and grew until it became Mount Mayon. When Mayon quakes, it is said that Paptuga is trying to retrieve his wedding gifts. When the top is covered with clouds, it is said that Ulap and Magayon are kissing.


Bicol has a number of other volcanoes, most notably Isarog, Asog, Masaraga, and Bulusan. Like Mayon, Bulusan is active. Masaraga's latent energy is used to power the Tiwi Geothermal project.

From Manila, Quezon is the province before one reaches the Bicol region. Its capital is Lucena. The people here speak Tagalog, and are noted for their industriousness and perseverance. Sweets and other delicacies make Quezon a popular stop for tourists going south.

Las Pinas is a suburban residential district about ten minutes away from Makati. It is home for the middle class Filipinos, most professionals or business people. It is self-contained in that it has its own department stores, amusement centre, and business establishments.

New Manila is a plush residential district. Before taking up residence in Malacanang, President and her family used to reside in this area.





ALBAY

Spanish for "by the bay", Albay is located right at the heart of the Bicol region and is home to the legendary Ibalon people and the awesome Mayon Volcano that is at once a provident deity and a wrathful destroyer.

With a land area of 2,552.6 sq km, and a population size of 984,740, there are 18 towns in the province of Albay, the capital of which is Legazpi City.

While plains and flatlands constitute a great portion of the entire land area, compared to the mainly mountainous terrain of the other Bicol provinces, Albay is crossed on the western half portion by low and rolling mountain ranges and on the eastern side by the majestic sprawl of the mountains of Mayon, Malinao and Masaraga.

Such a unique landscape has more than blessed Albay. Rivers that rise on the slopes of the Mayon Volcano fall rapidly and could easily be harnessed for power. The lakes between the mountains teem with fish, especially Lake Bato, from which they are hauled in truckloads. A great attraction to tourists, local and foreign, are the province's healthful springs, the best known of these being the Tiwi hot sulphur springs in Naga and some notable others in Cawit, near the town of Manite, and in Parian, near Camalig.

People here, traditionally industrious and enterprising, draw their livelihood from the rich produce of the land: hemp (the greatest source of wealth), coconuts, sugarcane, pineapples, vegetable and rice. Industries have also flourished on the nipa (hatch and alcohol) yielded by the swampy lands; the timber, rattan, pili nuts (made into sweets) and gum elemi (for export) from the forests; and the horses, cattle, carabaos, goats and sheep that graze on the low hills and wide grasslands. Guttapercha and para rubber trees are also cultivated. And there are marble quarries in Pantaon, gypsum deposits in Ligao and lime in Guinobatan and Camalig. Lord and master of all these bounties is Mayon Volcano, rising 8,189 feet above sea level, the serene-looking mountain of perfect conical symmetry - one of the country's most famous landmarks - at whose foot lies the capital city of Legazpi.

Although a small city, Legazpi has a complete transportation network, numerous recreation and service facilities, hotels and nightspots. Big commercial banks, oil depots, shipping companies have spurred economic growth not only in the city but in the whole province.

And yet, for all its bustle, Legazpi has retained a quaint charm of its own, owing to its lush and idyllic setting - the volcano soil is fertile and the temperature, since the eastern half is bounded by mountain ranges, is evenly balmy. Its charm also lies in its people - friendly, fun-loving, and expansively hospitable, and who are apt to boast that here "all the men are religious and all the women beautiful".

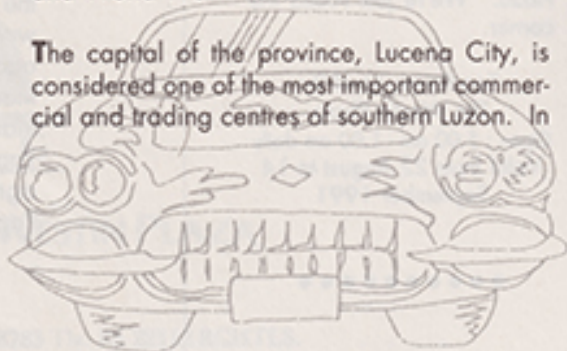
QUEZON

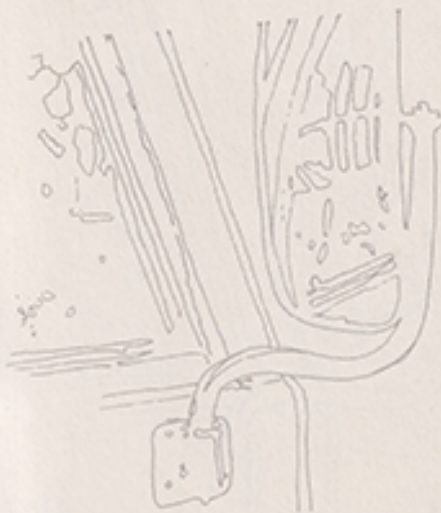
The proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is elusive quarry ... but the quiet, raw splendour of Quezon province is not.

With a population size of 1,408,601 Quezon's land area of 11,946.2 sq km, houses 41 towns, the capital of which is Lucena City.

Enter Quezon ... and two art deco angels trumpet your entry through the triumphal arch. Hardly past the boundary, and Villa Escudero hovers into view ... a coconut plantation of some 800 hectares, it bears imprints of the lives of a genteel aristocracy. Third generation tenants still work the fields, and they are as much of a tourist attraction as the three generation collection of family heirlooms and general antiques - ancient chemise porcelain, liturgical treasures and World War II relics.

The capital of the province, Lucena City, is considered one of the most important commercial and trading centres of southern Luzon. In

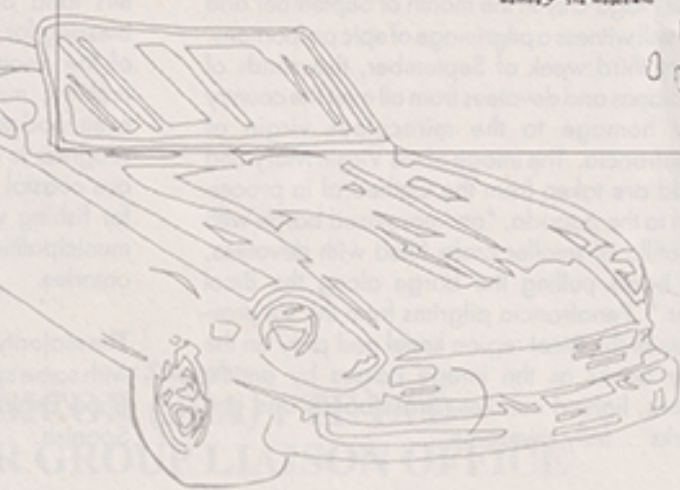
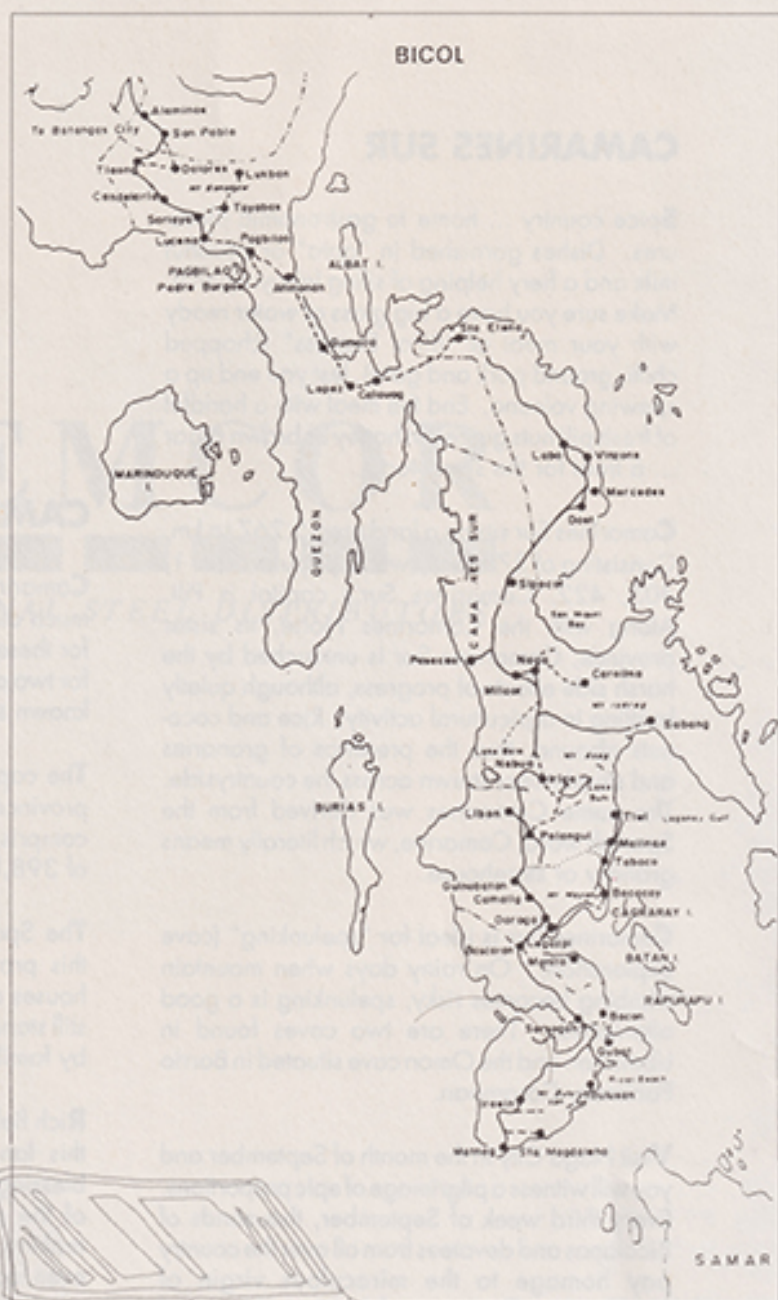




Lucena can be found Quezon Monument, the biggest monument of its kind in the country. Lucena also boasts of its Perez Park ... named after its model governor; and the mysterious, intriguing Mount Banahaw. The mountain is said to be the male counterpart to Mount Makiling which the goddess Maria is said to inhabit. Banahaw, range spanning Laguna and Quezon, is where the stout-hearted must go to gain strength and wisdom. On Banahaw's slopes thus, had sprouted occult communities, sects practising a medley of esoterica - from the Jewish Cabala, faith healers, soothsayers. Almost all claim a kinship with the mountain's supernatural denizen and claim unearthly powers from these beings.

And if tales are not enough to draw the curious and thrill-seekers, there are the coastal attractions of Quezon ... Lamon Bay, Tayabas Bay and Ragay Gulf ... rich fishing grounds, and beautiful beaches.

One final tale ... a tale of two cities ... Pagbilao Grande and Pagbilao Chico, two islands in Tayabas Bay. Connected by a sandy strip of land, the two islands are actually a million year old coral rock ... with caves, coves and white coral sand islets surrounding the islands. To the elders, the islands are actually the lovers "Hangin" (Wind) and "Bulaklak" (Flower). Hangin was a god, already betrothed to a goddess. In his wanderings he spotted Bulaklak, a mere mortal ... the two fell in love. But the disparity of their situations in life soon gave them only one option ... suicide. After the death pact was fulfilled, they were turned into islands. Old folks claim that Hangin and Bulaklak cause a child to drown from the bridge of sand each year in May, as a symbolic representation of their offspring in the world.



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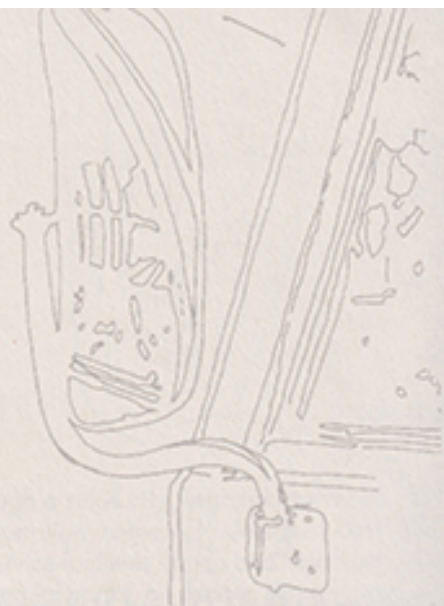
CAMARINES SUR

Spice country ... home to gastronomic pleasures. Dishes garnished in "gata" or coconut milk and a fiery helping of siling labuyo (chilli). Make sure you have a big glass of water ready with your meal of "Bicol Express" (chopped chilli, ground pork and gata), lest you end up a spewing volcano. End the meal with a handful of fresh pili nuts glazed in honey or brown sugar ... a treat for the sweettooth.

Camarines Sur sits on a land area 5,267 sq km. Consisting of 37 towns, with a population of 1,405,422, Camarines Sur's capital is Pili. Along with the Camarines Norte, its sister province, Camarines Sur is untouched by the harsh side effects of progress, although quietly bustling in agricultural activity. Rice and coconuts abound, thus the presence of granaries and storehouses strewn across the countryside. The name Camarines was derived from the Spanish word, *Camarine*, which literally means granary or storehouse.

Camarines Sur is ideal for "spelunking" (cave exploration). On rainy days when mountain climbing becomes risky, spelunking is a good alternative. There are two caves found in Libmanan and the Omon cave situated in Barrio Paniman, Caramoan.

Visit Naga City in the month of September and you will witness a pilgrimage of epic proportions. Every third week of September, thousands of Bicolanos and devotees from all over the country pay homage to the miraculous virgin of Penafrancia. The image of the Virgin Mary and Child are taken from the Cathedral in procession to the pagoda, "an improvised barge with a flotilla of smaller crafts filled with devotees, the boats pulling the barge along the Bicol river." Penafrancia pilgrims from the six provinces of the Bicol region kneel and pray on the river banks as the image passes by amidst hymns, lighted candles, brass bands and fireworks ... truly awesome.



CAMARINES NORTE

Camarines Sur and Camarines Norte are very much alike in its attractions and its ambience, for these two provinces were one political unit, for two and a half centuries, and they were then known simply as Camarines.

The capital of Camarines Norte is Daet. The province sits on a land area of 2,112 sq km, comprising a total of 12 towns and a population of 398,889.

The Spanish influence is very pronounced in this province, as evidenced by the age old houses of continental design and architecture, still standing to this day, and currently occupied by families of name and vintage.

Rich fields and coconut plantations abound on this land of fertile plains and valleys ... a blessing for the men who work the land. Many of the people are also engaged in furniture making, metalcraft, ceramics, garments and even food processing. The spectre of economic progress is indeed promising. Norte's numerous coastal indentations make it a safe haven for fishing vessels - in fact, four of the twelve municipalities are protected by offshore promontories.

The majority of the people speak fluent Tagalog, with some speaking Bicol; more than half speak good English, and about five per cent speak Spanish.

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NG CHIN HAN

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JACINTHA ABISHEGANADAN

CYRIL PEREZ

LIM YU-BENG



Goi
Sou



PLAYWRIGHT • Tony Perez ■ DIRECTOR • Nonon Padilla
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR • Dawn Westerhout ■ PRODUCTION/STAGE MANAGER • Tracie Howitt
SET DESIGNER • Justin Hill ■ LIGHTING DESIGNER • Kalyani P S Kausikan
SOUND DESIGN • Tan Choon Ping ■ SOUND OPERATOR • Paul Yap
MUSIC COMPOSITION • Mark Chan



It is May, 1984. The entire play occurs along the route between Manila and Legazpi City, in South Luzon.

Scene 1

5.15am, on the South Super-highway

Scene 2

7.35am, in Antimonan, Quezon

Scene 3

9.00am, in Calauag, Quezon

Scene 4

11.10am, in Daet, Camarines Norte

Scene 5

12.50pm, in Calabanga, Camarines Sur

Scene 6

2.15pm, in Naga, Camarines Sur

Scene 7

3.00pm, in Iriga, Camarines Sur

Scene 8

4.20pm, in Oas, Albay

Scene 9

5.45pm, in Camalig, Albay

Scene 10

7.00pm, in Legazpi, Albay

**15 - minute
Intermission**

Scene 11

6.30am, in Guinokatan, Albay

Scene 12

7.45am, in Ligao, Albay

Scene 13

8.00am, in Ligon, Albay

Scene 14

10.05am, in Catusao, Camarines Sur

Scene 15

12.00pm, in Talisay, Camarines Norte

Scene 16

4.10pm, in Binan, Laguna

Scene 17

5.20pm, in Las Pinas, Paranaque

Scene 18

7.00pm, in New Manila, Quezon City

ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER • Leong Mun Hoi ■ **COSTUME COORDINATOR** • Khoo Kah Bee
HAIR • Ashley Lim of Botticelli Hairdressers ■ **POSTER DESIGNER** • David Tan
PROGRAMME DESIGNER • Felix Fong & Arthur Tan ■ **GALA ORGANISER** • Chan Mei Lian
FRONT-OF-HOUSE MANAGER • Francesca Tan • Neo Kim Seng • Lucilla Teoh
PROJECTIONIST • Fauziana Siebel

*"There is hardly anything in the world
that some man cannot make a little worse
and sell a little cheaper;
the people who consider price only
are this man's lawful prey."*

John Ruskin 1819-1900

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ENROUTE TO A PRODUCTION

Interview by Dana Lam

In the past months, Mr NONON PADILLA, Philippines' foremost theatre director, has been called upon to brave all manner of circumstance, including floods, earthquake, and a brief closure of Manila International Airport, to direct his Singaporean cast in tonight's performance of *Trip To The South*.

In theatre terms, the director is the crucial hand in the success of a play. We, therefore, take great pleasure in introducing Mr Padilla in these pages.

Mr Nonon Padilla served as the Artistic Director of the Philippines Educational Theater Association (PETA) from 1973 to 1975 and designed the acting workshop component of the PETA Kalinangan Ensemble in 1978. In 1986, the International Media Studies Foundation in New York invited him to direct an English translation of Mr Tony Perez's play, "*Biyahang Timog*". It was presented at the Royal Court Theatre in New York City.

He has served as Director of the Coordinating Centre for Dramatic Arts (CCDA) and the Centre for Visual Arts (CCVA) in the course of his career.

He is now the Artistic Director of the Tanghalang Pilipino, the resident theatre company of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines.

Mr Padilla's association with the theatre began as a student director at the Ateneo High School, although he has also been distinguished in disciplines outside of theatre. His works in prints and water-colours have been widely exhibited in and outside of the Philippines.



WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR IN A PLAY?

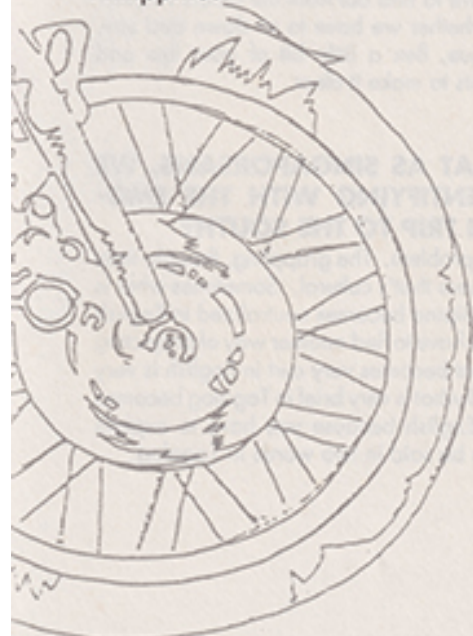
He is a guide. A person who thinks up a plan to present a script. He plans it out with certain actors in mind and he guides the actors through several stages in reading a script, in approaching the script, in finding out what the script means, what the characters mean, what they are and how they think, their background, their expectations, their vices and virtues.

HOW MUCH OF THESE BACKGROUND IS SEEN IN THE ACTUAL STAGING OF THE PLAY?

None, probably. Depending on how creative the actors are. The delineation or detailing of background material is to help the actor substantiate his behavior on stage. Unless it is a physical deformity, I would think it would manifest itself in the nuances, in how they phrase themselves, in who they express their emotions through the text. I guess it all depends on what they decide on as the essential factors that shape the characters. When they are clear on this assumption, then they can begin to work on the truth of the character.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN THE ACTORS ARE COMPLETELY NEW TO YOU AS THEY ARE IN THIS PRODUCTION?

I hold discussions, interviews to find out what they are used to and then I adjust. Actors are the same everywhere; whether they are in the Philippines or in Singapore, they all have a task to do. The task is create this play, and that takes creativity and imagination. A Director has to help actors bring out their imaginative capacity.



WE ASSUME A GOOD DIRECTOR ALWAYS ADDS TO A PLAY. IS THERE A POINT WHEN HE MAY BE ACCUSED (OR GUILTY) OF ADDING TOO MUCH?

There is always a tendency to do that, although that depends on the personality of the Director. There are directors who simply are irresponsible and who do not respect the script and who uses the script as a diving board for their egos; to project themselves.

That's irresponsible because if you have a script, you have a playwright to respect. His intentions and his designs have to be brought out and made apparent. But, of course, if you are doing Shakespeare, he is not around to answer questions. But there are many ways to interpret, say, Hamlet. In that case, you do have to guess and guessing always means an educated guess, depending on the hints the script gives you.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU WORK WITH NEW WRITERS? DO YOU FIND YOU DO A LOT OF REWORKING IN THOSE CASES?

50% of our season is for new plays, so, yes, there is some reshuffling and repositioning required.

"...sometimes I play the devil's advocate to shake him up..."

FOR SOME TIME NOW, YOU'VE WORKED VERY CLOSELY WITH MR TONY PEREZ. DO YOU SHARE HIS MOTIVATIONS FOR WORKING ON THE STAGE?

We go a long way back. We were classmates and we started doing theatre in high school. What he has mastered is the psychological play. He has more or less mixed the styles of Chekov and Eugene O'Neill and it is in that genre that he is most effective.

I think what I do most of the time is to criticize his treatment. He majored in psychology and a lot of the time, he gets tied up with psychological details. But a play is more than psychology. It's an artform. So sometimes I play the devil's advocate to shake him up so that he doesn't get too enrap in the psychology of it.

What we have is intellectual trust. Drama has specific forms which are hard to explain. We sort of have to agree with each other on the forms to take so that it has a beginning, a middle and an end, so that all of the parts are effective, and magical and artistic, not formulaic.



"I think a Director should be invisible."

WHEN WE LOOK AT THE TRIP TO THE SOUTH, WILL WE BE ABLE TO SEE THE DIRECTOR'S HAND IN IT?

I hope not. I think a Director should be invisible. The movies is a Director's medium because a Director chooses how to edit his movie and how to create the effects. A Director for stage does not do that. The play's edited by the playwright. What the Director does is, he tries to help the actors bring life to the play but the stage is basically an actor's medium. I mean if you have bad actors, I don't think you're going to come up with a good production of a play. But I think a Director should motivate his actors properly to bring out the best in the play through the acting.

HAVE YOU HAD ANY SURPRISES IN WORKING WITH OUR GROUP HERE? ANY SPECIFIC BARRIER TO BREAK?

No, nothing shattering. Maybe the English jolted me in the beginning. Because we speak a different accent. For example, one of the actors has such a thick accent I have difficulty understanding him. I have to find out from the others whether that's Singaporean or whether we have to sit down and say, look, roll out your tongue, flex a little bit of your lips and pronounce the consonants to make it clear.

DID YOU FIND THAT AS SINGAPOREANS, WE HAD TROUBLE IDENTIFYING WITH THE EMOTIONAL TRUTHS IN TRIP TO THE SOUTH?

No. I don't think that's a problem. The grappling, though, may take different forms. I guess that's cultural. Sometimes what is extremely emotional in Filipino becomes neutralized in English and it's very difficult. You have to find another way of projecting the emotion because what becomes very curt in English is very elaborate in Tagalog and what is very brief in Tagalog becomes extremely elaborate in English because you have to explain certain things which can be said in two words in Tagalog.

"...I'd quit. I'd cancel myself out."

WILL YOU EVER CANCEL A PRODUCTION BECAUSE YOU FEEL THE ACTORS ARE NOT READY?

No, unless they are terrible actors. And, if that is the case, I won't cancel the show, I'd quit. I'd cancel myself out. I don't think there'd be any reason to do theatre if you don't trust your actors. I would cancel a production if, let's say, the script weren't ready at a certain time. What happened to us once was that the orchestration for a musical didn't come to us on time for Opening Night and we cancelled. That was traumatic for me.

WHAT SORT OF SCRIPTS DO YOU RESPOND TO AS A DIRECTOR?

I prefer expressionist theatre, Brecht, Genet; the plays of Durren Matt are very exciting. I don't like too much, naturalistic theatre, I find it dull, as a style. But that doesn't discount, say, Pinter. Pinter may look naturalistic but he is not naturalistic because there is something cerebral about his plays. Beckett, for example, is also mental, something that makes you think. Maybe that's what it is, I prefer plays that makes you think.

DO YOU FIND YOUR AUDIENCE PUTTING UP A RESISTANCE TO WHAT WE CALL A THINKING PLAY?

Yes, of course. You'll always get a resistance because there are always people who prefer escapist theatre that entertains them and not make them think, not make them ask questions. But, I'd be very shallow if I concentrated on that, especially as we are subsidized.

ON THE WHOLE, DO YOU FIND THE FILIPINO PLAYWRIGHT PREOCCUPIED WITH ANY SPECIFIC ISSUES?

During the Marcos regime, a lot of the writers were very concerned about social issues except, perhaps, Tony Perez and Paul Dumol who I think are bigger and very deep writers in the sense that they do not limit themselves to faddish issues, but deal with essential philosophic issues for Filipinos.

YOU HAVE DIRECTED TRIP TO THE SOUTH THREE TIMES. FOR MANILA IN 1985, FOR NEW YORK IN 1986, AND NOW FOR SINGAPORE. IS THERE ANY PERCEIVABLE DIFFERENCE IN THE NUANCES OF THE PRODUCTIONS? DID YOU MAKE ANY CULTURAL ADJUSTMENTS, FOR INSTANCE?

There's an infinite number of difference in the nuances. I give the actors a framework. They have many options to take. That depends on their perception and creativity. That's also how to enjoy directing. You wait for the actors to surprise you, then you either smile or slap them back to the drawing board. In terms of cultural adjustments, there were a few. I guess the major one was adjusting to the language and the accents.

TANGHALANG PILIPINO

Tanghalang Pilipino is the resident theatre company of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines. Its regular season of plays (they present an average of eight plays per season) begins in July and ends in March. The company dedicates half of its season to new original plays. The other half is balanced with plays in translation from the classical or international contemporary repertoires. All productions are done in the national language, Pilipino.

At the moment, Tanghalang Pilipino is developing a core group of actors to serve the actors' company for repertory plays.

Tanghalang Pilipino was established five years ago after the February Edsa revolution.



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JOURNEY TO THE WRITER'S CENTRE

Interview by Dana Lam

Mr TONY PEREZ, the Philippines' leading contemporary playwright, wrote *TRIP TO THE SOUTH* originally in his native tongue, in 1984. It won the Grand Prize in a literary contest commemorating the 15th Anniversary of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines. It was first staged in Manila in 1985, and in New York, in 1986. *Trip To The South* is the second in a trilogy of plays.

Tonight's production was specially translated for Singapore by the playwright.

Mr Perez's creative expressions include poetry, the novel and stories for children. He also knits and crochets and has published numerous works. He has won numerous awards for his varied works, was a National Fellow for Drama at the Creative Writing Centre of the University of the Philippines in 1987, and is currently the Cultural Affairs Specialist for the Performing Arts with the United States Information Service in Manila. Mr Perez is in Singapore to conduct a two-week creative writing workshop with TheatreWorks' Writers' Laboratory.

We take great pleasure in introducing Mr Perez in these pages.

WHAT ARE YOUR INTENTIONS IN *TRIP TO THE SOUTH*?

I make plays to describe human suffering. People learn from suffering. The existence of suffering asserts, for me, the existence of God. Suffering implies that man is imperfect, and affirms the premise of a perfect God. Also, the enactment of human suffering points out the necessity for each person to transcend such sufferings. By diminishing his suffering, man approaches the state of perfection.

BUT, IN *TRIP TO THE SOUTH*, THE SUFFERING IS UNDIMINISHED?

The play is resolved when the characters become independent of, or liberated from, their previous suffering, and one another. At the end of the play, each character is walking into a different kind of life. There is dramatic change. The fact that Tito decides not to be like the father implies that the cycle of terror does not go on.

AS A PLAYWRIGHT, DO YOU HAVE ANY MODELS?

When I was younger, I learned to like Shakespeare because we had to take him for four years in school. I like Tennessee Williams and Anton Chekov.

"...I learned to like Shakespeare..."

YOU HAVE A REPUTATION FOR HAVING BROKEN FREE OF WESTERN MODELS AND FOR HAVING FOUND THE TRUE FILIPINO VOICE. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

It is not a matter of negating what is Western and asserting what is Eastern. It's not like that at all. I think that even if I consciously copied Arthur Miller, for instance, the product would never be an Arthur Miller play because of my own frames of reference and experiences. The Western mode is still there but it is transformed through an Asian filter. It has to do with being true to yourself.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ARE THE THREE MOST NECESSARY QUALITIES IN A WRITER?

Compassion for fellow man, a sense of spirituality, and the ability to allow things to happen. Incidentally, that's my definition of suffering - to allow things to happen.

"The playwright is like the architect of the play and the director is the builder, the engineer."

WE HEARD IT WAS A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE, TRANSLATING TRIP FOR THIS PRODUCTION. WHY IS THAT?

Well, I had to live through the motions all over again. A writer MUST feel the emotions in the play every time he goes through his scripts, otherwise it will not work for the audience.

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT SUCH A FAMILY AS THE VALLES EXIST?

Actually, there are such families. But, of course, I had taken characters from different families and brought them together in this play.

THE SEX, THE VIOLENCE, THE DARKNESS IN THE PLAY - WERE YOUR AUDIENCES OUTRAGED?

No. It's all there in the tabloids everyday. In fact, they didn't notice it at the time they watched the play. Some of them called the office a week later to say, "Hey, actually, it's a very dark play."

LOOKING AT THE PLAY AGAIN, AFTER SIX YEARS DID YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND OR PERCEPTION ABOUT ANY PART OF IT?

No.

WAS IT CONSIDERED RADICAL, SOMEHOW, WHEN IT WAS FIRST STAGED?

Only in form. It was the first time that the actors were forced to act in a restricted space. They had to be in their vehicles all the time, they couldn't run all over the place and use their physicality. It's very difficult for the actors. They have to concentrate on their acting all the time.

WHAT ARE THE ARCHETYPES YOU DRAW FROM?

I draw energy from Asian archetypes. In the case of Trip To The South, the extended family as an Asian unit, the interdependence of its members.

WHAT INSPIRATIONS DO YOU DRAW FROM?

Trip To The South is the second part of a trilogy inspired by a Filipino myth about a bird whose song can heal the sick. A king sent his three princes to catch the bird, but only one was successful. The other two were turned into stone. Anyway, in this trilogy, you find three protagonists going on three separate journeys, in search of the bird of life.

WHAT ARE THE OTHER PLAYS IN THIS TRILOGY?

The first is Bombita (it's a surname). It is set in an army jeep. It has five soldiers going on a secret mission, and it's about liberation of the self. The third is On The North Diversion Road and is set in a Bantam car, a small car - like a Beetle. It has two characters, a music composer whose wife is dying of cancer.

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A DIRECTOR FOR YOUR PLAY?

Someone who shares my philosophy. Someone who is able to see things in the play that I don't because then it's like yin and yang, it becomes complete. The playwright is like the architect of the play and the director is the builder, the engineer.

A DIRECTOR NEED NOT SHARE IN ALL YOUR PHILOSOPHIES, SURELY?

No. But usually, I find that if we agree with the philosophy in one play, we tend to share the same in a lot of other things, because a play is a very integral part of me.

DOES THAT MEAN YOU DON'T WORK WITH VERY MANY DIRECTORS?

Yes. I have really only worked only with 3 directors, Rolando Tinio, Mariano Singson and Nonon.

WHAT HAS MR PADILLA FOUND IN TRIP TO THE SOUTH THAT YOU DID NOT REALISED WAS THERE?

Nonon found in my play the light of optimism that I felt initially was not there. He was able to interpret the assertions of love in expressions of anger, fear and hatred. He provided unspoken, psychological bridges between scenes for the actors. After the premiere of the play, I felt that he had given me back a polished stone from the uncut diamond that I entrusted with him.

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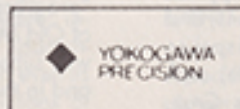
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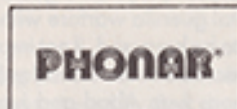
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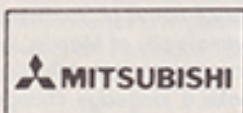
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A SURVEY OF FILIPINO DRAMA

Adapted from an essay written by KRISHEN JIT
First published in "Cambridge Guide to World Drama", 1988
"A Survey of Modern Southeast Asian Drama"

The first to write Western-influenced dramas, the Philippines and Thailand offer contrasting images of elitism prevailing in the early modern theatre of Southeast Asia. The Philippine revolutionary dramas (1902-06) were mostly written by a middle-class and Western-educated elite, but some among their number were also theatre professionals. They garnered responses beyond the small coterie of men of their rank and occupations. The so-called "seditious" plays emerged while the Philippines were locked in brutal guerilla warfare with the Americans, and caused its creators to be harassed, if not imprisoned. The spoken dramas were the creations of the *ilustrados* (educated elite), such as Aurelio Tolentino, Juan Abad and Juan Matapang Cruz, who regarded themselves as heirs to the committed literature tradition of Balagtas and Rizal. They also wrote the Spanish-influenced musical play, *Sarsuwela*, which in the early American Occupation era, were just as inflammable as the spoken dramas. Couched in allegory, in part so as to escape detection of the seditious purposes by the American authorities, the incendiary plays struck a responsive chord with the politicised Filipino populace. The theatre scholar, Tiongson, informs us that the "masses everywhere constructed make-shift stages of bamboo to enable non-professional actors from their own class to present these plays." The spoken drama and the *Sarsuwela* ousted the indigenised Spanish folk drama, *Komedya* from the Manila stage, and drove it to the provinces. Despite its short duration, the revolutionary spoken drama and *Sarsuwela* left legacy of passionate allegorical theatre and "people's art" that is vivid with contemporary Filipino theatre practitioners.

Once the fury of the Filipino Revolution was contained by the Americans, the spoken drama and *Sarsuwela* sputtered into political innocuity, and turned into domestic tales of middle-class romance and moral persuasion. The *ilustrados* switched their allegiance to the Americans with the coming of the "second American Occupation" in the seductive guise of the American education system. The result was doldrums in modern Filipino drama. The self-conscious literary homilies generated by American-sponsored drama education could hardly compete with the *bodabil* (vaudeville), and the movies, which became increasingly popular in the 1930's.

Long after the Philippines achieved independence in 1946, the urban Filipino elite continued to write their plays in English. In the meantime, the vernacular spoken drama, folk theatres, such as *Komedya*, and the musical theatre, *Sarsuwela*, were largely in provincial exile. (The romantic passion expressing the popular psyche evoked in the indigenous folk theatres, was, however, transposed to the Filipino movies and comics.) Psychological and social realism, modelled on the mainstream Euro-American dramatic mode, was essayed by playwrights like Wilfredo Ma, Guerreo, Alberto Florentino, Severino Montano, Estrella D Alfon and Nick Joaquin. They wrote principally for magazines and other elite print media. Modern performance was mainly based in schools, which staged Broadway musicals and Western classics. Companies practising amateur theatre rose and fell with equal rapidity. By their Western-influenced standards, the indigenous product in English or in Filipino dialects, was found to be wanting in dramatic craftsmanship and in psychological and philosophical depth and nuance. The introduction of playwrighting competitions, notably the Carlos Palanca Memorial Award for literature, that included drama

among its prizes, did not make a dent in these entrenched positions, and plays languished while "in search of a stage".

However, Nick Joaquin's play, "A Portrait of an Artist as Filipino", was staged soon after it was published in 1952. The play is a tragic-comic paean to the Hispanic-influenced values of nobility and humanism, that in the judgement of the playwright, had been swamped during the rush for American-directed "progress". Originally staged among the ruins of the Intramuros of Old Manila, the acting setting of the play, Joaquin's drama was subsequently performed 56 times in a span of two years, and in the most unlikely of places, such as cockpits and tennis courts. In 1956, it was made into a film.

Apart from Joaquin, the work of Guerreo, prolific playwright and influential leader of the University of the Philippines Dramatic Club, for three decades and that of Montano, who brought in arena staging to his country, lent lustre to a theatre era (1946-66), that has been described as "short-lived, merely transitional and with an unfortunate alienating effect".

Two factors in Philippines theatre since 1966 set it apart from the other contemporary theatres of Southeast Asia. The first is that, at least in the primate city of Manila, the dramatic rise of the nationalistic forces in the late 1960's compelled many Filipino writers to make a language change in theatre, from English to Tagalog. Secondly, the intense and prolonged politicization and radicalization of contemporary Philippine theatre is also uncommon. The process began with the student demonstrations in the late 1960's, and accelerated after the imposition of Martial Law in 1972. An initial period of dread and "circumspection" immediately followed Martial Law, but here soon swelled a sense that; "The present has too much urgency. It pressed on the playwright's consciousness too urgently. He had to respond".

The unique sensibilities were foreshadowed even before Martial Law was declared. Beginning in 1966, Manila audiences were "shocked" by the "bold" translations of Rolando Tinio of plays by Miller, Williams and Loea, that raised the status of Tagalog as dramatic language. In 1967, the Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA) led by Cecilia Guidote, launched its "national theatre" performances of indigenous and avant-garde foreign works in Tagalog. The wave-like movement of linguistic nationalism even swept the Ateneo de Manila High School, an elitist bastion of the English language. The Dulaang Sibol (New Theatre) company of that school was the brainchild of its artistic director, Onofre Pagsanghan, and the group staged the prize-winning plays written by students. The Dulaang brought two outstanding young playwrights to the surface; Paul Dumol and Tony Perez, who wrote in style that was dubbed as "poetic realism". Pagsanghan's own translation of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* was frequently staged, not least because it fused "the Filipino language with Western theatre". Theatre also took to the streets and other crowded places in support of the students' demand for an end to "American imperialism, feudal corruption and bureaucratic capitalism". Employing the "living newspaper" technique of Piscator and Brecht borrowed from Euro-American counter-culture theatre companies of the 1960's, the street theatre created improvised ensemble plays that branded injustices in Filipino society.

The exposure of injustice and the enactment on stage of kinship with the masses, emerged as persistent themes in contemporary Filipino theatre. Indeed, one critical measure of "a truly intensive Philippine play" of the era was the consideration of "whether or not it works for the welfare of the masses". By digging into themselves, Filipino playwrights and directors exhumed seemingly limitless theatre resources, which they reshaped to suit their pressing current needs. The resources excavated were: ur-dramas, and epic plays of the pre-Hispanic period. Spanish-influenced religious and secular dramas *Sarsuwela*, and even its death-knell, *Bodabil*. One of the earliest deconstructions of indigenous and indigenized performance texts was *Halimaw*, by Isagani Cruz, staged by PETA. While the traditional *Sarsuwela* was being revived, Cruz fused it with a variety of epic, absurd and Broadway musical devices to deliver his dire warning on tyrannical power. *Sinaculo* (passion play) was also refashioned by the revival-conscious Babaylan Theatre of the 1970's. The company's *Sinaculo* series climaxed in 1977 with the appearance of a radical Christ taking up arms against his imperialist persecutors. A Mass calling on the Filipino clergy to join "in the life and death struggle of the nation" was written by Bonifacio Ilagan. Rediscoveries of neglected and maligned past personalities by revisionist historians, provoked a spate of history-based dramas.

Conventional Western forms were not discarded, instead, the techniques were deployed to serve anti-regime ends. The constraints of Martial Law forced naturalistic playwrights to camouflage their true intentions; this they did by the device of "sticking to the facts". Thus in one of the best received plays of this genre called *Paraisong Parisukat*, (Square Paradis, 1974) its playwright, Orlando Nadres, self-effacedly flashes out the details exposing the non-existent state of a female shoe-store employee.

Even before the Marcos regime ended in February 1986, disillusioned voices could be heard over the political theatre of PETA, but more particularly, that of its clones in the provinces. Dissatisfaction with the uninspired political theatre was openly articulated in the 1984 second Makiisa People's Cultural Festival held in Manila. It was argued, for example, that while politically committed theatre kept the issues and the struggle against the Marcos regime alive, the preponderant weight given to content over form was harmful to the continued development of the Philippine arts. Hitherto an influential and articulate supporter of PETA, the theatre scholar and playwright, Tiongson, declared at Makiisa II that political and artists were reaching a state of fossilization. He claimed the politics of the committed theatre people were too narrow, the dramas predictable, and the experience generated, stale and counter-productive.

In the same year, Tiongson had occasion to extol the virtues of *Bihang Timog* (Going South, 1984), an existential play by Tony Perez. Perez's dramatic exposition of the debilitating effects of Filipino feudalism, embodied in the power wielded by the dead father over his grown children journeying to his funeral, is a poetic experience. According to Tiongson, the political undercurrents of Perez's allusive play are more potent than sloganeering dramas. Three years earlier, Perez's prize-winning play, *Bombita*, surprised theatre observers because of the adroit treatment of comic and farcical situations. A Perez journey, in this case, that

of four soldiers on a secret mission, is both real and metaphorical, and the two states of being are interlocked. Misadventures pile up, as do the laughs for the audience until finally, the quartet came face to face with the grim reality: not the mission alone, but even their lives, are absurd. A playwright who weaves textures more than stories, Perez is dedicated to theatre as art and therapy. And it should be obvious by now that he is averse to the fist-raising and other hortatory gestures of the revolutionary theatre. He is counted among the important figures in contemporary Philippine theatre - the others are the playwrights, Paul Dumol, Jose Dalisay and the directors, Behn Cervantes and Nonon Padilla, who have passed through PETA in the late 1960's and early 1970's on their way to mature theatrical careers.

Apart from compelling personal reasons, the departure of the playwrights at least, was caused by their dissatisfaction with the company's ensemble creativity system, and the primacy it accorded to politics over art. By the mid 1970's, however, the national theatre energies in the Philippines had expanded beyond the confines of PETA and diversified its methods and aims. One of the most significant institutions that encouraged indigenous plays was CCP's (Cultural Centre of the Philippines), Bulwagang Gantimpula (prize-winning laboratory), led by the theatre director, Tony Espejo. Bulwagang staged prize winners of playwrighting competitions on its small experimental stage and naturally showed a literary bias, that found favour with writers like Perez. Bulwagang's testimonial to the playwright as the singular creator of theatre, provided an alternative to the improvisational group and the politically transparent theatre forces that had expanded in the Marcos years.

Since February 1986, Philippine contemporary theatre seems to be in a state of repose, that is mirrored in part by the public and private post-mortems conducted on radical theatre. Perhaps the liveliest centre of theatre activity in mid-1987 was the Cultural Centre of the Philippines. Once the shining emblem of the Filipino elite culture, CCP, under the new artistic leadership of Tiongson, is being restructured in order to lead the democratization and decentralization of Filipino theatre. For the time being, the ending of the Marcos regime has found the issue-oriented theatre groups without a burning cause. On the other hand, the poetic voices of the realistic playwrights, such as Perez, Dalisay and Villaneuva, and the expressionist directors, Chris Milliyado and Nonon Padilla, are discovering supporting echoes in Philippine theatre society.

Decolonization has been a powerful force of innovation and the inculcation of a national identity, particularly in the theatres of the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. But few of the theatre practitioners, even in these relatively developed theatre cultures are convinced that the objective of creating a communicable form of theatre has been achieved. Their caution could be justified by the fact that modern theatre in Southeast Asia, which began in the city, remains a predominantly urban phenomenon. The exceptions are to be found in the Philippines, and among a handful of young theatre companies in Indonesia. Recently, however, the spreading tentacles of television have brought modern naturalistic theatre to the rural areas. Most Southeast Asian governments ensure that kitsch television is sanitized of images and ideas contrary to its purposes. Alternative or opposing social and political attitudes in the performing arts often stemmed from modern stage theatre, thereby lending urgency and justification for its survival. The reluctance or failure of contemporary theatre to abandon its urban fortress renders it a minority art form. In fact, even in its natural domain, the city, it tends to have an enclave mentality, "a minority among diverse minorities".

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THEATREWORKS

TheatreWorks, Singapore's first professional adult theatre company, was formed in 1985 as a private limited company. In March 1990, the company crossed a major milestone when it changed its status to a non-profit organization limited by guarantee and again in May 1991, when it became a charity. These transitions marked the realization of a dream envisioned by its founding members.

Over the years, TheatreWorks has produced critically acclaimed and memorable productions, presenting a wide range of plays which include Singaporean, Malaysian, British, American, French, Swedish and Japanese works.

The numerous Singaporean plays commissioned by the company has contributed greatly to attracting capacity audiences, and the company has responded by forging closer ties with Singaporean playwrights. To develop this relationship, TheatreWorks has recently established a Writers' Laboratory with Desmond Sim as its first Writer-in-Residence.

TheatreWorks has consciously fused drama with other creative fields, inviting well-known Singaporean artists, fashion designers, architect, interior designers and musicians to participate in theatre.

Other than working with the Singapore creative community, the company has developed an exchange programme with foreign theatre companies such as the Five Arts Centre of Malaysia and with this new Asean Season, there will be more exchanges with our top-notch Asean practitioners. TheatreWorks is also organizing the **SPRINGBOARD**, a comprehensive training programme for theatre skills. Conducted by theatre professionals from UK, the programme is sponsored by the British Council and the Ministry of Information and the Arts.

These moves are part of the effort to ensure a balance repertoire and a varied programme for its audiences and a continuing training programme for theatre practitioners in Singapore.

TheatreWorks receives support from the Ministry of Information and the Arts, particularly in its Theatre-in-Residence Scheme, National Parks Board and corporate patronage. The company's pioneer corporate sponsors are Tangs Studio and Glaxo with hotel accommodation sponsored by The Westin Plaza and the Writers' Laboratory being sponsored by Singapore Press Holdings. These companies are distinguished by their enlightened leaderships and sound corporate philosophies. They are the first to publicly recognize the relevance and necessity of a professional theatre company in the context of developing a culturally vibrant environment in Singapore.

The second phase of TheatreWorks' development began when it moved into its premises in historic Fort Canning Park. With the **BLACKBOX** theatre, rehearsal studios and administrative offices, the company has become even more active, having launched an alternate repertoire which serves to be a channel for experimentation and to provide a more varied programme for Singaporean theatre-goers.

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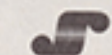
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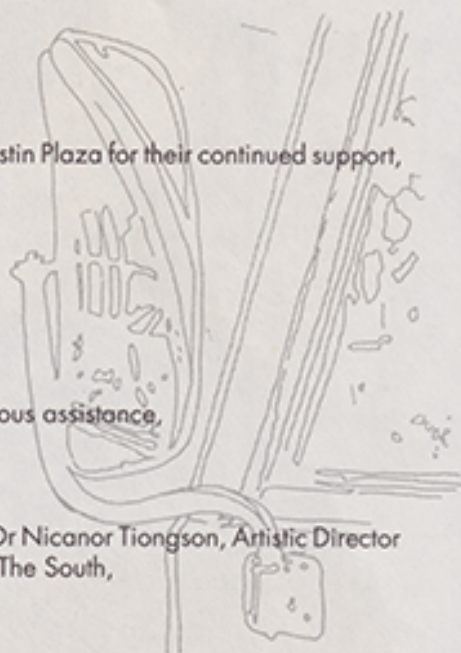
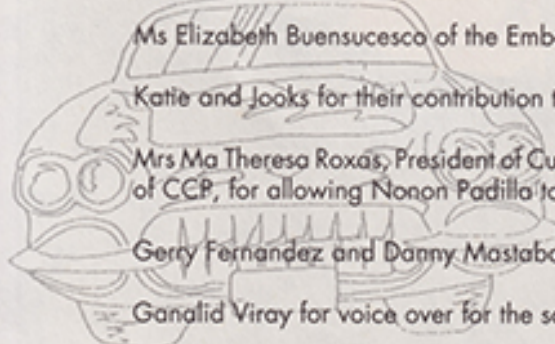
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Gerry Fernandez and Danny Mastaba for sound recording,

Ganadil Viray for voice over for the soap opera,

And all front-of-house assistants and all who has contributed to the production.



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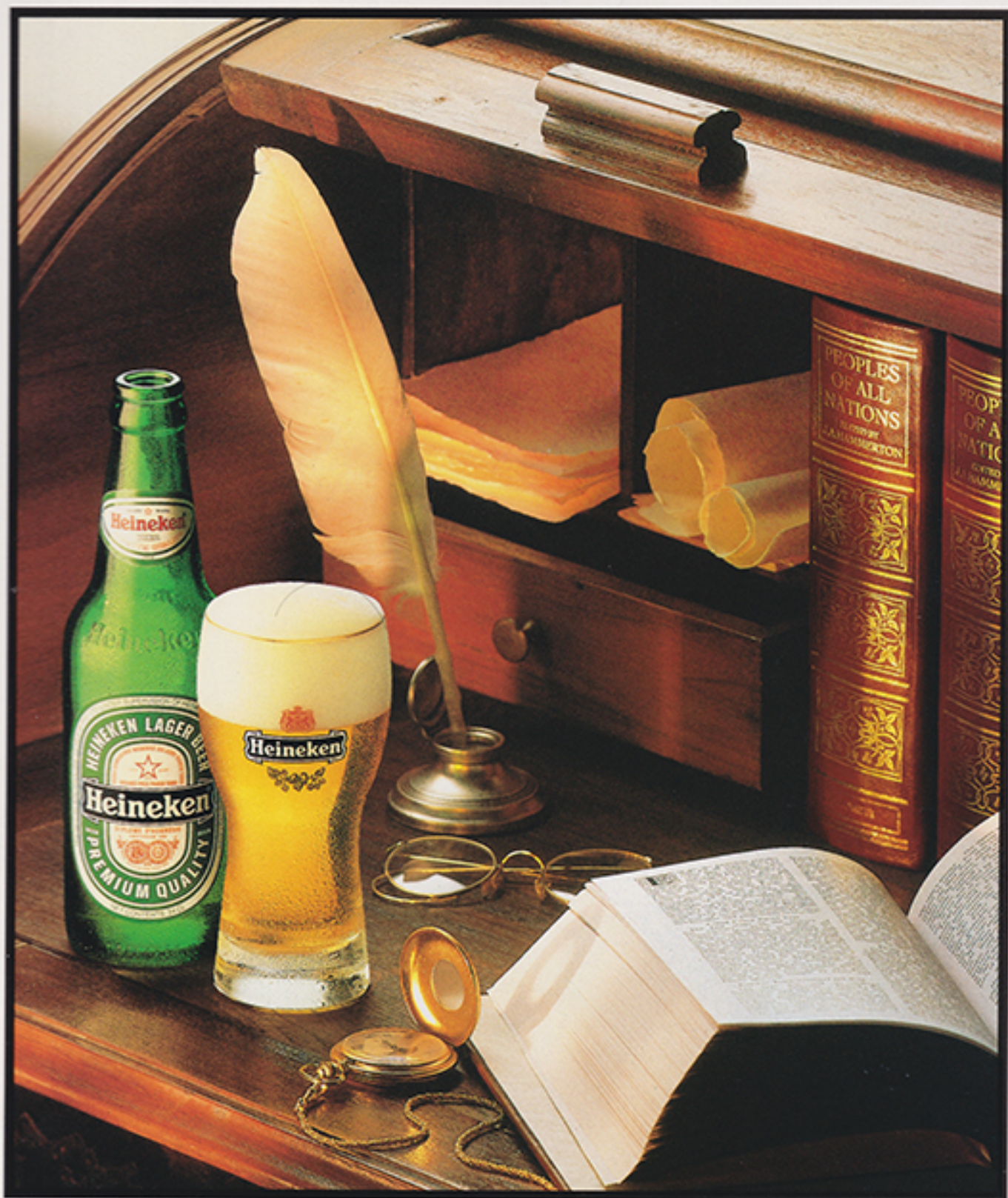
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