
THE FLYING CIRCUS PROJECT

— taking asian traditional arts into the next millenium

“ When land-bound animals begin to fly

Reaching for the unknown

An unexpected transformation

Rooted but free

The same animal but different

Man's quest for flight continues

Circus

The antithesis of museum

Raw, exciting, dizzying, robust

Dangerous, magic

The sacred and the profane co-exist

Theatre of the people

Hanuman, monkey, leaps into flight ”

29 November - 28 December 1998

The Black Box, Singapore

Conceived & Directed by Ong Keng Sen

Artistic Director,

TheatreWorks (Singapore) Ltd

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A major programme exploring Asian Traditional Arts for the 21st Century. This multi-disciplinary programme in theatre, dance and music will run for six years; with laboratories consisting of workshops and seminars, and innovative new productions. Although there are productions, these are kept separate from the Laboratory. This is an attempt to keep The Flying Circus Project process-driven. It started in the last quarter of 1996 where the focus was on Southeast Asian Traditional Arts - the Southeast Asian Laboratory (SEA Lab). The Japan Foundation Asia Center production of *Lear* was premiered in Japan in 1997. In the third year (1998), the focus will be on countries - India, Korea, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 1996: | Laboratory involving artists from Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore |
| 1997: | The Japan Foundation Asia Center Production of <i>Lear</i> conceived & directed by Ong Keng Sen written by Rio Kishida |
| 1998: | Laboratory involving artists from India, Korea, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore |
| 1999: | Asian Production of <i>Othello is Dead</i> conceived & directed by Ong Keng Sen written by Rio Kishida |
| 2000: | Laboratory involving artists from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet, Mongolia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea |
| 2001: | Asian Production of <i>Julius Caesar</i> |

All the foreign artists who are invited to the Laboratory to work with Singaporean artists are specially handpicked by TheatreWorks' Artistic Director, Ong Keng Sen. This involves a rigorous process of researching the various artforms in their cultural context. Ong meets face-to-face with these master artists, witnesses their performances and engages in an intense dialogue with them.

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THE 1998 LABORATORY (29/11 - 28/12)

- **Aims**
- **What is Different**
- **1998 Workshops**

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AIMS:

- The exploration of Asian traditional arts
- Revitalisation, Reconnection and Regeneration of contemporary arts through this exploration
- A celebration and reaffirmation of the Asian identity
- Asian traditional arts for the 21st Century

This Research and Development programme will assist participating artists to be rooted in traditional arts and culture and yet be sufficiently adaptive to harness them and advance into the new millenium.

The 2 unique aspects of The Flying Circus Project are that:

1. It is Asian initiated.
2. Autonomy, Equality, Empowerment and Dialogue are encouraged.

Beginning with the learning of traditional forms, the focus however is on re-invention of these forms into creative strategies for Asian performers in the new century. These sessions of inquiry and investigation are facilitated by Ong Keng Sen.

The approach to the programme is rational and systematic, with a resounding and educational impact. There are two aspects to the programme:-

1. To examine how contemporary arts can benefit through a juxtaposition with traditional culture in fruitful and powerful ways.
2. To examine how these traditional arts can withstand the progress of modernity without lapsing into "museum" art.

For four weeks in December 1998, 50 Master Artists in traditional and contemporary performance, as well as young performers will assemble in Singapore for workshops, seminars and creative explorations. In 1998, this artistic team will also include Rustom Bhaurucha, well-known author, academic, dramaturg, director and multicultural thinker. He will lead the feedback/discussion sessions during these weeks.

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WHAT IS DIFFERENT?

In this 1998 laboratory, there are 2 different aspects from 1996:-

1. **The inclusion of visual (installation/performance) artists**

During the lab, these artists will also experiment with video and modern technology vis-a-vis the traditional performing arts. In particular, the visual artists will play a large role in the re-invention workshops.

2. **Establishing a continuity with the first laboratory of 1996**

Artists from Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore will be invited back to participate in the 1998 Laboratory.

It is the hope that the Flying Circus Project will in the end spawn creative artists who will lead cultural discussion and artistic innovation in their home countries. Hence the need for the lab to nurture these selected artists in a continuous manner rather than in a once off laboratory.

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1998 WORKSHOPS

INDIA

Seraikella Chhau
Kuttiyatum
Kathakali
Thang Ta
Manipurian Performance
Manipurian Music

KOREA

Traditional & Avant-Garde Dance
Contemporary Korean Percussion
Kagok (Traditional Korean Court
Singing)

MYANMAR

Myanmese Puppets
Gar Byar Loht (Myanmese Dance)
Myanmese Marionette Dance
Pattala (Myanmese Xylophone)
Shwebo (Puppet Singing)

INDONESIA

Randai
Silat
Minang Dance
Minang Music & Percussion

SINGAPORE

Enquiry/Investigation/Re-invention

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FOREIGN ARTISTS PARTICIPATING IN THE 1998 LABORATORY

INDIAN ARTISTS

Mr. Shashadhar Acharia
(Seraikella Chhau)

A *bihar* Mask Dance based on the martial arts of the East India region. Mr. Acharia grew up in this tradition and presently teaches it to drama and dance students in the National School of Drama (NSD).

Mr Madhu Margi
(Kuttiyattum)

Kuttiyattum is Sanskrit theatre. It is an ancient art form of 1,500 years old. It is the dramatic form of *Kathakali* dance whereby all the text is spoken in Sanskrit. *Kuttiyattum* is highly ritualistic with its origins being temple based. Mr Margi is only in his early thirties and is already reputed to be the master saviour of this artform.

Ms Maya Rao
(Kathakali)

Ms Rao has traditional *Kathakali* training and is also a contemporary trained actress who has melded the two forms in her performance work.

Mr Heisnam Tomba
(Mainpurian Performance)

Fusing Manipurian traditional martial arts (*Thang Ta*), shaman ritual performance (*Maibi*), traditional Manipurian story-telling, Grotowskian theatre techniques, an indigenous training method has been developed in Manipur by Mr. Tomba and his father. This indigenous actor training methodology is known as the Theatre of Suffering. Mr. Tomba is also a director, playwright and composer.

Mr Rustom Bharucha
(Multicultural Thinker)

Mr Bhaurucha is a writer, director and dramaturg, currently living and working in India. He has written extensively on indigenous theatres and the politics of interculturalism. His works include *Rehearsals of Revolution* (1983), *The Theatre of Kanhailal* (1992), and a monograph entitled 'The Question of Faith' (1992).

Mr Tiken Singh
(Manipurian Music)

Mr. Singh is a musician, composer and music director working in fusion and traditional Manipurian/Indian music.

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KOREAN ARTISTS

Ms Hong Sin-Cha
(Contemporary Korean Dance)

Ms Hong is a contemporary New York trained avant garde dancer whose work melds traditional Korean dance forms with her contemporary training and sensibilities.

Prof. Kim Yong Hee
(Traditional Korean Dance)

Prof. Kim is a traditional Korean dancer who is exploring new ideas, aesthetics and expressions with her traditional dance training. The traditional dance training is heavily based on breathing rhythms. She is the Dance Professor at Erhwa Women's University.

Mr Kang Tae Hyo
(Contemporary Korean Percussion)

Mr. Kang is a member of a contemporary percussion group known as PURI. Apart from percussion, he plays the *ajaeng* (a zither played with a bow) and sings as well. PURI is popularly known as the Korean STOMP, as their work bears certain similarities.

Ms Kang Kwon Soon
(Korean Court Singing)

Ms Kang is a traditional *Kagok* singer. *Kagok* is traditional court singing. She has performed extensively in San Francisco and New York.

Anh Pil Yuen
(Korean Installation Artist)

Miss Anh has been involved in large scale public structures all around the city of Seoul. She is particularly well-known for her pop installations which are found in wide ranging spaces from fashion boutiques to museums. She is also a performance artist who often performs the role of a Korean shaman.

Hwa Young Park
(Korean Installation Artist)

Ms Hwa is an exciting installation artist who has exhibited extensively both singularly and as a group in Seoul and New York.

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MYANMESE ARTISTS

(U = Mr in Myanmar (older man); Ko = Mr in Myanmar (younger man); Daw = Madam in Myanmar)

U Chit Oo Nyo
(Myanmar Puppets)

U Chit Oo Nyo is an important Myanmar writer, journalist and cultural thinker.. He started making films in 1997 and is presently working on his second film.

U Nan Nyung Shein
(Myanmar Puppets)

U Nan Nyung Shein is a traditional puppeteer nicknamed "the genius of strings". Myanmar puppets are heavy string puppets. They require great technical virtuosity to create an illusion of living puppets. Further, the best puppeteers imbue an emotional quality to the puppets.

Daw Ma Ma Naing
(Myanmar Puppets)

Daw Ma Ma Naing is a preserver/producer of traditional Myanmar puppets who is also a puppeteer in her own right.

U Mg Mya Han
(Shwebo Puppet Singing)

U Mg Mya Han is a male singer from Shwebo. The region of Shwebo in Myanmar is renowned for the stylised singing of the puppet voices.
U Mg Mya Han sings traditional Myanmar weeping songs which is a staple of Myanmar puppetry.

U Zaw Min
(Myanmar Marionette Dance)

U Zaw Min is a dancer in his 60s but well known for his agile performance of this dance. In this dance form, the dancer impersonates the Myanmar puppet in all its stances and stylised movement. Ironically, the human being imitates the puppet.

U Than Aung
(Gar Byar Loht)

U Than Aung is a master of Myanmar dance. Before retirement, he taught in the Mandalay school of traditional theatre where he specialised in the Gar Byar Loht. The Gar Byar Loht is literally a dance dictionary which contains all the different gestures of Myanmar dance (approx. 150 gestures). This is the basis of all Myanmar dance.

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Indonesia

Gumarang Sakti

Gumarang Sakti, an Indonesian dance company based in Jakarta will have four artists joining the The Flying Circus Project. This company is known for its re-working of traditional Indonesian artforms, such as Sumatran martial arts (*silat* & *randai*) into new dance forms.

a) Suwita Yanti

Ms Yanti is one of the senior dancers of Gumarang Sakti and is also assistant choreographer of the company. Since 1994, she has also been the manager of Gumarang Sakti.

b) Pitrik

Pitrik has danced with the company both in Indonesia and abroad. He is a young dancer known for his extraordinary talent.

c) Jhony Azwar

Mr Azwar plays *gendang*, a flute from West Sumatra. He also teaches body percussion and *randai*. He is also a composer.

d) Gusnisam

Gusnisam is known as "the girl with the golden voice". She has toured with the company both in Indonesia and abroad.

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Thailand

**Peeramon
Chomdhavat**

A Thai dancer, Peeramon began studying *khon*, a form of traditional Thai dance at the age of 10 and was later trained in ballet, modern dance and jazz music. He has appeared with the Bangkok Ballet Theatre and was a member of the Le Jeune Ballet de France. He is one of the exciting young dancers/choreographers in Thailand today.

Malaysia

Krishen Jit

Krishen Jit has over 30 years of extensive experience in Malay and English theatre. He is considered by many to be the doyen of Malaysian theatre. He is currently teaching at the National Arts Academy, having set it up. He is also a founding member of Five Arts Centre.

Aida Redza

Aida is a Malaysian dancer and choreographer trained in classical ballet. Currently the Artistic Director of Shakti Dances, she also teaches at the National Arts Academy in Kuala Lumpur. Her work has been presented at dance festivals in countries such as Indonesia, China, and South Korea.

Bernard Chauley

Bernard is a young promising film-maker. He has recently been involved in documenting traditional artforms in Malaysia.