



## TWORKS+SPH:WLAB

### CHARGING UP MEMORY LANE: 30 PLAYS IN 30 DAYS

THE WRITERS' LAB


THE SPH CELEBRATION OF 10 YEARS OF PLAYWRITING

16 MARCH - 14 APRIL 2001




Singapore  
Press  
Holdings

HEARTWORKS



## FEATURED WRITERS

Chin Woon Ping, Chng Suan Tze,  
Chong Tze Chien, Christian  
Huber, Chua Tze Wei, Corrine  
Chia, Dana Lam, Desmond Sim,  
Eleanor Wong, Kenneth Yap, Kim  
Ong, Lee Chee Keng, Mary Loh,  
Ng Swee San, Ng Yi Sheng,  
Otto Fong, Ovidia Yu, Rinkoo  
Bhowmik, Ni Yi Sheng, Robin  
Loon, Russell Heng, Stella Kon,  
Tan Mei Ching, Tan Tam How,  
Theresa Tan, Wong Chen Seong.



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## SPH: THE PROUD SPONSORS OF 10 YEARS OF PLAYWRITING

The Singapore Press Holdings is proud to play a pivotal role as corporate sponsor of TheatreWorks' Writers' Lab since 1991.

SPH shares TheatreWorks' commitment to the development of theatrical arts in Singapore. We recognise that plays are the lifeblood of theatre and the development of playwrights and new plays are essential in keeping the local arts scene alive and energised.

Over the years, the Writers' Lab has seen new works developed and produced by established playwrights such as Russell Heng, Desmond Sim, Ovidia Yu and Tan Tarn How, just to name a few. Working alongside experienced playwrights are aspiring and young talents such as Ng Yi Sheng. The Lab has also introduced Singaporeans to quality local productions, and contributed to the increased awareness and appreciation for the theatrical arts.

This year, to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of SPH's support of Writers' Lab, we are for the first time offering a rare theatrical treat of 30 plays being performed over 30 days at TheatreWorks' Black Box and Fort Canning Park. Entitled 'Charging Up Memory Lane: 30 Plays in 30 Days' - The SPH Celebration of 10 Years of Playwriting, the month-long event will revisit and showcase some of the most brilliant works which have been borne out of Writers' Lab.

The theatrical scene in Singapore is thriving, and we are moving closer towards Singapore's goal of becoming an international art hub and renaissance city. SPH, a steadfast supporter and sponsor of theatrical arts and literary programmes, is proud to contribute to the efforts. Apart from TheatreWorks' Writers' Lab, SPH also sponsors other developmental programmes in writing such as the Golden Point Award and Singapore Writers' Festival. For our contributions towards the arts, SPH is awarded the Distinguished Patron of the Arts award by the National Arts Council for eight consecutive years from 1993 to 2000.

As late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century prolific writer Elbert Hubbard penned, "The best preparation for the good work tomorrow is to do good work today". We are happy to say that the Writers' Lab has indeed produced good work over the past ten years and has laid a firm foundation for the development of playwriting in Singapore.

## MESSAGE BY TWORKS

The test of time has shown the resilience of this TheatreWorks and Singapore Press Holdings collaboration.

This 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, 'Charging Up Memory Lane: 30 Plays in 30 Days' has 9 premieres including many prize winning plays and Stella Kon's rediscovered 'Feeding the Armadillo'. After the official opening, the 30 days start from 16 April which kicks off with 'The Lady of Soul & Her Ultimate S Machine', the play which marks the change in censorship laws in Singapore.

Actors who premiered original productions return to direct for 'Charging Up Memory Lane: 30 Plays in 30 Days', sometimes commemorating their return to the Singapore stage after a period of absence. These include Gerald Chew, Rina Ong and Danny Jow. Actresses who premiered original works return to their favourite roles such as Tan Kheng Hua.

TheatreWorks renews ties with established performers such as Kumar, Nora Samosir, Hossan Leong, Sandy Phillips, Lee Weng Kee; finally works with some young directors of the Singapore stage such as Tan Boon Hui; continues its friendship with sister Singaporean theatre companies such as Toy Factory's Goh Boon Teck and Luna-Id's Christian Huber.

As usual The Writers' Lab continues its tradition of inviting professional directors and actors to perform new scripts written by teenagers as young as 16 years of age. The Writers' Lab also continues to be a debut platform for writers, directors and actors: Spin actress Elaine Cheah directs her maiden theatre production; Straits Times editor and well known playwright Tan Tarn How directs his first play; visual artist Amanda Heng crosses over to scripted plays. TheatreWorks also encourages new performance groups through its cooperation with NTU Hall of Residence 8.

Finally, we would like to dedicate the performance of 'Lest The Demons Get To Me' to our friend, the late William Teo who directed its first production in 1992. William directed Jeremiah Choy, our present Festival director.

Perhaps the strongest feature of this Festival is the flow of time, the transcendence of life and the endurance of expression.

Ong Keng Sen  
Artistic Director



## MESSAGE BY FESTIVAL DIRECTOR

I have almost come a full circle with this project.

I first started my involvement in professional theatre with TheatreWorks in 1988. That year, we were doing 'Beauty World'. There was much excitement about the first local adult musical in town.

At that time, there was a dearth of local plays as well as local playwrights. Nothing much was happening, in terms of local writings. But in 1991, after housing some local playwrights in the Writers' Lab, TheatreWorks asked me to participate in the Writers' Lab Reports.

During that time, I remembered spending sleepless nights rehearsing for "dramatised" reads of the scripts, literally hot off the oven. The experience was exhilarating as well as exhausting. I was pretty much holding two jobs - my day job (as a lawyer) and my night job (as an actor).

New impetus came about when we were finally ready to stage the local plays. In 1992, TheatreWorks organised the first theatre carnival in Singapore - a huge success. I played KC in 'Lest the Demons Get to Me', my very first monologue. It was then that I realised that I had a passion for theatre and I dreamed of going full time.

Over the past ten years, I have met many of these playwrights and had the privilege of working with some of them. I am heartened that this important component of Singapore theatre has persevered over the years, despite playwrights not being able to make a decent living. They continue to give us gems of plays which have become "classics" in Singapore.

I went full time in the theatre in 1997. I started to venture into directing and script-writing myself. I began to take an interest in the craft of telling a story to an audience.

Hence, my vision for this festival is to go back to the basics of story-telling. This festival provides a wonderful platform for the playwrights, directors and actors to tell a story in their own ways.

For the playwrights, each showing of their play is a chance to relive their characters, to rework their lines and to re-tell their stories.

For the directors, each production is a chance to create magic on stage, to tell a story with a vision that runs in tandem with the playwright's voice.

For the actors, each performance is an opportunity to be reincarnated as a different person, to be the voice of the playwright.

I am glad to take on this project as the Festival Director. The task is daunting but I am enjoying the energy and synergy. Maybe, one day soon, my own scripts will be staged by the Writers' Lab. Then the cycle will be completed.

I would like to thank Keng Sen for having faith in me, Tay Tong for guiding me, Ee Hoon, Vivian and Melanie for assisting me.

Last but not least, my dear friend and mentor William Teo, who has given me the courage to believe in the Singapore theatre.

**Jeremiah Choy**  
Festival Director



## CELEBRATION OF A DECADE OF WRITERS' LAB

In December 1990, Artistic Director of TheatreWorks, Ong Keng Sen, conceived the Writers' Laboratory, a programme to nurture young budding creative talents in playwriting.

Why a need for Writers' Lab? There were few plays that we could really call our own then. Although there was an interest to write, there was no impetus, no catalyst.

New and well-written plays are the lifeblood of developing good theatre. The process of writing a full-length and creative play is never an easy one. Yet, it can be fulfilling and challenging. However, it requires intensive investment of time, talent and resources. Playwrights need nurturing and support from their mentors, peers and sponsors.

Thus, the Writers' Lab was born. And for the last 10 years, Singapore Press Holdings has been its fervent supporter, single-handedly sponsoring the laboratory.

The Writers' Lab allows new and emerging playwrights opportunities through workshops, mentoring and readings to hone their creative writing skills. It also provides an artistic platform for mature and established playwrights to contribute new plays to the Lab. In turn, the Lab serves as an avenue for writers who desire to develop their concepts, themes and characterisation through interaction with an informed and critical audience at various stages of development.

The Lab has seen new works developed and produced by playwrights such as Russell Heng, Eleanor Wong, Tan Tam How, Ovidia Yu, Desmond Sim, Robin Loon, Mary Loh, Dana Lam, Pawarthi Nayar, Tan Mei Ching, Jean Tay, Ng Yi-Sheng, Chong Tze Chien and Christian Huber.

Many an audience have been entertained, educated and stimulated by plays like 'Three Fat Virgins Unassembled', 'Undercover', 'Mergers and Accusations', 'Lest the Demon Gets to Me', 'Pie', 'Watching the Clouds go by' and 'Hungry'.

Theatre and drama students have also used the Writers' Lab plays for discussion, improvisation and performance.

In 1998, the successful 'Got to go..... play till dawn' Singapore's First Overnight Theatre Carnival provided yet another showcase that highlighted winning plays from the Writers Labs 24-hour Playwriting Competition, namely 'Hungry', by 18 year old Ng Yi Sheng. The focus in that showcase was on new talents, one of the consistent aims of the Writers' Lab, be it in writing, directing or performing.



## THE WRITERS' LAB & THE SINGAPORE THEATRE

The Writers' Lab has been instrumental in many developments in Singaporean theatre such as:

1. The airing of Closet Issues, that were previously hidden from public scrutiny. Playwrights like Russell Hong wrote about mania's arrests as well as the pains of transsexualism.
2. The development of the genre of political satire. Its chief advocate is Tan Tarn How who wrote plays about a nation in search of soul as well as the paranoias of a nation under surveillance.
3. Tan Tarn How's political satire 'The Lady of Soul and Her Ultimate S Machine' made history as the first script to be passed under the revised censorship guidelines of Singapore. The production heralded in a new phase of openness/maturity on the Singapore stage.
4. The coming of age of Gender as a political issue in playwrighting. Leading the field were Eleanor Wong's plays on the choices facing a gay female lawyer and Ovidia Yu's hilarious feminist comedies.
5. The politicisation of individual writers. Chief amongst these was Ovidia Yu who has since become the President of AWABE. Her plays in the early years of the Writers' Lab often contained her reflections of the joy and pain of being a Singaporean woman.
6. The discovery of many new playwrights and new theatre artists such as Chong Tze Chen who won the student's section of the first Singapore Dramatist Awards and went on to become resident playwright of The Necessary Stage. Ng Yi Sheng who as a young student won the 24 hours playwrighting competition with the stunning work of 'Hungry'. Christian Huber who won the 2000 24 Hours playwrighting company with 'Dis/Integration' or Bob's Journey of Fear runs a new theatre company known as Luna Id.
7. Being a Platform for playwrights to continuously flex their writing muscles. Perhaps the most constant playwright has been Ovidia Yu who has contributed at least one play every year in the last ten years. She has enjoyed her plays being read at all the Lab Reports (public play-readings) and even now participates

for the fun of it in Playwriting Competitions such as the 2000 event on a cruise ship.

8. The development of writing as community programmes including youth events. This began in 1992 with Keng Sen forging a connection with another SPH sponsored writing programme for schools, the Creative Arts Program (C.A.P.). Later that year, professional actors read and performed plays written by 13 year olds at Lab Report IV. In 1996, the resident playwright of Writers' Lab Robin Loon went into secondary schools to teach playwrighting. Subsequently performing many of these plays with professional actors in 'The Writers' Lab Goes To School'. In that same year, the 24 Hour Playwriting Competition was launched to highlight the fun in communal playwrighting events. Participants wrote overnight at the zoo, along the Singapore river and in a cruise ship over a weekend. Finally, the Singapore Dramatist Award was revamped to become The Singapore Young Dramatist Award to focus on playwrighting in schools. This decision was made as it was felt that there was a creative gap that needed to be filled.
9. The consistent publishing of play anthologies with many different playwrights. This year, the Writers' Lab will publish its fourth anthology.
10. The establishment of free public play-readings to unveil new plays and share them with the audience. These were often rehearsed with professional actors and directors, hence allowing writers to rework ideas and dialogue.
11. The need to continuously focus on Singaporean identity and Singaporean playwrighting as opposed to plays written in English by Asians and Pan Asian. However this focus is not exclusive as the Writers' Lab welcomes plays in the latter category as well.
12. The validation of the need to constantly nurture playwrighting and playwrights before it became fashionable. When TheatreWorks started The Writers' Lab in 1990 with the first playwright-in-residence, Desmond Sim, many people laughed at the project saying that playwrighting could not be taught; one was either born with the gift or not. There were many who thought TheatreWorks was crazy to even suggest such a laboratory.



## FESTIVAL CALENDAR

1000 MONDAY	1003 TUESDAY	1403 WEDNESDAY	1403 THURSDAY	1403 FRIDAY	1703 SATURDAY	1403 SUNDAY
				8PM The Lady of Soul and Her Ultimate 'O' Machine	8PM Undercover 9PM Bernard's Story	8PM, 9PM Lost the Demons Get to Me
1403 MONDAY	2000 TUESDAY	2003 WEDNESDAY	2003 THURSDAY	2003 FRIDAY	2403 SATURDAY	2003 SUNDAY
8PM Playwrights Unscripted Meet 'em, Ask 'em, Know 'em	8PM Dory of a Mad Woman	8PM Bernard's Story	8PM Quiet the Gorilla	8PM Three Fat Virgins Unassembled	8PM Three Fat Virgins Unassembled 9PM Mergers and Accusations 9PM Wills and Succession	8PM Mergers and Accusations 9PM Wills and Succession
2003 MONDAY	2703 TUESDAY	2403 WEDNESDAY	2403 THURSDAY	3003 FRIDAY	3103 SATURDAY	0104 SUNDAY
8PM Playwrights Unscripted Meet 'em, Ask 'em, Know 'em	8PM Concetta's Dreams The Garden	8PM The Famous Five Go On An Adventure	8PM Breaking Through	8PM Fast Cars and Fancy Women Disintegration	11PM - 8PM YoungHeart 8PM Dirty Laundry	11PM - 8PM YoungHeart 8PM Dirty Laundry
0204 MONDAY	0204 TUESDAY	0404 WEDNESDAY	0504 THURSDAY	0404 FRIDAY	0704 SATURDAY	0604 SUNDAY
8PM Playwrights Unscripted Meet 'em, Ask 'em, Know 'em	8PM Pan Island Expressway	8PM Feeding the Armadillo Dressed Over Will You Please Jump?	8PM Neon Souls, Cold Lights Yellow Ducks on Paper Napkins	8PM Woman in a Tree on the Hill	8PM Watching the Clouds Go By 8PM Woman in a Tree on the Hill	8PM Neon Signs, Cold Lights Yellow Ducks on Paper Napkins 8PM Watching the Clouds Go By
0904 MONDAY	1004 TUESDAY	1104 WEDNESDAY	1204 THURSDAY	1304 FRIDAY	1404 SATURDAY	1504 SUNDAY
8PM Playwrights Unscripted Meet 'em, Ask 'em, Know 'em	8PM The Lady of Soul and Her Ultimate 'O' Machine	8PM Undercover	8PM Half Century	8PM Half Century	8PM Half Century	

## FACILITATOR'S MESSAGE

Many of us who write for the stage are werewolves.

By day we go about the business of putting a roof over our heads and filling our ricebowls. And then in the wee hours, we scrape our remaining energies, and we transform into this creature who has this unexplainable impulse to help put something wonderful (we hope) on stage - something of worth...of spirit...something filled with the unrestrainable need to connect with the humanity of all those out there in the dark who watch for a message of hope. Or a message of empathy, of compassion. Or, a spark of awakening...questioning...

Even for those who have the courage to write full-time, they are drained by the very process of playwriting that sustains them.

We often find ourselves exhausted between plays.

But every once in a while, it pays to step back. Breathe. Think outside the walls of creative passion. Or, as they say in "7 Habits of Highly Effective People", sharpen the axe before you continue hacking away at the tree...

In the 10 years since I helped springboard the Writers' Laboratory, life has been rich. If not so much materially as playwrights, - at least spiritually, emotionally, creatively.

For those of us who still write, and those of us who have just decided to, we probably know one of life's secrets: there is certainly no shortage of things for us to appreciate. Rather, there is a shortage of people who are able to truly appreciate what life has to offer.

And so, it is our mission to open up the windows and doors to the appreciation of life's many textures and colours...the essential pulsations and meanings.

After 10 years of doing it, I still love helping to let in the light.

DESMOND SIM,  
Facilitator of PLAYWRIGHTS UNSCRIPTED

### PLAYWRIGHTS UNSCRIPTED Meet 'em. Ask 'em. Know 'em.

Playwrights in Singapore are as stressed as everybody else. Sometimes a bit more.

Most of us have another full-time job, and rely on that job to pay the bills, fill the rice-bowl keep a roof over our heads.

And then, in between the necessary jobs we have, we fill our spaces with our real passion. The need to put words on paper...words into the hands of directors...words into the mouths of acting talent...words that, we hope, will essentially move the hearts and minds of our audiences.

Why do we do it? What odds do we face in the process of doing what we passionately feel for? What has helped us? What do we come up against in practicing our craft? What are the life issues writers face...are they any different from issues faced by other theatre practitioners? How do other theatre practitioners see us? Do they have anything to say to us?

All these and more will be packaged in a stimulating series over four Monday evenings - 12, 19, 26 March and 3 April, 2001.

#### Session 1 (120301)

"I WRITE BECAUSE..."

#### Session 2 (190301)

"WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID I'LL SAY?"

#### Session 3 (260301)

"A WRITER'S GOTTA LIVE..."

#### Session 4 (030401)

"SEEING YOU IN OUR EYES..."



## TWORKS (SINGAPORE) LTD



TheatreWorks (Singapore), established in 1985, is an international performance company based in Singapore. Since then, TheatreWorks has become known in Asia for its reinvention of traditional performance through a juxtaposition of cultures.

Under the Artistic Directorship of Ong Keng Sen, TheatreWorks' concerns goes beyond that of Singapore. It sees a strong synergy between nationalism and internationalism. This philosophy informs the company's work and outlook. With this philosophy, TheatreWorks has performed in the cultural capitals of Asia and Europe since 1992 in major festivals and cultural institutions.

TheatreWorks asks, "What is Asian in this age of globalisation, internationalisation, modernisation and urbanisation?" Its work exists on the tension between modernity and tradition; local and global. It hopes to rethink what is Western, what is Eastern, what is first world and what is third world. "Do these dichotomies continue to make sense in the new millennium?" Representing the continuum between tradition and contemporary, the work is unafraid to be exotic and yet conceptual. TheatreWorks' aesthetics projects the hybrid identity of the modern Asian and embrace the multiple realities of Asia today. The processes and productions of TheatreWorks question critical cultural issues without forsaking both emotional potency and artistry.

One of the significant projects of the company is The Flying Circus Project, a brainchild of Keng Sen's. This laboratory, the first with such extensive scope and continuity in Asia, looks at the different creative strategies of individual artists, through the recognition of difference between the many Asian cultures. The Flying Circus Project was established in 1995. It is divided into three phases linked by a spirit of investigation and inquiry. The focal point is cultural negotiation through a clash of cultures, a clash of time/space through the dynamic interaction between traditional and contemporary performers and a clash of disciplines.

Over the course of a decade, TheatreWorks has undergone numerous phases, always in response to its surrounds. For instance, the company's developmental programme for writers, The Writers' Lab, envisages a goal to cultivate writers—commenting powerfully and controversially on the social condition in Singapore. It has developed numerous playwrights currently working in Singapore. Other past programmes which developed theatre practice includes the Directors' Lab; Resident Artist Scheme; Associate Artist Scheme; and the Springboard Series.

In 1999, TheatreWorks initiated the Arts Network Asia that encourages and supports regional artistic collaboration. This Network is motivated by the

philosophy of meaningful collaboration, distinguished by mutual respect. This Network, with funding from the Ford Foundation and managed by TheatreWorks, is run by a panel of Asian artists. The Network makes grants to assist regional collaborations. The panel of artists, including TheatreWorks, is not allowed to apply for funds from this Network.

Apart from intercultural concerns, TheatreWorks' recent works have challenged accepted history through a genre of docu-performance. Such works question the process of documentation itself. It points to the slippage when translation occurs: linguistic translation, translation from fact into history into myth into performance. These works ultimately deal with the realm of myth making in modern societies.

TheatreWorks works primarily through a process of collaboration, dialogue and engagement with artists from other cultures. The company has become increasingly concerned with the urgent need for Asia to engage with Europe, America and Australia on new territories and with a new vocabulary. Ultimately, TheatreWorks is dedicated to the development of contemporary arts in Singapore, and to the evolution of an Asian identity and aesthetics for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century through a culture of difference.

## TWORKS EXECUTIVE AND BOARD

TheatreWorks is a non-profit company limited by guarantee with charity status and is a recipient of the 2-year grant from the National Arts Council.

### Artistic Director

ONG Keng Sen

### Managing Director

TAY Tong

### Production/Stage Manager

Valerie OLIVEIRO

### Project Manager

Vivian LEE

### Technical Co-ordinator

Lennie LEE

### Board of Directors

Justin HILL

LIM Kay Tong

LIM Siaw Chong

ONG Keng Sen

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## PRODUCTION TEAM

Festival Director	Jeremiah Choy
Production Manager	Khoé Ee Hoon
Lighting Designer	Dorothy Png
Set Designers	June Chan Wjayabudi Eve Tan Ang Kay Heng
Production Assistant	Melanie Tan
Stage Managers	Bala Subramaniam Iris Tan Elizabeth Goh Devina Tan Hui Yi Dione Chung Natalie Tan Tan Ling Ling Low Pei Choon Geraldine Tang Hui Chan Hoo Kuan Glen Wang Xuan Fei Rydwah Bin Anwar Ong Shi Lin Seto Wai Han Jie
Technical Co-ordinator	Roslan bin Mohammad
Asst Technical Co-ordinator	Melvin Lim
Technical Assistants	Alex Ng Tzu Cher Denny Tham Wai Kit
Designer	Yuen Chee Wai
Publicity	Page to Stage Studio
Front-of-House	Eugene Tan Darien Tock

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National Parks Board  
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The Necessary Stage  
Fly Entertainment  
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Fairfield Methodist Secondary School  
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### Volunteers

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Ibrahim a Ad Latif  
Eleanor Ang Yin Ping  
Felicia Oh  
Nurashikin Hashim  
Priscilla Tang Ming Ying

And everyone who has helped us in one way or another.

MANY SPECIAL THANKS TO



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FOR MAKING THIS EVENT  
POSSIBLE FOR THE PAST DECADE.





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"Miraculously, Sheng and his witty librettist, David Henry Hwang, takes no false steps. The music shimmers and soars in numerous individual accents, sometimes percussively punctuating the text, sometimes exquisitely expanding the inherent emotions. The intricate, introspective piece lasts only 75 minutes. Short minutes."

Martin Berheimer, *The Financial Times*, 310500

"Mr Sheng proves remarkably successful at juxtaposing Asian and Western idioms...With due respect to several wonderful performances, especially Karen Kandel as the Golden Buffalo, it was wondrous to hear the romance between the Cowherd's flute and the Goddess-Weaver's pipa."

James Oestreich, *The New York Times*, 060600

For queries and information,  
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**THEATREWORKS**