

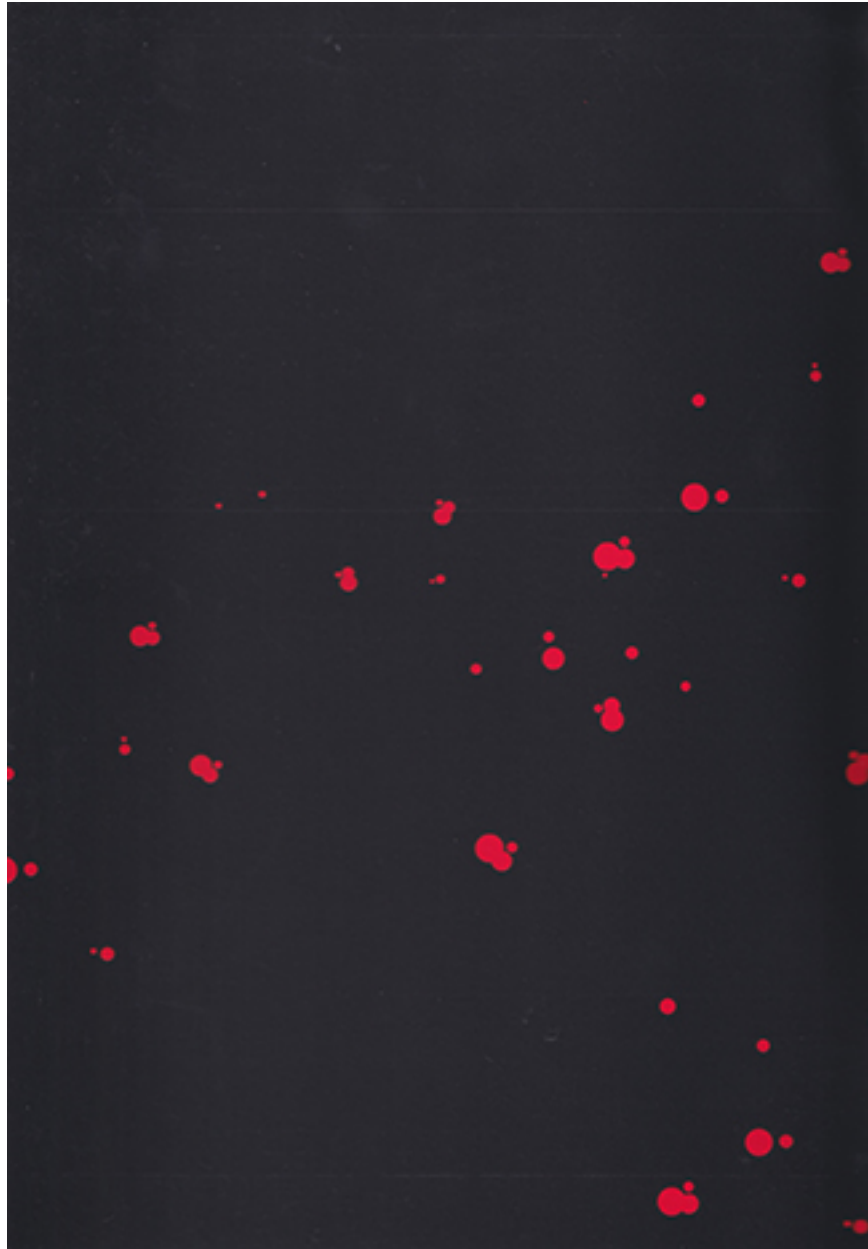
SINGAPORE ARTS FESTIVAL 2004
PRESENTS THE WORLD PREMIERE OF

SANDAKAN THRENODY

18 - 20 June 2004 Victoria Theatre



THEATREWORKS





singapore arts festival

Presented by the Singapore Arts Festival
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Also supported by the Australian Government, through the Australia International Cultural Council, in celebration of the 30th anniversary of Australia's dialogue partnership with ASEAN.



CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the Singapore Arts Festival 2004 – A New Season Blossoms.

In this vein, we hope you will enjoy the blooming of our Festival in over 300 performances by 1500 artists from 32 cities. You have the pick of a diverse range of contemporary and traditional productions of dance, music and theatre. Look out also for the four world premieres and four Asian premieres.

As a national celebration of the arts, the city will also be filled with many colourful, fun-filled and free programmes and activities, such as Arts on the Move, art exhibitions, Weekend Highlights and the Closing Celebrations. Come to these events and add excitement to the Festival.

On behalf of the National Arts Council, I thank our sponsors and partners for their generous support. A big Thank You also goes out to all of you in the audience for your participation in the Festival.

Enjoy the fresh blooms in this special arts season!



Liu Thai Ker
Chairman
National Arts Council

CREATIVE TEAM

Director
Ong Keng Sen

Composer
Jonathan Mills

Consultant/Initial Researcher
Lou Weis

Collaborators-Performers
Matthew Crosby
Tim Harvey
Lok Meng Chue
Gojo Masanosuke
Rizman Putra
Kota Yamazaki

Set Designer
Justin Hill

Light Designer and Video Artist
Margie Medlin

Collaborating Video Artist
Choy Ka Fai

Associate Director
Lok Meng Chue

Soundscape Designers
Steve Adam
Jonathan Mills

The music for *Sandakan Threnody* was performed by Jamie Allen (tenor), Cantillation (chorusmaster Paul Stanhope) and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra conducted by Richard Gill with Riley Lee (shakuhachi) and Wang Zheng-Ting (sheng).

Produced by Steven Adam, Jonathan Mills, Russell Stapleton and Jane Ulman.

Orchestral recording produced by Owen Chambers.

Additional recordings produced by James Atkins, Jonathan Mills and Russell Stapleton.

Recorded in April and May 2004 at the Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House and ABC Studios, Ultimo and Southbank.

Sandakan Threnody was inspired by a work for tenor, choir and orchestra of the same name by Jonathan Mills.

Narrative
Ong Keng Sen

Choreography/Text
Matthew Crosby
Tim Harvey
Gojo Masanosuke
Rizman Putra
Kota Yamazaki
with Ong Keng Sen

Body Installations
Rizman Putra

Cameras
Choy Ka Fai
Margie Medlin

Recorded Voice(Poem)
Dr. Frank Mills

Illustrations
Melvin Chee, :Phunk Studio

DIRECTOR'S THOUGHTS

How did it all come about?

Jonathan Mills, the composer, and I first talked about Sandakan in July 2001. We had met socially in Melbourne and we exchanged notes about what we were doing. I told him that I was directing a play about the Second World War and he said that he was also doing something about World War II. Jonathan told me that his father was very lucky to have been transferred out of Sandakan as the whole POW camp was wiped out (2000 men). There were only 6 survivors and they survived because they escaped. He was writing a new orchestral piece for Adelaide. I didn't hear about it again until Jonathan came by Singapore in the beginning of 2002. He asked if I was interested to direct *Sandakan Threnody*, to translate the 30-minute orchestral piece into a theatre piece. I was intrigued by it and this began the two-year process of searching for funds and looking for festivals to commission it. Ching Lee (from NAC) and Robyn Archer (from Melbourne) were very open to it from the beginning and we had to find other Australian partners.

The play deals with the themes of war—why the fascination with war-themed pieces?

My work in the last decade has been concerned about giving voice to the voiceless, to those who have hitherto been unheard. After the war, there has been an obliteration of what happened in Sandakan. Some writers have called it a conspiracy of silence. I tend to see it as several conspiracies of silence both in Australia and Japan, which have obscured stories of trauma and dignity. So I would like to float these human stories to the surface.

And we can see from the stories of the US Army in Iraq how power can be abused. Societies are still going to war, still fuelling the very human fear of 'the other'. Racial and cultural prejudice is still rife today, waiting to be manipulated by politicians and governments. There is an interesting Australian documentary *This is Japan* during the war about how Japanese are trained to hate from a young age. Ironically, the documentary also teaches Australians to hate the Japanese. I find this material endlessly potent. I know how one can be sucked into it as I can recognise it in the human condition including myself. So as long as there is war, these pieces are still relevant to discuss the darkness in our souls.

The Body Transparent...

There is a scene (scene 2) that we have made about the transparent body. As the POWs marched on these death marches, they slowly wasted away

on the mountain ranges of Mount Kinabalu. They walked 260 km in 17 to 28 days depending on their physical condition. Half to two thirds of the men died in this manner. We were discussing how as they marched, they began to defy their bodies in a strange way. As they dragged their bodies through the jungle, many of them were crawling like animals. Through the thick tropical jungle, they lost the ability to even stand, due to lack of food and the terrible terrain. They became in a strange way immortal. Their physical bodies collapsed but ironically I think they were able to lift off spiritually. It is always about how they find immense strength in the worst of circumstances.

What or who is a hero?

Bill Moxham - one of the six survivors who came back with post-trauma syndrome and killed himself in 1961? Captain Yamamoto who was executed at the war crimes trials of Borneo but who said that he would take sole responsibility for what happened? The locals who died but are not commemorated either in Koya-san, Japan or in Sandakan War Memorial Park?

Beauty and Darkness

There are also the kabuki scenes in the performance. A male dancer impersonates a woman (the onnagata role). This is a symbolic role of an old woman ravaged by memory; time flashes back into a past life where there is the joy of love and the tragedy of death. The woman is finally transformed into a bird, a symbol of hope for humanity. The kabuki presence is like a gold thread through the tapestry of war and pain. I am interested in the flip side of brutality/violence - beauty. The inspiration for these scenes came when I saw the 2000 photographs of the POWs who died at Sandakan in the Canberra War Memorial. Some of them were just young boys but all of them were stunning, godlike in their smiles, invincible on the day of their enlistment. The beauty of these boys, the beauty of Japanese aesthetics is juxtaposed together in the kabuki scenes to tell about the waste of war, about the incredible darkness, which erupted in Sandakan.

A Suspended Time and Space

I have been fascinated with projecting the play beyond 1945. Two performers play out a scene in the end, which is suspended in time and space. Their antics are watched over by a Hairy Midget, who danced a duet with the bird of hope, and a Narrator who is now a witness. I call this scene 'the future' - what happens after the war, perhaps when the 'last' Australian meets the 'last' Japanese? They are like the tragic clowns of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* - waiting for war wounds to finally come to rest. For perhaps we are still infected by the invisible virus of hatred and fear.

The cultural war is still embedded within us. The legacies of the past continue. Ultimately there are three different journeys, which are being woven onstage: the live action, the music, and the video. It is my role to pull these three strands together.

Is Sandakan Threnody different from your previous works?

Yes, as it is the first time that the many cultures in my work have significance in an immediate social, political context. I think it is no longer possible to talk about war through one culture. **Sandakan Threnody** is positioned at the crossroads of Japan, Australia and Borneo/Singapore/Southeast Asia (the site of the war). It is not a typically patriotic piece. It talks about the descendants, both real (Sue Moxham, Tetsuya Yamamoto, Tim Harvey, Jonathan Mills) and metaphorical, of the war. Working with Tim to trace the past as he remembers his grandfather, a POW at Changi, brought home many immediacies, as did our Labuan-Sandakan-Ranau journey. On that journey, we traced the death march route which is now a four hour expressway ride on a bus. We managed to track down four local survivors who are all in their seventies now. Their stories were dignified, confusing and sobering – including the most shocking one, of some starving Japanese soldiers who hung up a white POW and slowly sliced his flesh off to be cooked while he was still alive. This story has now ended up in local mythology. All in all, I feel I have a concrete responsibility towards the past and the future through working with collaborators from many cultures and I wonder, is it possible to transcend cultural bigotry, which leads to war?

Ong Keng Sen



COMPOSER'S MESSAGE

It is the destiny of the artist not to serve those who make history, but to serve those who are its victims. – Albert Camus

The composer writes: **Sandakan Threnody** is dedicated to the memory of Captain L.C. Matthews, GC, MC, executed at Kuching Prisoner-of-War Camp, 2 March 1944.

That the events surrounding the appalling treatment of Australian and British troops held prisoners-of-war in Sandakan and Ranau, North Borneo between 1942 and 1945 have been brought to light is largely due to the efforts of six Australian soldiers who escaped the marches from Sandakan to Ranau and lived to tell the tale.

Those who survived this dreadful ordeal were: Keith Botterill, Dick Braithwaite, Owen Campbell, Bill Moxham, Nelson Short and Bill Sticpewich. None of these men are alive today. My father, Dr Frank Mills, was also incarcerated in Sandakan and Kuching as a prisoner-of-war during that period. **Sandakan Threnody** is also written as a tribute to his experiences in North Borneo.

Commissioned by the Centenary of Federation, South Australia Committee and at the suggestion of Robyn Archer, on the occasion of the return by the Australian Army of the Torrens Parade Grounds to the people of South Australia, **Sandakan Threnody** has been revised for performances by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and now, a theatrical version directed by Ong Keng Sen, TheatreWorks Singapore.

In its original form, the music comprises three movements. Whilst not specifically programmatic, each movement refers to a different aspect of the Sandakan story. Each movement functions as a musical archetype. One movement is an instrumental overture, albeit one with references to both the subtle timbres of traditional Japanese music such as gagaku and the diverse, almost incongruous, often aggressive timbres of contemporary orchestral percussion. It is the shortest movement and its relative brevity is a comment on the brutality and shattering abruptness of war.

Another movement is a march: a march that undergoes a series of disintegrating and occasionally defiant permutations. It is scored for solo tenor, chorus and orchestra. It uses two texts, Psalm 130 and a fragment of a poem by Anna Akhmatova. The core rhythmic motif of this movement is based on a morse code transcription of the words 'De profundis clamavi ad te Domine' (Out of the depths do I cry unto Thee, O Lord). It draws a connection between a 'dead' language, Latin, and a 'dead' technology, morse code, to express the tragic dimensions of a 'death' march.

Yet another movement is a lullaby. It is a setting of a highly lyrical poem by Randolph Stow for solo tenor and orchestra. The imagery of the poem is evocative of a quintessential Australian landscape, offering the possibility of repose and the hope of renewal.

Following the performances of the complete orchestral version of **Sandakan Threnody** by Jamie Allen, Cantillation, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Richard Gill in late April, the work was recorded in its entirety and in a large number of short fragments.

These fragments particularly, have formed the basis of an entirely new version of the music for the theatre production of **Sandakan Threnody**.

Working with the sound designer and electro-acoustic composer, Steve Adam, we have devised a series of elaborate "soundscapes" which treat the orchestral material in various ways: enlarging, compressing, bending, breaking apart the inner fabric of the original material in a process akin to musical archeology.

From movement to movement, the sound score changes its role – sometimes supporting the dramaturgy and at other times propelling the stage action itself. The process has been quite challenging and revealing.

The title of the work derives from the Greek word **threnos** which means grieving but with an explicit emphasis on a public act of grieving. In contrast to the cathartic wisdom of ancient Greece, Australia seems to have a problem with public expressions of grief. For us, grief is a very private matter, with the result that tragedies like Sandakan are too often unknown, unobserved and unlamented.

It has not been my intention in writing **Sandakan Threnody** to make accusations. No culture or country has a monopoly on righteousness. The rituals of many cultures rely on the representation of a transforming journey, a pilgrimage or a path to enlightenment. By contrast, the marches from Sandakan to Ranau had no purpose and provided no enlightenment.

Jonathan Mills

BIOGRAPHIES

Ong Keng Sen

Ong Keng Sen is an active contributor to the evolution of an Asian identity and aesthetic for contemporary performance. His juxtaposition of different art forms and cultural styles has helped him to create a trademark epic style which has attracted acclaim in the region, Europe, the US and Australia. Apart from his creative laboratories, Keng Sen is known for "docu-performances" that explore today's Asia, its diversity and its relationship with the world. He is the first Singapore artist to have received both the Young Artist Award (1992) and the Cultural Medallion Award (2003) for Singapore.

Jonathan Mills

Prominent Australian composer Jonathan Mills studied composition with Peter Sculthorpe in Sydney and piano with Lidia Arcuri in Italy. He is one of Australia's most experienced festival directors having been Artistic Director of both the Melbourne Festival (2000-2001) and the Brisbane Music Biennale (1995 & 1997). He has written two highly acclaimed chamber operas, the most recent of which *The Eternity Man* was co-commissioned by the Almeida Opera and the Aldeburgh Festival and received a Genesis Prize for Opera. His future projects include a Double Concerto for piano and violin, a co-commission for Duo Sol, with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and the London Sinfonietta. He is Director of the Alfred Deakin Innovation Lectures for the Victorian Government.

Matthew Crosby

A graduate from the National Institute of Dramatic Art, Sydney; Matthew received a Japan Foundation Fellowship to study Japanese theatre in 1995 and in 2000 was awarded a scholarship from Australia's Asialink and since then has worked extensively in Japan. He has worked in all areas of the Australian industry but in the last ten years has concentrated mainly on theatre, with numerous credits to his name.



Tim Harvey








Tim earned a Bachelor of Arts in Dance and Drama at Deakin University. Since then, he has been working as a performer, teacher and choreographer in Melbourne and around regional Victoria. Apart from performing with Danceworks, BalletLab and Shelley Lasica's ongoing Plan Protean project, Tim also creates his own works and often facilitates movement workshops in schools.

Lok Meng Chue

Meng Chue has been involved (from 1985 to 1995) in nearly all of TheatreWorks' productions. These include numerous performances on stage, both locally and overseas, and backstage as director, stage/production management, and offstage as workshop coordinator and administrator.

Gojo Masanosuke

A leading dancer/choreographer of the Gojo School of Japanese dance, Gojo is one of Japan's most celebrated 'Onnagatas' (female impersonators) who has earned high praise for his dramatic expressiveness, backed by a sure technique, in performing a wide range of classical roles. He has also engaged actively in the creation and the performance of new works.



Rizman Putra

Rizman is the co-founder of Multi-disciplinary art collective, Kill Your Television (KYTV). Apart from performances, he works on collages, installations and drawings, which have been the primary force behind his outrageous performances. Well-known for his alter ego, Manic Jango; Rizman is also a singer/songwriter for local indie-rock outfit, Tiramisu.

Kota Yamazaki

One of Japan's most feted contemporary dancers, Kota Yamazaki is best known for devising choreography that combines the essence of the Japanese avant-garde butoh, classical ballet and American modern dance. He is now exploring new forms of human relationships and community. His last choreography was in Senegal, Africa with the Jant-bi company.

Justin Hill

Justin Hill, scenographer and architect, is based in Singapore, where he is a partner of Kerry Hill Architects and a board director of TheatreWorks. He studied architecture at the University of Adelaide graduating with honours in 1979. During his studies, he was involved widely in stage and theatre design and has since worked extensively in opera, musical theatre, and drama in both Asia and Australia. A founding member of TheatreWorks, Justin has designed more than 20 productions for TheatreWorks.

Margie Medlin

Margie Medlin studied Visual Arts, in Sydney, lighting design at Yale School of Drama, scenography at Central Saint Martins School of Art & Design and Advanced Computer Applications for Theatre Design at the Central School of Speech & Drama in London. She has an MA in Interior Design from the RMIT in Melbourne. In addition to working in the fields of film, lighting and projection design, she is a media artist and develops film and video installations exploring the interrelations of dance and the moving image.

Steve Adam

Steve (Stelios) Adam has had a long-term fascination with music, sound and its associated technologies. After studying electronics and establishing a career in broadcasting, he returned to study, pursuing composition and computer music at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia. Steve has created sound and music works for a variety of media and performance contexts. His electro-acoustic works have been broadcast in Australia and performed in Europe, North America and Asia. He has taught in sound, composition and technology at various institutions in Australia and in 1995 established the new programs and technical facilities in composition and music technology at Monash University in Clayton, Victoria, where he has been a PhD candidate since early 2002.

Choy Ka Fai

Graduated from LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts with a Diploma in Fine Arts (New Media Arts), Choy Ka Fai is a multi-disciplinary artist who works with video installation, short-films and theatrical performances. Video has always been his strong point of collaboration and basis of experimentation, with him presenting many inter-disciplinary works with visual artists, dancers and musicians. As a core artistic member of local multi-disciplinary artists collective Kill Your Television (KYTV), he is actively involved in the direction and multi-media designs for KYTV's performances, short films and exhibitions.

Sydney Symphony Orchestra

Established in 1932, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra is Australia's largest and busiest orchestra. Many of the world's finest artists have appeared with them, including legendary figures George Szell, Sir Thomas Beecham, Otto Klemperer and Igor Stravinsky. The Orchestra now regularly welcomes the great conductors of today such as Lorin Maazel and Charles Dutoit. Highlights of the 2004 season under the direction of Chief Conductor Gianlugi Gelmetti include Verdi's Requiem with the Chorus of the Rome Opera; the return of violinists Salvatore Accardo and Vadim Repin and a complete cycle of Sibelius symphonies conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy.

Richard Gill Conductor

Artistic Director of the Sydney Symphony's Education Program, Richard Gill is also Artistic Director of OzOpera, Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Canberra Symphony Orchestra and the Adviser for the Musica Viva in Schools program. An internationally respected music educator specialising in opera, musical theatre, vocal and choral training, his work in developing young musicians and creating opportunities for them is recognised globally, garnering numerous accolades during the course of his illustrious career.

Jamie Allen Tenor

Educated at the State Conservatorium of Music in Sydney, Jamie Allen joined the Opera Australia Chorus in 1994 and in 1998 became a member of the company's Young Artists' Development Program, winning numerous awards in the Australian Singing Competition. In 1999, he was awarded the Rémy Martin Scholarship having been voted the outstanding young talent at Opera Australia. He has continued his association with the company in roles such as Rodolfo (*La bohème*), Jacquinio (*Fidelio*), Lysander (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and Gastone (*La traviata*). Jamie has extensive experience on the concert platform including Bruckner's F minor Mass and Te Deum, Verdi's Requiem, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, Haydn's Creation, Janáček's Glagolitic Mass and Bach's B minor Mass.

Cantillation Chorusmaster: Paul Stanhope

A chorus of professional singers, Cantillation is an ensemble of fine voices with the speed, agility and flexibility of a chamber orchestra. Formed in 2001 by Antony Walker and Alison Johnston, it has since been busy in the concert hall, opera theatre and the recording studio. Performances have included Adams' *Harmonium*, Sofia Gubaidulina's *Now Always Snow* with the Sydney Symphony, Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Cantillation has recorded numerous discs including great choral masterpieces of the Renaissance, Fauré's Requiem, Orff's *Carmina burana* and Handel's *Messiah*.

SOURCE MATERIALS

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ABOUT THEATREWORKS

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

This year, TheatreWorks turns 20 – and with its plans to move into its new home at Robertson Quay called the icaa (international centre of asian arts), it begins a reinvention process to become +Works. It will position itself in a landscape of all the Asian arts it has engaged with in the last decade, and go back to its roots of encouraging young Singaporean creativity as well as continue its laboratory activities.

The icaa will be an independent international centre that engages with inter-Asian creativity and networking, a place where individuals from other countries would arrive at to understand the broad perspectives of working with the global Asian urban metropolis, tradition and artists.

+Works will also start SCAN (Singapore Creative Arts Nucleus) which will curate groups of young creative individuals known as scanners, with the icaa being the site for their creativity.

At present, +Works has two strands: the Singapore Wing and the International Wing – to facilitate its growth both in Singapore and in the international arena.

In Singapore, it continues to support and nurture Singapore artists and develop Singapore arts through its developmental programmes like The Writers' Lab that produces and promotes Singapore writing, creating a theatre that is Singapore and with a Singaporean voice; and the education and outreach programmes that work closely with schools and institutions, bringing the magic of theatre and drama to youths and the general public. Last year, the Singapore Wing embarked on a new development, creating works that redefine the bounds between science, art and 'live' performance. To date, +Works has created and presented over 165 productions, which are important landmarks in Singapore theatre history.

Internationally, +Works continues to develop its various productions and programmes that have gained international recognition. Homegrown research and development projects like The Flying Circus Project have turned into internationally known and sought-after laboratory processes. Its progressive outlook results in works that have challenged accepted history through a genre of documentary performances. It continues to do commissions by international festivals and institutions, as well as initiate new creative programmes internationally. For instance, The Continuum Arts Project or CAP, a capacity building programme in Laos that helped revive the Laotian Ramayana.

In 1999, TheatreWorks initiated the Arts Network Asia, a network of independent artists and arts activists promoting regional artistic collaborations and exchanges. With funding from the Ford Foundation, it was hosted and managed by tWorks for the first three terms, ending in 2004.

Under the artistic directorship of Ong Keng Sen, +Works' concerns go beyond that of Singapore. It sees a strong synergy between nationalism and internationalism – a philosophy that informs the company's works and outlook.

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Associate Artistic Director
(Singapore Wing) ~ Low Kee Hong

Associate Artistic Director
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Associate Artistic Director
(Singapore Wing) ~ Tan Tarn How

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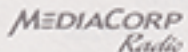
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- The Heeren Shops
- The Substation
- Toshiba
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