

THE MAHABHARATA †

PART I : THE GAME OF DICE

Described as “the great story of mankind” The Mahabharata tells the story of a long and bloody war between two cousins: the Pandavas of five brothers and the Kauravas of whom there were a hundred. The power struggle ends with an enormous battle that would determine the fate of the world. The Game of Dice traces the journey of the creation of the Pandavas and Kauravas. It is a journey taken by humanity since the beginning of time. A lifetime of choices presented, each with an effect on the rest of nature. Choices faced by each of us even today.

14 and 15 July 1995

Lasalle-SIA College Of The Arts

18 to 23 July 1995

The Substation Garden

25 and 26 July 1995

Victoria Theatre



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the mahabharata

PART I : THE GAME OF DICE

BY JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIERE
TRANSLATED BY PETER BROOK

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message from LASALLE-SIA college of the arts

It is a pleasure and privilege for LASALLE-SIA to host Asia In Theatre's *The Mahabharata Part I : The Game of Dice*. That epic story is fundamental to the cultures of Southeast Asia. There can be no understanding of painting, sculpture, dance, music, monumental and folk arts without a perusal of it. It is as important to Southeast Asians as the study of Greek mythology to Europeans.

The fact that Asia In Theatre has researched not only The Mahabharata's story line but also the various ethnic theatrical forms of its presentation is of great interest to Lasallians. They are eager to profit by the group's studies and thereby enrich their own perceptions of Asian performing arts. These are down to earth and close to nature. Asia In Theatre's use of a piece of virgin land to build the sets of the production will be watched with interest. Congratulations William and Asia in Theatre on the realisation of your vision and the growth of your research.

The total production will take three years. The timeframe is fittingly commensurate with the length of the story. And it means that a whole generation of students will mature and grow with the production itself.

LASALLE-SIA is proud to be associated with *The Mahabharata*.

Brother Joseph McNally
President
LASALLE-SIA College of The Arts



message from the french embassy

The Cultural Service of the French Embassy has great pleasure once again to extend its congratulations and support to William Teo and Asia In Theatre Research Centre as they stage *The Mahabharata Part I : The Game of Dice*.

Two years ago, Georges Bigot, known for his role as Prince Norodom Sihanouk, from Ariane Mnouchkine's Theatre du Soleil, conducted an acting workshop for Singapore actors. Bigot's great love for the theatre and his artistic concepts helped shaped Asia In Theatre's production of *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.

Later this year, a French actor from Peter Brook's company will be in Singapore to conduct another acting workshop.

The Cultural Service of the French Embassy will be delighted to continue its support of *Part II* and *Part III* of *The Mahabharata* by Asia In Theatre.

Such an approach to Performing Arts where East meets West will not only enrich each other but also enhance the artistic co-operation between France and Singapore which we hold dear.

Jean-Claude Terrac
Counsellor
Cultural, Scientific and Technical Cooperation



THEATREWORKS

presents

lok meng chue

in the singapore premiere of

leow puay tin's

ANG

TAU

MUI

a modern woman

...

MY NAME IS ANG TAU MUI.

What kind of name is that?

THAT WAS WHAT MY FRIENDS CALLED ME.

What does it mean?

THE GIRL WHO SELLS RED BEAN SOUP.

....

July 26 - 29, August 2 - 5, 8, 10 - 12, 1995.

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*The writer of **Three Children**,
Leow Puay Tin returns with a
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Modern Woman.*

Directed and performed by Lok
Meng Chue, one of Singapore's
favourite actresses, this
monologue is an intimate and
heartwarming portrayal of a
woman called Ang Tau Mui
from Kappan Road in Malacca.

With endearing poignancy, Ang
Tau Mui shares her love for
shopping, dreaming and Lin
Dai. Join her as she brings you
on a ride that will make you
laugh, cry and wonder!



message from **Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation**

Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation ("Foundation") is proud to be one of the sponsors of Asia In Theatre Research Centre's production of Project Apsara's *The Mahabharata Part I : The Game of Dice*.

With a capital sum of \$10 million held in trust, the establishment of the Foundation is the result of an earlier commitment made in 1990 by Dr Michael Fam, Chairman of Asia Pacific Breweries at the opening of the new Tiger Brewery in Tuas.

The Foundation, which was established in June 1994, aims to support the Arts, humanitarian causes, human resource development, research and excellence in science and technology.

Project Apsara, with its emphasis on research, experimentation and exchange of ideas with a diversity of participants from the various Asian countries is clearly born out of a desire among those in the Performing Arts to preserve and integrate traditional art forms with the new.

The Foundation wishes Asia In Theatre Research Centre all the very best and is honoured to be able to contribute positively towards the realisation of their vision for a unique global theatre.

the mahabharata

toh han shih

This epic is called The Mahabharata, on account of its large size (mahattva) and its weightiness (bharavattva).

Giant among the Bharatas (literally meaning Mahabharata), whatever is here on law, sex, commerce, spiritual salvation, dharma, material prosperity, the pleasures of personal and social life, is found elsewhere, but what is not here is to be found nowhere

Thus proclaims the Mahabharata about itself. Sixteen times longer than the Christian Bible, it is not just a poem, but an entire literature and epic of the totality of life, containing so many things on the most diverse topics under the sun.

I have composed a poem that is vast. Therein are revealed the mystery and subtleties of the Vedas and Upanishads; descriptions of creeds and modes of living; past, present and future; rules for castes; the Puranas; dimensions of the sun, moon and stars; a description of the four ages (yugas); a definition of charity; reincarnation; the science of medical healing; a geographical description of places, rivers, mountains, forests, cities, palaces; the art of war; descriptions of different nations and their different cultures; the Universal Spirit.

Thus claims the semi-legendary author of the Mahabharata, Vyasa, who acts as a character in his own work. Did this author exist? Scholars believe the poem evolved in 3 stages, from about 800 BC to 200 AD :

Jaya (victory)	8 800 verses
Bharata	24 000 verses
Mahabharata (big Bharata)	100 000 verses

Scholars believe the final version of the Mahabharata may be composed in the early post-Vedic age as a unified work by a single genius. This single author made use of the many stories that existed in India since ancient times, adapted and modified them, and put them together, to create the unified work.

After that were continued additions by various later authors, which were of varying and unequal quality. There exist multiple versions of the Mahabharata, which differ from each other, reflecting the influence of different authors.

The poem has a main story, which concerns a quarrel between two sets of cousins, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, culminating in a vast, bloody war. This story was known in 1500 BC. The geographical locations of the story, eg. the battlefield of Kurukshetra and the royal capital of Hastinapura, actually exist in North India. At points in this main story, other stories develop. Within these other stories, more stories develop. Stories branch into stories branching into stories ad infinitum. This is the Indian tradition of storytelling. Within these many stories are embedded discourses on politics, religion, morality, astrophysics, mysticism, medicine, ancient Indian law, and other topics. The Mahabharata is not just one story, but an immense structure of stories and topics that keep growing as later authors add to it. In that sense, it is a living text.

The Mahabharata has influenced the Puranas, classical and modern Indian drama, medieval romance, Indian novels and cinema. Its influence has spread beyond India. Cambodian inscriptions dating back to the 6th century give evidence that the Mahabharata was a well-known and important text in Cambodia then. Episodes from the poem were carved in bas-reliefs on the 11th century temple, the Baphuon, and the 12th century temple, Angkor Wat. The Angkor

Wat has the longest bas-relief of the Mahabharata in the world - 49 metres long. In Indonesia, the poem was translated from Sanskrit into Javanese from 1000 onwards. Temples in Bali and Java from the 13th century till today depict scenes from the Mahabharata in bas-reliefs.

Ancient Cambodia and Indonesia adopted much Hindu religion and culture from India. Both ancient kingdoms had the same caste society as India, including the caste of learned gurus, *brahmins*, and the caste of aristocratic noble knights, *ksatriya*. The Mahabharata tells of mystical, magical *brahmins* and heroic *ksatriyas*. Ancient Southeast Asian kingdoms were frequently at war among themselves. The knightly code of chivalry of the warrior caste and the war between the Pandavas and Kauravas in the Mahabharata found direct relevance in these warring Southeast Asian kingdoms. Balinese, Javanese and Cambodian kings modelled themselves on the 5 Pandava brothers, the heroes of the poem, who were of the caste of aristocratic knights.

The Mahabharata remains important in India and Indonesia today. Indians and Indonesians have learnt to think and act in terms of the Mahabharata, modelling themselves and labelling others based on its characters. The first president of Indonesia, Sukarno, called himself Bhima, one of the famous 5 Pandava heroes of the poem. Sukarno made himself a 5-star general after the 5 Pandava brothers. Indonesian shadow plays use scenes from the Mahabharata to comment on contemporary Indonesian life: World War II, the anti-communist coup of 1965, etc.

The Mahabharata has also reached Europe. In a bas-relief by a 13th century Italian sculptor Benedetto Antelami on the Porta della Vittoria of the Baptistery in the Italian town of Parma, the story of a man in a well, from the Mahabharata, is depicted, transposed from its Hindu context into a Christian setting. The Bhagavad Gita from the Mahabharata is admired by 20th century European Christians like T S Eliot, who quoted it in his poems.

The Mahabharata is not just a quaint ancient fable, but contains much that is relevant to our modern world. Modern critics have found the Mahabharata has much to say on how to be a successful chief executive officer, how to be a good wife, feminism, the environment and modern international politics. The weapons and warfare described in the Mahabharata bear an eerie resemblance to electronic and nuclear warfare.

For centuries, different societies in India and Southeast Asia have found the Mahabharata relevant to their needs and conditions. No doubt the Mahabharata will continue to find new messages for new problems in societies of the future, not just in India, but throughout the world.

the mahabharata in cambodia

A 6th century Cambodian inscription called for an unbroken daily recital of the entire Mahabharata. The Prasat Kandol Dom Inscription of the 9th century says that Sivasoma, royal preceptor of King Indravarman, was an expert on the Mahabharata. The stele of Prasat Tapan Run of the 10th century, dated Saka 928, says that the teaching of the entire Mahabharata was in fashion. The Prasat Khna Inscription says that King Suryavarman I was fond of sacred narrations from the Mahabharata.

In the temple of Bantai Srei (Women's Fortress), built in the 10th century, one of its pediments

depicts a scene from the Mahabharata where an *apsara* stands between Bhima and Duryodhana. Episodes from the epic were carved on panels on the 11th century pyramidal temple, the Baphuon. On the long wall of the outer galleries of the famous Angkor Wat, built in the 12th century, the Mahabharata is depicted in bas-reliefs. The southern section of the west wall of the

outer gallery has scenes where Krishna aids the Pandavas. The fight between the Pandavas and the Kauravas covers 49 metres: the longest bas-relief of the Mahabharata in the world. This battle scene is an allegory of the many wars ancient Cambodian kings fought.

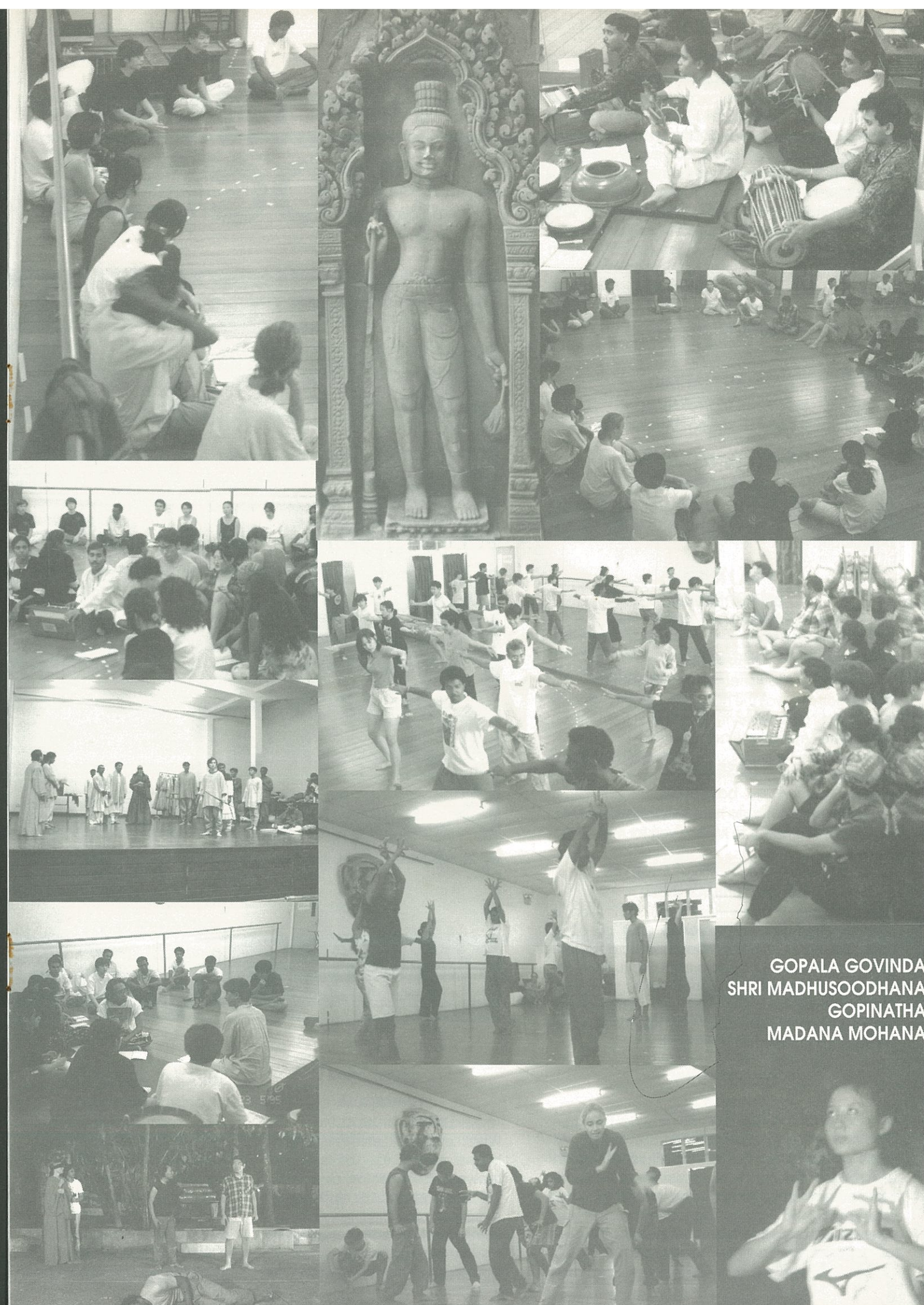




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GOPALA GOVINDA
SHRI MADHUSOODHANA
GOPINATHA
MADANA MOHANA

In the beginning, my preconceptions and learned inhibitions held me back from freely giving from my heart. Real focus is needed or the "moment of life" or "spark" on the stage is not achieved. The yoga sessions helped to bring my mind into focus. But the hardest and most important lesson I learnt was discipline on stage - to be aware of all the elements you need at any moment and throw in your heart and soul without inhibition.

An inspiring journey into a culture as
irresistable as destiny.

This is like soul searching. Perhaps, it is.

The play brings out the real human values and emotions in you and draws you closer to the characters.

I felt like being part of a big family.

The 'unlearning' was the most difficult part. After we learnt to put down everything and start from zero, a clean slate...magic!

The Mahabharata has everything that anyone needs to know. Even for me.

Each rehearsal is an exercise in concentration, a concentration built on awareness and an open heart. You enter an empty space, you create, you give as much of your feelings as possible. If we are true to our inner feelings, our inner selves, we move. Sometimes we fail, but at the very centre of our bodies we have an overwhelming desire to fly, to be carried by the experience we have created.

Rehearsing for The Mahabharata was like being on a holiday, a trip to another world and culture. As much as it is about the Indian culture, filled with fantasy and wonder, the feelings and emotions are very contemporary and similar to what I'm familiar with. I've realised that nothing much has changed since, but I am glad to know that despite different races, religions and cultures, we all share a common bond.

the creative process

The rehearsals are engrossing! The more we've discovered about the heroes and heroines of *The Mahabharata*, the more remains to be discovered. It's been an exhilarating journey.

Attending the workshop is like returning to the Garden of Eden. We uncaged ourselves, stripped of all influences that shaped us. Then we had to unearth Adam's language. The experience is Zen!

William's work with his actors is grounded on 2 basic principles: a) performances must be clean and sparing, and that means no unnecessary gestures, mannerisms or movements, and b) performances will come across genuinely and convincingly if the actors allow themselves to respond only to the "here and now" of each moment on stage because everything else is extraneous and irrelevant. This may not be the only way of doing theatre, but it is one valid way, and I believe it works beautifully for a play like *The Mahabharata*.

It's living, learning and experiencing life all over again.

I identify with the Elephant God because his nature is very like mine - calm, measured and a man of peace. May he give me his blessings for this and all my ventures. Om Shri Ganeshave!

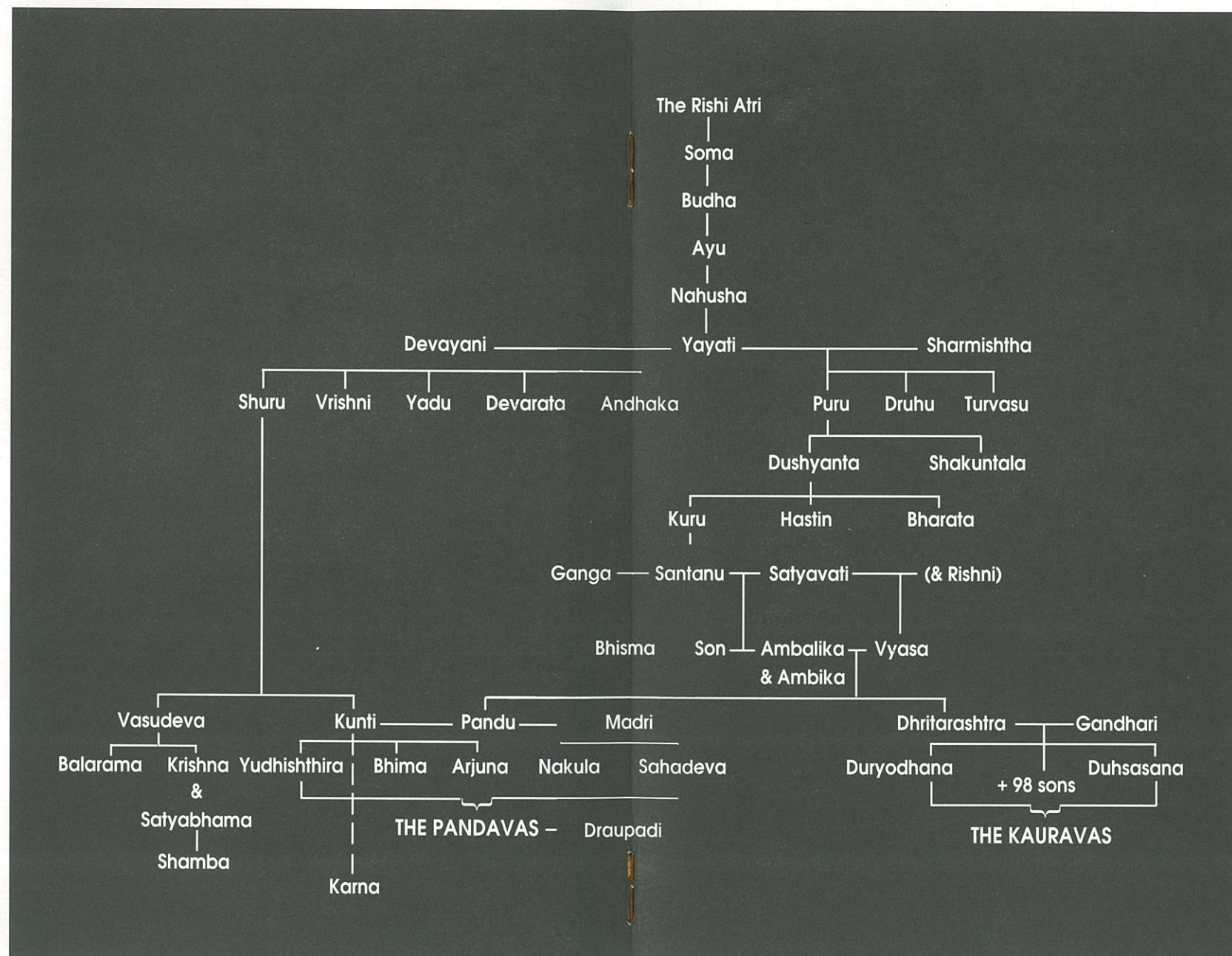
The Mahabharata is like ascending a skyscraper. The first level is an illusion, the second level brings reality. The final level sees a fusion of both - the destiny,

It was like returning to our mother's womb. First, silence. Then as we enter the world, sound. We learnt to crawl, stand and then to walk. A long, tedious process, we learnt and created The Mahabharata.

An epic written before history but tells the story of future mankind. Very challenging indeed.

subhadra/rakshasa
The stories of our past
The history of our future
The significance of now

The workshops taught me to throw away the mask of intellect and learning, to conquer the fear of plunging into the depths of the ocean of my psyche. I was encouraged to express my true self among a gang of people who were non-judgemental, accepting and supportive. Their accepting me for what I am was crucial to my accepting myself.



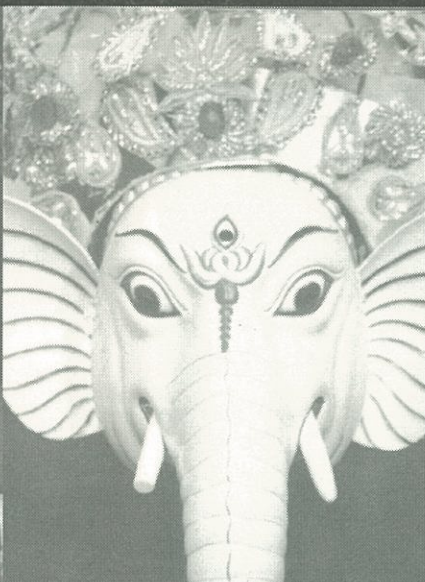
What I especially enjoy in theatre is the exchange of energy between fellow actors as well as with the audience. It's as if there is a greater force helping us along. When you feel for the character you are playing, the high you get is indescribable.

We are constantly reminded by William that we are artistes not actors, we play not act and manifest our emotions on the sacred stage and not merely recite lines. It is difficult but we will keep trying.

We came, shared our ideas and learnt the hard way. I have always wanted to do The Mahabharata as all the characters of man - jealousy, hatred, love, friendship and generosity are found in the play.

It took me some rehearsals before realising the task of playing a blind king - make that two tasks. I have grown to cherish Dhritrashtra's vulnerability, his capacity to love, even his indecisiveness. The things I've learnt in *The Mahabharata* (and from the people involved) will remain close to my heart.

ARJUNA: You'll teach me everything?
DRONA: Yes, everything. **ARJUNA:** Even sacred weapons?
DRONA: No. I keep for myself the secret of sacred weapons.
 They must never be launched against men. **ARJUNA:** Why
 have weapons if you cannot make use of them? **DRONA:**
 Because even their dimmest glow could shrivel up the earth.



Om Ghum Ganapathaye Namoh Namaha

Vakra Thunda Maha Kaya
 Soorya Koti Samaprabha
 Nirvikhnam Kurume Deva
 Sarva Kaaryeshu Sarvatha

Mooshika Vaahana Modhaka Hashta
 Chaamara Karna Vilambitha Soothra
 Vaamana Roopa Maheshwara Putra
 Vigna Vinaayaka Paatha Namasthe



publicity photography: steve zhu

nrityalaya aesthetics society

The society for Artistes, by Artistes to help Artistes.

Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society, formerly known as Bhaskar's Academy of Dance, was founded in India in the late 1940's by Mr KP Bhaskar. In 1952, he established it in Singapore and was later joined by his wife Santha Bhaskar who is also a dancer. The organisation began to conduct dance classes in Singapore and Malaya. Later, they joined the National Theatre Club and taught under its auspices for many years. In 1987, with a request from the government they registered the Society and have since been an active participant in the arts scene. Students of the institutions are practising dance and music all over the world.

Nrityalaya has grown in its scope of activities and now conducts classes, performances and lectures in Bharata Natyam, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Chinese Dance, Carnatic Vocal, Veena, Flute, Violin, Mridangam, Hindustani Vocal, Harmonium, Sitar, Tabla and Western Music, namely, Classical, Spanish and Pop Guitar and Keyboards. The Society has developed and is actively involved in Indian Art ("O" & "A" Levels), Stress Management, Yoga and Meditation. Nrityalaya holds an annual Drama Festival and monthly seminars on Indian Literature. Nrityalaya also offers teacher's training and Nattuvangam classes. Earlier this year, the Society's quarterly magazine on the arts, *The Aesthetics*, was launched.

Nrityalaya has been involved in cross-cultural performances and experiments since the 1950's (under Bhaskar's Academy of Dance). The story of Liang Shan Po and Chu In Tai was presented as a classical Indian dance drama in the 1960's. The organisation has acted as advisors and worked with Practice Performing Arts School, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Centre for the Arts at the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological Institute in cross-cultural projects. More recently, the Society combined Western choral music with Carnatic music. It collaborated with TheatreWorks in *Trojan Women* and now Asia In Theatre's rendition of *The Mahabharata*.

Nrityalaya is an active participant in the National Arts Council's Arts in Education Programme.

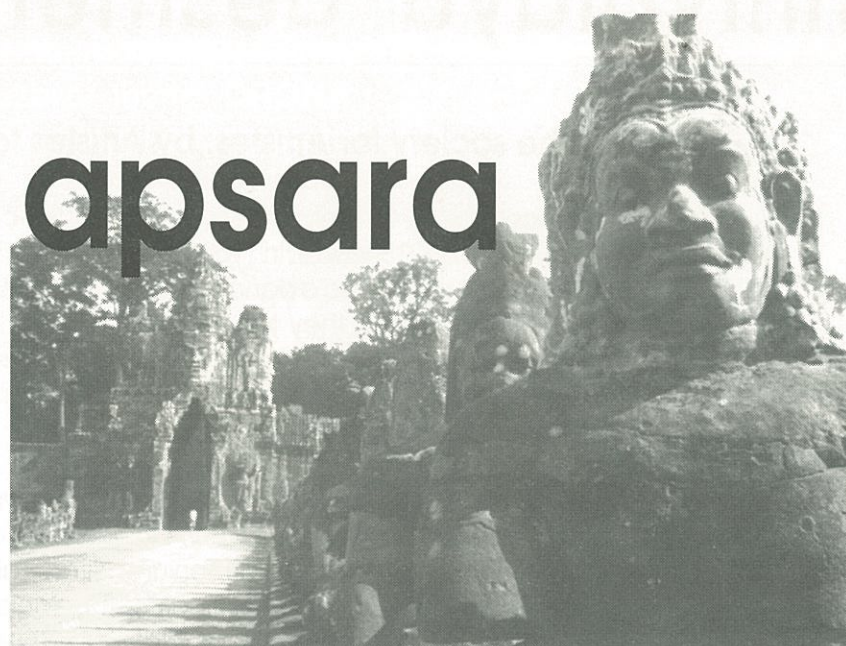
The Society has been nurturing and promoting Singaporean Indian talents and pushing them to the forefront to gain experience. It is the philosophy of the Society that only through hands-on experience can the training be put to the test and only then will the artistes mature.

For more information on the Society's classes, performances, seminars, etc., please contact Tel: 3366537, Fax: 3346326 or stop by the office at 155 Waterloo Street, Stamford Arts Centre, #01-09, Singapore 0718.



project apsara

lim how ngean



It all started in August 1994 when artistic director of Asia In Theatre Research Centre, William Teo was awarded the Young Artist Award for theatre by the National Arts Council.

A personal visit to Phnom Penh, Cambodia in September 1994 prompted Teo to start *Project Apsara*. In Phnom Penh, Teo saw the richness of Cambodian theatre that was never tapped and remained quite remote to the rest of the world. In a war-torn city, Teo found that the University of Phnom Penh was trying its very best to rebuild the Faculty of Fine Arts where old traditions of Cambodian theatre is fighting to stay alive. Thus began Asia In Theatre Research Centre's (ATRC) venture into theatre workshops which marked the Asian-influence style of the company's form of theatre and traditional Cambodian theatre.

In February 1995, ATRC was represented by Teo, K P Bhaskar from the Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society, Lee Yin Luen and Raman Rajakanth for a theatre exchange programme with 13 faculty members of the Faculty of Fine Arts and five graduating students. This was to be the first stage of ATRC's *Project Apsara*.

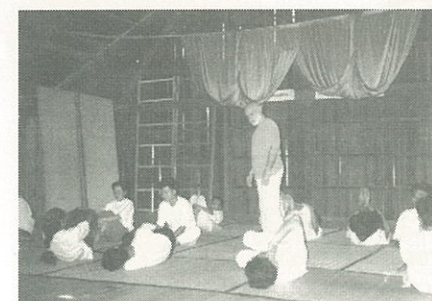


Two objectives were met at the three-week exchange. First was ATRC's research into the "historical tragedy" of Cambodia. The interviews with Cambodians who survived the Pol Pot regime and their present lives were not easy.

Many broke down during the interviews. But those who shared their stories were very touched that people wanted to hear their stories and they truly opened their hearts. These materials will be used for ATRC's next project *Phnom Penh: The Year 0020 - The Historical Tragedy of Cambodia*.

The other objective was to have an exchange on theatre skills and knowledge between ATRC and the faculty members. This exchange proved to be very fruitful as ATRC benefitted in learning the ancient Cambodian theatre of *bassaq* which is similar to Chinese opera. ATRC also had the benefit of being exposed to the art of Cambodian court dances from the dancers of the court of King Norodom Sihanouk. The Cambodians learnt yoga, meditation, mantra chanting and Indian dances. Workshops with Cambodian musicians were also held.

Although there was a difficulty in communicating with the Cambodian theatre practitioners, Teo and the other ATRC members managed to carry out a very rewarding workshop. The language barrier was broken



with ATRC's style of theatre that included movement theatre, universal body language and songs to bridge the gap. The 3 week exchange culminated in the performance of *The Mahabharata Part I: The Game of Dice*, which was used as a vehicle for the workshop.

The picture in Cambodia is not pleasant; what more the arts environment in a politically unstable country. "The theatre teachers in the university are thirsty for knowledge. They have been cut off from the progress of the outside world because of the war. During the Pol Pot regime, many intellectuals were killed. Some of the present teachers have just graduated from the university! They do not have the experience and have not been exposed to theatre outside Cambodia.

"In a war-torn country like Cambodia, the arts takes last place. It is not the priority of the government. Theatre groups have no money at all. They can't even afford a broom to sweep the stage," observed Teo.

It is from this bleakness and desolation that the imagination is challenged. Teo spoke of how the Cambodian theatre takes on a higher level of imagination and creativity: "Everything is imagined. If they want to show someone how to kick a ball, they have to imagine the ball. They just don't have any money to buy a ball. There are no stage lights to teach lighting, the roof leaks. I believe in poor theatre but then, you need the bare essentials; shoes to protect your feet, a roof over their heads."

During *Apsara I*, Teo laid groundwork into research of the lives of Cambodians during the Pol Pot regime.

Thus *Apsara II* is a continuation of this research where practical work would be done by both Cambodian and Singaporean actors. Teo hopes to achieve a 'theatre of images': a contemporary theatre likened to a 'live' painting. It is an amalgamation of images, narration, sounds and music to paint a vivid picture: a docu-drama.

Beginning this July until June next year, eight Cambodian actors will travel to Singapore to work on this project. Singapore actors will also travel to Cambodia to do research and rehearse. Titled *Phnom Penh: The Year 0020 - The Historical Tragedy of Cambodia*, it tells the story of Phnom Penh 20 years after Pol Pot's revolution in 1975. 1975 becomes year zero when Angkar took over. To be staged in June 1996, *Phnom Penh: The Year 0020 - The Historical Tragedy of Cambodia* is a full collaboration between ATRC and the Cambodian actors to tell the story of war-torn Cambodia. To retain its authenticity, it will be a bi-lingual production, in English and Khmer.

Teo on the relevance of *Phnom Penh: The Year 0020*: "It is an important historical tragedy that concerns not only the Cambodian people but the world as well, especially Singaporeans. It is a tragedy that has only happened in this century. The idea of genocide and the wiping out of a whole society is still prevalent. Our lives are constantly being threatened; mankind is constantly threatened by tragedies like that. The new generation of Singaporeans must be aware of the mistakes that man has made."

the global theatre

gerald heng



Project Apsara is the realisation of a segment of a dream and a long-term plan to create a global theatre in which full-time practitioners from home and abroad, based in Singapore, learn and create through the process of study, research and exchange of ideas. *Project Apsara* will be a major milestone in Asia in Theatre Research Centre's (ATRC) journey to create this theatre - one that will speak to all manners of man about the issues of life. It shall tell the story of Cambodia - both past and present.

Project Apsara will involve a significant amount of experimentation, exploration, discovery, and creation. Using both Asian and non-Asian practitioners, ATRC's artistic director, William Teo, envisages a project which will contribute, through the means of theatre, to a greater understanding of humanity. In the process, six performances will be staged. It began in February 1995 and will close in 1998.

ATRC was conceived as a vehicle to realise a dream - to create a theatre that transcends nationalities and cultures. This global theatre seeks to draw upon the participants' diverse backgrounds and experiences to synergistically develop a form of theatre that is both unique and contemporary. It will reach deep into various traditional Asian performing art forms to evolve a theatre that communicates with the inner selves of participants.

In order to bring this global theatre to life in a way that preserves its integrity and richness, Teo thought it appropriate and important that inter-cultural exchanges should take place. These will serve to open up the mind and foster a better understanding and appreciation of people in a world that has yet to comprehend itself. Such exchanges will involve the study, exploration, and research of theatre in and of the countries that will be embraced by this global theatre. More specifically, it will gather interested practitioners to embark on a full-time journey of learning, experimentation, discovery, and development. The global theatre will be based in Singapore.



The first step towards the realisation of this dream began many years ago when Teo was exposed to Cambodian history in France in 1980. Since then, he has staged productions based on works of Akatagawa, Brecht, Euripides, Farid Ud-din Attar, Genet, Gogol, Li Hao Ku, Mishima, Peter Brook, Pushkin, and Russel Heng, among others. For the past few years, Teo has travelled to various Asian countries to understand their history and culture. In February this year, he launched *Project Apsara* - a seed from which his global theatre is to grow. This project will involve two to three years of experimentation with international actors. Its aim is to create a theatre, through the exchange of ideas, which will cut across cultural boundaries. It will culminate in the production of *Phnom Penh : The Year 0020 - The Historical Tragedy of Cambodia*. In the process, *Project Apsara* will recreate the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*. This massive work will be staged in three phases, the first of which (*Part I : The Game of Dice*) will premier this July at the Lasalle-SIA College of the Arts, moving on to The Substation, and then to The Victoria Theatre. *Project Apsara* will also involve a theatre exchange programme with the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Phnom Penh. This programme will see the setting up of a theatre resource centre at the University and the performance of *The Mahabharata* in Phnom Penh.

Most of the time before the start of a project or production, ATRC does not know where the money is to come from. Such is the strength of conviction and determination of ATRC that even if it meant proceeding without costumes, proper sets or lighting, it would have been so. This financial concern would have taken its toll on the creativity of its artistic director whose mind would otherwise be freed to concentrate on the real work at hand. Apart from appeal for sponsorship, Teo has decided to put, and will continue to put, his culinary skills to the cause by cooking for special *Apsara Nights* at The Opera Cafe.

The Mahabharata is part of the Cambodian story and is accepted as part of the national culture of Cambodia for many years. This is where the most magnificent work of art inspired by Sanskrit is found, surpassing even those found in India. With *Project Apsara*, ATRC hopes to have a meaningful exchange of ideas with the Cambodians, learn from them, not only about their dance form, folk art and traditional theatre, but also about their spirit and strength. Most of all, it hopes to contribute in its small way to a better understanding among humankind.



PROJECT APSARA WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN 3 PHASES

PHASE I

Module 1 : February - June 1995

4 ATRC members visited Cambodia to exchange ideas in February/March. Workshops began upon their return in March at Lasalle-SIA College of the Arts for *The Mahabharata Part I : The Game Of Dice*.

Module 2 : July - August 1995

2 teachers from the University of Phnom Penh will come to Singapore to be attached to the production of *The Mahabharata Part I : The Game of Dice*.

Module 3 : September - October 1995

2 court dancers from Cambodia will come to Singapore to conduct research, training and workshop, as well as train Singaporeans in Cambodian court dancing.

Module 4 : October - November 1995

4 Singaporeans will go to Cambodia to research, train and conduct workshops.

Module 5 : December 1995 - January 1996

4 Cambodians will come to Singapore to research, train and conduct workshops.

Module 6 : February - March 1996

Artistic director, ATRC and stage manager will go to Cambodia to rehearse the production *Phnom Penh : The Year 0020 - The Historical Tragedy of Cambodia*.

Module 7 : April - May 1996

Singapore actors rehearse for *Phnom Penh : The Year 0020 - The Historical Tragedy of Cambodia* in Singapore.

Module 8 : June 1996

8 actors from Cambodia and the Singapore cast present *Phnom Penh : The Year 0020 - The Historical Tragedy of Cambodia* in Singapore.

The following two phases will see the realisation of the global theatre when full-time practitioner will be based in Singapore to continue experimentation and development:

PHASE II

1996-1997 Presentation of *The Mahabharata Part II : Exile In The Forest*
Presentation of *The Terrible Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia*.

PHASE III

1997-1998 Presentation of *The Mahabharat Part III : The Battle*
Presentation of a Cambodian contemporary story.

WE NEED YOUR HELP TO REALISE THE GLOBAL THEATRE

The first module was made possible with the help of very generous people and organisations who believed in our vision. But we cannot always return to these same benefactors. Can you give us any leads for potential sponsors that we can approach? Can you help us send the 100 kg worth of theatre resource materials that we have already collected? Can you offer us air tickets for our Cambodian actors and for us to travel to Cambodia for work and research? Would you like to be informed of future fund-raising dinners? Would you like to set up a fund raising committee? Call us at 7321609 or write to us at Asia In Theatre Research Centre, 304 Orchard Road #04-57, Lucky Plaza, Singapore 0923.

AN INTERVIEW WITH SOK LEE, 27, TEACHER OF MODERN THEATRE, UNIVERSITY OF FINE ARTS, PHNOM PENH, CONDUCTED DURING PROJECT APSARA IN FEBRUARY 1995. THIS WILL BE ONE OF THE STORIES THAT WILL BE USED FOR PHNOM PENH : THE YEAR 0020 - THE HISTORICAL TRAGEDY OF CAMBODIA. INTERVIEW BY LEE YIN LUEN.

I have no parents, my parents died during the Pol Pot regime, when I was just 7 years old. After the Pol Pot soldiers left, the Vietnamese government gathered all the orphans, like myself into orphanages where we were fed and educated. They gave me a bursary and provided me with a roof over my head.

I was young then and had no worries about food. I need only study hard. In the orphanage, everyone was treated equally. Everyone was poor.

But sometimes, I do see the well-dressed rich children outside the orphanage and I envied them. I told myself not to think about it because I knew I would never get what I wanted.

I have three sisters and two brothers, but we have all separated, living in different towns. I live alone in an old house which I bought with my own money. Sometimes, I model to make money, other times I act in a film and get paid for it.

I have many problems but I know that I have to take care of myself. My siblings are not educated, it is difficult for me to communicate with them. We only meet about once a year or so, and I have grown distant from them.

Nothing is really important to me now. But I hope that one day acting will make me happy. I have not given up hope on my future.

I have never met a foreigner who is interested in my life. Now I feel a lot for you. Even my family and friends have not asked me about my life, have never cared whether I was sick or sad. Life for me has been going downhill, but now I am happy because someone has shown concern for me. I open my heart to you.



THE HOUSE OF BERNADA ALBA



MEDEA



MOTHER COURAGE & HER CHILDREN



THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS



THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH



THE DRAGON KING

asia in theatre research centre

In October 1987, *Bernada Alba* walked on stage for the first production of Asia In Theatre Research Circus at The Drama Centre. It was also the only production in a conventional theatre. Pre-dating the beautifully restored buildings that now adorn Fort Canning Park and housing Singapore Dance Theatre and TheatreWorks, Asia In Theatre turned the next year to the park for their first outdoor venture, the Greek tragedy *Medea*, staged with the huge gates of the Fort as their backdrop.

From *Medea*, the group learned a valuable lesson, that nature and the elements can play a large part in their investigation into the actor/audience relationship. We all need to re-sensitise ourselves to our natural surroundings and Singapore audience began to learn that luxurious all purpose-built theatres can also house barriers. They braved the occasional mosquito and the lack of air-conditioning, to experience the magic of sitting under the stars with the wind rustling through the trees.

1989 saw the group turn to the former skating rink again in Fort Canning Park for Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, which was followed by a period of research and travel. This involved trekking in northern Thailand; living amongst the hill tribes near the Thai-Burmese border; trips to Bali to meet with the old mask maker who makes all the traditional masks used in their plays; a sojourn in Rajasthan, enriching themselves with images and ideas found in the ancient beauty of India; plus visits to Peter Brook's Bouffes du Nord and Arianne Mnouchkine's Theatre du Soleil in Paris. The underlying quest was always towards a 'poor' theatre and the fusion of the various traditional theatre forms so rich in the East.

From the travelling and the experiences of previous productions came the realisation of the need for a base. Not necessarily a permanent one, rather a home from where they could co-ordinate workshops and on-going projects. Previously, the group had always disbanded at the end of a project, starting afresh each time from the next venue.

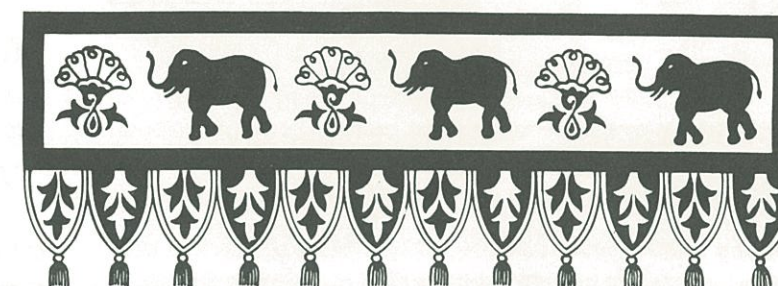
The next step was taking over a disused warehouse by the Singapore River for *The Conference of the Birds* (1991). This was transformed from a rundown godown in the midst of a working fruit and vegetable distribution area to their next temporary home. The audience were welcomed by street jugglers into a 'bazaar' where they could buy middle eastern sweets and drinks, Thai textiles, Indonesians handicrafts, while watching the actors make-up and prepare for the night's performance.

This warehouse stayed their home for the next project. A month-long intensive workshop given by one of Mnouchkine's actors Georges Bigot culminated in a production of Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, (1993) using a cast of seven different nationalities. Sadly, after that project finished, the warehouse was getting too dilapidated and the group had no funds or resources to restore it and make it safe to continue working in.

By this stage, Asia In Theatre was well on their way to carving out their own style of performing and were recognised by other groups and institutions. They began to share what they had learnt with other drama students, particularly with the full-time students at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts. Working with Lasalle students bore fruit and ideas germinated there led to *The Dragon King*, performed on a round stage in Fort Canning Green in July 1994.

In late 1994, a two week exploratory visit to Cambodia planted the seeds for *Project Apsara*, a long term mutual learning programme. In February-March 1995, members of Asia In Theatre returned to Cambodia and shared experiences in theatre, dance and music with students and teachers of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Phnom Penh.

This year the group finally found a base at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts. The group dropped 'circus' from its name and it is now known as Asia In Theatre Research Centre. The performances of *The Mahabharata Part I: The Game of Dice* will continue their research into the Asian mobile theatre, performing at three different venues, moving from village theatre (LASALLE-SIA College of The Arts/The Substation Garden) into an urban one (Victoria Theatre).



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PROJECT APSARA

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THE MAHABHARATA PART I: THE GAME OF DICE

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