

Centre 42 presents

THE VAULT



SaU(DARa)

by BHUMI COLLECTIVE

Ride
Ride
Ride



5 & 6 OCTOBER 2018
CENTRE 42

aBOU+ BHUMI

Bhumi Collective is the point of convergence for artists making art in a borderless world.

We are a producing company which believes in the lesser seen, lesser heard and the lesser talked about, at our heart. We believe in facilitating the process of art-making between artists of different disciplines, from sparking initial conversations to realising ideas on the stage. We work across genres and forms to tell stories that embrace our differences in race, religion, colour and circumstances while constantly finding commonalities that connect us.

We are curious, we are connected, we are Bhumi.

www.bhumicollective.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bhumi Collective would like to acknowledge the staff of Centre 42 for offering this opportunity to create and respond to this iconic text. To our colleagues and mentors for their valuable feedback during our preview run. To Leow Puay Tin for sharing how the text was first conceived. To TheatreWorks for providing the recording of the 1988 work for reference.

Artist's Message

When I was first asked to do a performance response for this play as part of its 30th anniversary, I was worried that its reputation may affect how I approach the work.

But a close reading of the script has proven to be quite therapeutic in some sense. I felt transported to moments in my childhood, times with my late grandparents in my kampung at Masjid Tanah, Melaka, and also as a young boy playing hide and seek, running up and down the blocks in my Simei neighbourhood.

Devising this artistic response has been quite an adventure, bringing together our female collaborators with great expertise in the various disciplines of theatre, traditional dance and music.

The original script allowed my collaborators to tap into their intimate experiences and share some of their stories growing up. I for one felt the script made me think about the experiences of girls and women particularly their roles as mothers in the family unit and also as indispensable members of the community.

I am grateful to Centre 42 for giving Bhumi Collective this opportunity to reflect upon this iconic work and provide a contemporary response to it. Most of all, we are grateful that we found creative collaborators who were gracious to share some of their stories.

SOULTARI AMIN FARID
Artist Facilitator

about 3 Children

Three Children was written in 1985 by Malaysian playwright Leow Puay Tin. The play is about three grown-up siblings — two sisters and a brother — who return to their childhood home on Kappan Road, Malacca, to confront their past. Eschewing a linear narrative, the three characters and a narrator race through a series of childrens' songs, games and sketches.

Thirty years ago, TheatreWorks staged *Three Children* in a directorial collaboration between its artistic director Ong Keng Sen and Five Art Centre founder Krishen Jit. For three months, the directors trained and devised with the cast, comprising Lok Meng Chue, Claire Wong, Lim Kay Tong and Neo Swee Lin. *Three Children* opened on 11 November 1988 at the Drama Centre to critical acclaim. *Three Children* returned in 1992 as a touring production with the directors, Lok and Wong, and joined by Loong Seng Onn and Tan Kheng Hua. The production was toured Singapore, Malaysia and Japan.

**To find out more about *Three Children*,
head to centre42.sg/about-three-children**

BIOS

SOULTARI AMIN FARID

Artist Facilitator

I feel like my whole existence is about the arts. I got my pseudonym, Soutlari, in a dream, a portmanteau of soul and "tari", which is dance in Malay. I guess a side of me wishes to dig deeper into our humanity. Hence, tapping into one's soul could help in answering that predicament. I hope through my works, I continue to be critical of our existence and bring others along into this exciting journey.

Oh, hi. My name is Soutlari Amin Farid.



SYAFIQAH 'ADHA SALLEHIN

Performer

Hey, I'm Syafiqah. You can call me Syaf. I have an affinity with music and keyboards since young. I started playing classical piano as a little child, and then became curious about traditional Malay music and picked up the accordion in my late teens. Music composition became one of my musical strengths, so as I grew into a young adult, I attempted to refine it at a local music conservatory. Now I play, create, teach, direct, live and breathe music. But once in a while, I get bored so I love taking on challenges to try out new things. Sometime soon, I'd love to travel out more into the world with all that I can offer.

LYN HANIS REZUAN

Performer

Hi! I'm Lyn and I think I started my involvement with the arts since I was 13 in secondary school with Malay dance as a CCA. Polytechnic didn't quite fit my M.O., so I jumped ship from there to pursue performing arts in Jakarta. After graduating in December last year, I've been more involved with the local performing arts scene. During my free time I'm pretty laid back and try to catch up on my Netflix and Anime. I am also a pretty big Cat person :)



Bios



SURYANA NORDDIN

Performer

“When I grow up, I want to be a Malay teacher...or a singer. No, no, no...I want to be a teacher.”

That was my childhood dream. But as I grew older, I eventually gave up becoming a teacher because I got rejected so many times. So I just continued to study and (barely) got myself a Degree.

When I was in tertiary level, I took up theatre as my CCA, although I don't really know why I did it. But I enjoyed it anyways. Then in 2013, somehow, I became a wedding singer. Five years on, I'm still singing and doing theatre. I teach too, occasionally. I guess I'm destined to be a performer. I just got to believe.

SYAFIQAH SHAHARUDDIN

Performer

Hello i'm Syafiqah, almost everyone i know calls me Syafiq. This name has been with me since my Poly days so yes, Syafiq it is...

Still a student in SIM doing Accounting.

I entered the Malay Arts in primary school where i joined Malay Dance as a CCA and since then I knew it was something i wanted to do for a long time. Twelve years later, I'm still here doing it. Not to be dramatic, but I cannot remember how it feels like to not have Dance as a part of my life. I was given the opportunity to groom and choreograph the Malay Dance students in Temasek Polytechnic recently but I'm still getting the hang of it.



MOHAMAD SHAIFULBAHRI
Executive Producer /
Co-Artistic Director, Bhumi Collective

Hi, I'm Shai but I'm not that shy except for when I was a child. My parents wanted to bring me to drama class but I would only do so if I could wear sunglasses...because I was urm, shy. For the record, I ended up not going for any. When I was in primary school, I wanted to be an author when I grow up. I actually wrote my own horror stories (I loved the Goosebumps series) and would print and collate them into a file and my friends in school would take turns to read them. I don't watch horror movies anymore because I'm an adult now and I can choose not to!

Film was my first love but when the theatre bug bit me, I was infected. It's become a part of me, coarsing through my bloodstream and I'm unable to imagine a life without the performing arts. I ran my own community theatre group for 10 years and have now co-started an actual company, which is a rollercoaster ride. The world can still be a big and scary place from time-to-time but I'm so blessed to be able to do what I do with an amazing bunch of people.



bios



IFFAH IDI
Production Stage Manager

Oh, hello. I don't know why everyone is introducing themselves when their name is right there *roll eyes*. I am a newbie in the industry but my love for the arts started at 9, playing the Angklung for my school's ensemble. It shifted into playing the saxophone and trumpet for my school's Military Band and even learning a little bit of Malay Dance along the way. I fell in love with theatre at a later age, 16 going on 17, being a part of Titisan Temasek when I was in Temasek Polytechnic. I graduated, placed my Engineering Diploma aside, took a gap year and now, I am a fresh graduate of LASALLE's Bachelors of Arts in Arts Management. I entered LASALLE with a goal to give back my service to the industry once I completed my education, so here's me leaving my little mark, enjoy!



“I’ve been getting goosebumps a lot,” says Soultari Amin Farid, the co-artistic director of young theatre group Bhumi Collective. For the past four months, he and his team have been developing a new work called *Sau(dara)*, which will be presented under Centre 42’s Vault programme on 5 and 6 October 2018. It is a contemporary response to *Three Children*, a landmark play by Malaysian playwright Leow Puay Tin that was staged in Singapore 30 years ago. That production was co-directed by Ong Keng Sen, the artistic director of TheatreWorks, and Krishen Jit, the late founder of Malaysia’s Five Arts Centre. And the reason Amin is getting goosebumps is that he has been learning about some unintended parallels between *Sau(dara)* and the original productions of *Three Children*.

“I had very little to work with in the beginning except the script,” explains Amin. “But then I had an

unarranged meeting with Puay Tin at a conference recently, then I read the programme booklet of the 1992 production just two weeks ago, and then I watched the video of the 1988 production a few days ago, and I saw that I have incorporated quite a bit of the original staging into the piece. It’s like fate!”

Three Children is a play about childhood and memories. Through a series of disjointed vignettes, two sisters and a brother revisit their childhood home on Kappan Road in Malacca, recalling the games and incidents that they experienced as kids. In his director’s message for the 1992 production of the play, Keng Sen mentioned how important it was for his cast to draw from their personal experiences for their roles.

“One thing we were very clear of: the final production of *3 Children* would spring from the imagination of the actors,” he wrote. “They would build

the world of the children, viewed through children's eyes. The directors would act as catalysts, pushing them to explore and confront themselves. The process was built on experience, memories; felt by the body rather than rationalised by the mind."

Similarly, *Sau(dara)* is created based on the team's own childhood memories. The title of the piece is a play on the Malay words "saudara", meaning siblings or relatives; "sau", which is the sound of wind; and "dara", which refers to young women or virgins. It is collectively devised by an all-female cast – dancers Lyn Hanis Rezuan and Syafiqah Shaharuddin (Syafiq), singer and actor Suryana Norddin (Sue), and musician Syafiqah 'Adha Sallehin (Syaf) – with Amin facilitating the process.

To get them started, Amin encouraged everyone to draw objects and memories from their childhood, which led to some very frank – and at times painful – discussions as they slowly opened up to each other. The team is honest in admitting that this was initially a challenge, as none of the cast members knew each other prior to this project, and none of them had ever devised a work from scratch before. Lyn, for example, struggled with the exercise because all she could recall was the verbal abuse that her mother hurled at her when she was young.

"At the time [of the exercise] I was like, hey what the heck, it's not like they're all gonna know how negative my earlier years were!" she says. "But then when Amin presented his stories first, I guess it helped that he was so sincere and honest about it. Which gave me the courage to open up a bit. And I'm glad we all did, because all our different memories helped to create genuine content for this piece."

Each of the actors then went on to build their own monologues around particular themes or topics that they would like to explore. Lyn bravely followed through by delving into her difficult relationship with her mother, Sue questioned what it means to be a good friend, Syaf explored feelings of not being good enough, while Syafiq examined what it's like to appear invisible to those she cares about. These are difficult things to work through, but Amin is grateful that everyone has embraced each other's experiences with open hearts and minds.

"I remembered how we all felt that day listening to each other's stories," says Amin. "And in one of our recent runs, Lyn broke down whilst dancing to her voiceover and the others came to comfort her. That for me meant a lot more than focusing on a perfect product."

Another parallel between the TheatreWorks production of *Three Children* and Bhumi Collective's *Sau(dara)* is that both companies decided to incorporate traditional art forms into their performances. In the case of *Three Children*, the cast took lessons in voice, Chinese opera, and tai chi, as Krishen was a firm believer that mastering these techniques is crucial to good acting. For the *Sau(dara)* team, they became fascinated with the idea of wind and how it can sweep one's troubles away, so Lyn suggested infusing elements of an Indonesian dance called Pakarena into the piece. She had learnt the dance when she was studying in Jakarta from a teacher who came from Sulawesi, the island that Pakarena originated from.

"The philosophy of the Pakarena dance is about hollowness and emptiness. It contrasts drastically with the traditional music that accompanies it, which shows that no matter how violent life can be,

the wind is always there to guide you,” Lyn explains. “It’s hard to learn as it is mainly about patience and maintaining composure for the duration of the dance. But I’m trying my best to share my experience and knowledge with the girls in *Sau(dara)*.”

The Pakarena dance in *Sau(dara)* will not be accompanied by drums and flutes like traditional performances, however. Neither will there be “an orchestra of percussions, flute, guitar and gu-zheng” like the 1988 production of *Three Children*. Instead, Syafiqah will be playing her accordion, which is, fittingly, a wind instrument.

To bring things full circle, there are also plans for the creative team to further develop this iteration of *Sau(dara)*. In March 2019, Centre 42 and Bhumi Collective are hoping to bring the work across the Causeway to none other than Five Arts Centre in Kuala Lumpur, for yet another cross-cultural exchange between the two countries. Just like the good ol’ days back in 1988.

“I feel like we are reliving history by partaking in this cross-border

collaboration, especially since *Three Children* also was part of a transnational endeavour by two prolific figures, Ong Keng Sen and the late Krishen Jit,” says Amin. “My hope is that we continue to remember our history and the links we share between the two countries. I think cross-border exchanges will continue to influence our performance practice and I think that’s really wonderful, because it keeps us dynamic and quite attuned regionally and globally. I’m excited for the conversations and future aspirations!”

In the meantime, as part of Centre 42’s commemorative activities for the 30th anniversary of *Three Children*, we will also be holding a Living Room event here on 7 October. Audiences can hear from playwright Leow Puay Tin, actors Claire Wong (from the 1988 and 1992 productions) and Loong Seng Onn (from the 1992 production), who will reminisce about their experiences working on the play with theatre academic Robin Loon. ■

This article was published in *Blueprint* issue 7 on 28 September 2018. Read it at centre42.sg/creative-coincidences/

BLUEPRINT

CENTRE 42’S QUARTERLY E-NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 7 IS OUT NOW!

Read the issue at centre42.sg/blueprint

KEY EXCERPTS

FROM PROLOGUE

GIRL 1 & GIRL 2 Ride, ride, ride, ride, ride...
Riding into the jungle.
Ride, ride, ride...
On my horse, my faith
Ride, ride, ride...
Riding among trees.
Ride, ride, ride
Ever deeper into the jungle.
Ride, ride, ride...

FROM ACT ONE SCENE FIVE

GIRL 2 I am a good mother.

GIRL 1 She gave away her baby.

GIRL 2 But a tin of sweetened milk cost as much as a gantang of rice. I had five children by then. I went to the convent. Grand aunty Ee Poh went with me. She could speak Malay. She spoke to the nuns there, but they would not take the baby.

NARRATOR The baby has a father and mother, sisters and brothers. She should stay with her family. We only take in orphans.

GIRL 2 So we came back. The next day, somebody told me that Ah Piem Chim, Aunty Opium, who lived in Semabok wanted to adopt a baby. She was a widow. She had no children. I took a trishaw to Semabok, I gave her the baby and she gave me an angpow of five dollars. That night, we had a very good dinner. The children went to sleep.

BOY The good father returned home late that night. He left his baskets and sacks by the door, washed his hands, took the oil lamp and went upstairs to have a look at the children.

GIRL 2 Then he came down.

BOY All the children are asleep, but where is the little one?

FROM 3 CHILDREN

GIRL 2 Eat first.

BOY Where is the baby?

GIRL 2 Eat your rice first.

BOY But where is the baby?

GIRL 2 I have given her away to Ah Piem Chim in Semabok.

BOY Tomorrow we will go and take her back.

GIRL 2 I have already spent the angpow she gave me.

BOY How much?

GIRL 2 Five dollars!

BOY He kept quiet. He didn't eat the rice. For a long time after that, he did not touch her.

FROM ACT TWO SCENE TWO

NARRATOR Yes, a baby girl was given away. She would later grow up, marry and have children of her own, and like everyone else, she would also die and her children would marry and go on to have children of their own. The Famous Five had many adventures while the children played in the backlane which separated Kappan Road from Kampung Hulu. When night came, they slept, for it wasn't good to play in the dark. And they had such dreams as came only to children. They dreamt they were in school again and their homework was not done! They dreamt of monsters, eating ice-cream and chicken rice, of flying, swimming and drowning. When they fell ill with fevers, they dreamt of mountains falling on them, of coffins and ghosts. Oh, they dreamt of being beaten and being loved...They dreamt the dreams children usually dream of and which adults forget...

Three Children can be found in:

Rowland, Kathy, editor. *Staging History: Selected Plays from Five Arts Centre Malaysia, 1984-2014*. Five Arts Centre, 2015.

Puay Tin, Leow. *Three Children: A Play*. UniPress, 1992.

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF LEOW PUAY TIN'S *THREE CHILDREN*

IN THE LIVING ROOM THREE CHILDREN

with LEOW PUAY TIN, LOONG SENG ONN,
CLAIRE WONG, and ROBIN LOON



IN THE LIVING ROOM: THREE CHILDREN

7 October (Sunday), 5.00pm
Centre 42 Black Box

"[Three Children] challenges you to look into your soul. What you will see is the raw manifold of life. The rest is up to you." — T. Sasitharan

From how the work was created to what audiences saw onstage, the 1988 TheatreWorks production of *Three Children* was ahead of its time. The project, jointly led by Krishen Jit and Ong Keng Sen, saw the actors put through three months of rigorous training and devising sessions. When *Three Children* opened on 11 November, audiences and critics lauded the production's unconventional, nonlinear storytelling and its bold mix of Chinese opera and Western stage techniques.

Thirty years after this landmark production, our Living Room will play host to LEOW PUAY TIN, the playwright of *Three Children*, LOONG SENG ONN, actor in the 1992 touring production, and CLAIRE WONG, actor in the 1988 and 1992 productions. Together with theatre academic ROBIN LOON, the four will chat about this remarkable play, from its conception, development and reception, to its impact on today's theatre landscape.

Admission: Give-What-You-Can
Register at lr3children.eventbrite.sg



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THE VAULT

THE VAULT revisits and remembers Singapore works dating back to our early theatre years, refreshes them through the responses of artists and collaborators, and retells them in a contemporary manner.

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