

ASIA IN THEATRE

Research Centre Ltd



Previous Projects

It had been the long-term aim of William Teo, the late Artistic Director of Asia-in-Theatre, to develop a kind of theatre that has its roots in traditional performing styles in Asia which have few fixed structures, and often taking place in spaces outdoors. The actors move from village to village, constantly packing and unpacking, without necessary recourse to the use of modern technical resources. Much of the group's work in recent years bears essential elements of this style of performance. In pursuit of these aims, William Teo had embarked on a series of collaborative projects in Cambodia, Bangladesh and Thailand.

Project Apsara

This project began in 1995 in Cambodia with the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh. This involved two working trips to Cambodia led by William Teo to collaborate on workshops for directors, actors and musicians. It led to a presentation at the University itself and to the production of Year Zero: The Historical Tragedy of Cambodia in Singapore, a collaborative effort which saw Cambodian actors, dancers and musicians (many of whom were survivors of Pol Pot's killing fields) working together with members of Asia-in-Theatre for the production.

Project Kasturdesh

This project began in 1997 together with the support of the Alliance Francaise de Dhaka and the Jahangir Nagar University. This project saw an extensive collaborative effort in research and workshops with musicians, dancers, actors and script writers in Bangladesh. During two working trips to Dhaka, an original work, The Gateless Gate, was created. It was workshopped in Dhaka and presented as a complete creation here in Singapore in July 1998. This creation saw Ankara, the music ensemble associated with Asia-in-Theatre, working with Bangladeshi master flautist Bari Siddiqui on the music for the staging.

Project Thepanom

Begun in 1998 with Asia-in-Theatre giving a scenography workshop at the Thammasat University in Bangkok. The group then invited a spirit dancer from Chiangmai in late 1999 for a performance in Singapore.

Asia-in-Theatre Research Centre

Asia-in-Theatre

Asia-in-Theatre Research Centre (ATRC) is a theatre group that has carved out a niche for itself on the Singapore theatre scene. According to Kuo Pao Kun (playwright and a pioneering figure in Singapore theatre), the reason for this is that in terms of performance style, it is the only theatre group in Singapore which blends “..two cultural sources : the Southeast Asianised classical Chinese theatre and that European hybrid of contemporary theatre represented by Ariane Mnouchkine and Peter Brook.” The result is that its productions have a visual simplicity that has been described as “stunning” (through its emphasis on the use of colours and textures in sets and costuming) and by an overall performance quality that has been likened to a “rhythmic ritual” (Heike Gaessler, Artistic Director, Tacheles Arts Festival, 1999, Berlin).

It was one of the first theatre groups to stage productions outdoors, producing *Medea* in front of the Fort Gates at Fort Canning Park in 1988, long before the Park became a favourite venue for theatre. It was also possibly the first group to use unusual spaces, staging *The Conference of the Birds* (1991) and *Macbeth* (1993) in a disused warehouse in Merbau Road near the Singapore River.

Led by its late artistic director, William Teo, the group initially gained renown for its productions of Western classics, but later branched out into staging works that were group-researched and written, such as *Year Zero: The Historical Tragedy of Cambodia* (1996).

Regardless of subject matter, Asia-in-Theatre has rarely wavered from its two-fold focus in its productions : first, on the need for strong narratives (rather than abstractions) in all its works, and secondly, on melding together the most



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THE WOODEN BOX

Studio Theatre

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Regardless of subject matter, Asia-in-Theatre has rarely wavered from its two-fold focus in its productions : first, on the need for strong narratives (rather than abstractions) in all its works, and secondly, on melding together the most relevant and effective stylistic devices from Asian performing traditions in order to do so. Both of these are the hallmarks of the group. If audience response is anything to go by, the performance style of the group has contributed much to its impact by serving to intensify the human passions that lie at the core of each story that it has chosen to tell in its productions. It is partly for this reason that Kuo Pao Kun has remarked that Asia-in-Theatre's remarkably small output belies its impact, and that “..although Asia-in-Theatre has not been very productive, nor has it had a huge audience, the quality of the group's presence in the Singapore theatre scene outweighs that of companies doing many more shows and commanding bigger audiences.”

Among many theatre-goers, the annual productions of Asia-in-Theatre are eagerly-anticipated events.

Ankara- Music Group

The music group Ankara, under its director Rajakanth, has been regular partners in the productions of Asia-in-Theatre since 1997. Its aim is to draw together into one ensemble various elements of Asian-Pacific musical traditions and musical styles, and to create a musical harmony out of such diversity. For Ankara, the scope for development and experimentation is all the wider by virtue of its organic membership system. The line-up of musicians varies with each performance, so the group's music is never restricted by the range of musical instruments and their sounds. Its partnership with Asia-in-Theatre allowed William Teo to fulfil his belief in the invigorating presence of music and its ability to contribute to the dramatic tensions of a theatrical performance. Aside from its regular partnership, Ankara has also performed as a musical ensemble on its own to great audience enthusiasm.

RAMAYANA

Cast

<i>Subramaniam</i>	<i>Rama</i> (Prince of Kosala)
<i>Jaynthi Siva</i>	<i>Sita</i> (Rama's consort)
<i>Philip Marcelo</i>	<i>Ravana</i> (Demon King))/ <i>King Dhashrata</i> (father of Rama)
<i>Sonny Lim</i>	<i>Lakshmana</i> (brother of Rama)
<i>Priyalatha Arun</i>	<i>Kaikeyi</i> (2 nd wife of King Dhashrata)
<i>Christina Sergeant</i>	<i>Hanuman</i> (a god-like Monkey)
<i>Rajan Ramchandani</i>	<i>Vibishana</i> (brother of Ravana) / <i>Mareecha</i> (uncle of Ravana)
<i>Julie Phang</i>	<i>Kooni</i> (maid of Kaikeyi) / <i>Ravana's wife 1</i>
<i>Aidan Bamrah</i>	<i>Bharata</i> (brother of Rama, son of Kaikeyi)/ <i>Sugreeva</i> (King of the Monkeys)
<i>Neelam Chugh</i>	<i>Soorpanaka</i> (sister of Ravana)
<i>Juraimy Abu Bakar</i>	<i>Jatayu</i> (an Eagle)
<i>Mohammed Irfan</i>	<i>Indrajit</i> (son of Ravana)
<i>Julihanna Annuar</i>	<i>Agni</i> (God of Fire) / <i>Ravana's Wife 2</i>

Directed by Chris Cheers

Written by Sonny Lim

With the participation of

Sri Warisan

(Artistic Director Mdm Som Said)

*Rizman Kassim, Adel Dzulkarnaen Ahmad, Zarudin Yob Ahmad, Irwan Iskandar
Juma'at, Helmie MD Yussof, Azrie Ahmad*

&

Nirmal Singh, Jasbir Singh, Ajit Singh

<i>Musical Director</i>	<i>Aidan Bamrah</i>
<i>Multimedia Designer</i>	<i>Chan Man Loon</i>
<i>Production Manager</i>	<i>Julie Phang</i>
<i>Choreographer</i>	<i>Juraimy Abu Bakar</i>
<i>Costume Designer</i>	<i>Radiah Aljunied</i>
<i>Stage Manager</i>	<i>Fran Conan</i>

A Word from the Director : Chris Cheers

The Ramayana has touched more people than possibly any other story ever told. We have approached our telling of this magnificent epic with a mixture of trepidation and respect and, through a truly collaborative process, have developed what you are about to see. May it be as wonderful an experience for you as it has been for us.

Asia-in-Theatre's Ramayana : Sonny Lim

Ramayana is an epic poem composed by Valmiki in about the 4th century B.C. in Sanskrit, and there exists centuries-old re-told versions of it in nearly every Indian language, all with their own variations of detail. I have based my dramatic adaptation on the novelist R. K. Narayan's prose version, which was in turn based on the Tamil version of the 11th century poet Kampan. In this sense, our version is in the spirit of the countless re-tellings of this epic tale both past and present.

My purpose while writing the script was to tell the main thread of the Ramayana story in as accurate a way as possible, paying fidelity to the way the characters are traditionally perceived in their original cultural context. There has been almost no attempt to offer any modern perspective on the characters. Whatever original elements there are in my characterizations have been the result of my dramatic imagination, fired by specific dramatic situations (but again, held in check lest this goes too far). The general thrust is simple: Rama is a hero because he is the god Vishnu incarnate. His purpose on earth is to defeat the force of evil represented by Ravana. All is pre-ordained, and everything that happens is part of the divine grand plan.

However, there remains the matter of Rama's puzzling behaviour at the moment of his reconciliation with Sita, a behaviour which some of the various re-tellings have tried to explain away or justify. In the traditional Tamil version by the poet Kampan (from which our re-telling claims lineage), even the god Brahma was mortified by Rama's behaviour and steps forward to remind Rama not to forget his divinity. This is perhaps the only moment that we have teased out, just a little. This, and making one of the key players, Lakshmana, narrate the story some time after the tumultuous events are over, is our contribution to possibly the first-ever recounting of the epic tale for the English stage in Singapore.

Performers

Subramaniam Resident artist with Asia-in-Theatre, Subra began his theatre training with William Teo in 1995 when he joined the cast for Mahabharata. He has since appeared in nearly every major production of the company.

Jaynthi Siva Jaynthi is a trained dancer in both the Bharata-natyam and Odissi styles of Indian classical dance and she studied drama and western contemporary dance in Australia. She will next be seen in Borrowed Space's Nava Rasas for the Late Nite Series at the Singapore Arts Festival. This is her first collaboration with Asia-in-Theatre. Jaynthi choreographed Sita's dance in the Odissi and western contemporary style for this production.

Philip Marcelo Resident Artist with Asia-in-Theatre, Philip first appeared in Mahabharata in 1995 and has then subsequently acted in nearly all of ATRC's major productions including Equus in 2000. He has made occasional guest appearances with other companies, the most recent as Trinculo in Drama Plus's production of Wayang Tempest in 2001.

Sonny Lim Sonny is resident playwright with Asia-in-Theatre as well as an actor, arts reviewer and classical Indian dancer in the Bharata-natyam style. He first appeared with the company in Mahabharata (1995) and was last seen on stage in the company's production of Peter Schaffer's Equus in 2000 in which he played the role of the psychiatrist Martin Dysart. Among TV appearances, his most notable has been in a lead role in the AlterAsians episode "Lee".

Christina Sergeant A mime artist and a well-known actor on the local theatre scene, Christina is also the Artistic Director of Mime Unlimited. She has performed frequently with Asia-in-Theatre, most notably in Mahabharata (1995) and Equus (2000). She was recently seen in Luna-Id's One Flea Spare.

Priyalatha Arun Priya is a well-known Bharata-natyam dancer who has danced both in Singapore and India to great critical acclaim. This is her first collaboration with Asia-in-Theatre. Priya choreographed Kaikeyi's dance in the Bharata-natyam style for this production.

Aidan Bamrah Aidan joined Asia-in-Theatre in 2000 and contributed as a musician in Equus (2000). He makes his acting debut with Ramayana.

Rajan Ramchandani Stage, TV and film actor Rajan first worked with Asia-in-Theatre in Siddhartha in 1995. He acted in Singapore's first English language TV serial and will soon be seen in Singapore's first science fiction film. He was recently seen in Growing Up.

Juraimy Abu Bakar Dancer and alumni choreographer with the NUS Dance Ensemble, Juraimy has just finished performing Melatonin recently for Substation's DanceSpace program. As an actor Juraimy first appeared with Asia-in-Theatre in The Dragon King (1994) and was last seen on stage in the company's production The Painted House in 2000.

Julie Phang Julie first appeared with Asia-in-Theatre in Mahabharata (1995) and was last seen on stage in the company's Harold and Maude (1996).

Julihanna Annuar A freelance dancer, Julihanna has been with the NUS Dance Ensemble since 2000. She has worked with Dramaplust, Teater Ekamatra, and Touch Arts. Juli's last stage performance was Evocation for the NUS Dance Ensemble in January 2002. This performance is her first appearance with Asia-in-Theatre.

Neelam Chugh A LaSalle-SIA College graduate originally hailing from Hong Kong, Neelam was seen in Action Theatre's The First 42 Fest in Storm in the Curry Pot. She has also had the opportunity to perform in an International Theatre Festival held in Slagesle, Denmark in 2000. This is her first collaboration with Asia-in-Theatre.

Mohammed Irfan Irfan is making his stage debut with Asia-in-Theatre.

Adel Dzulkarnaen Ahmad Adel is General Manager of Sri Warisan and a musician.

Rizman Kassim Rizman is principal dancer, choreographer, instructor and arts administrator with Sri Warisan. Rizman choreographed the Rama-Ravana fight sequence in the Silat style for this production.

Zarudin Yob Ahmad Zarudin has a 12-year experience as a dancer and is also a presenter and facilitator with Sri Warisan.

Irwan Iskandar Juma'at An experienced Dikir Barat performer, Irwan is a gendang player and also a music instructor with Sri Warisan.

Helmie MD. Yussof Helmie is a member of Sri Warisan and is a music instructor.

Azrie Ahmad Azrie is a part-time cultural performer with Sri Warisan.

Nirmal Singh Nirmal is the Gatka instructor with The Sikh Centre, Silat Rd Gurdwara and devised the Gatka sequence for this production.

Jasbir Singh Jasbir is a Gatka disciple of Nirmal Singh.

Ajit Singh Ajit is a Gatka disciple of Nirmal Singh.

Pallavarajan s/o Nagendran Palla is a mridangam student at the Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society. He had initial training under Chennai K Deenadayalan and is currently the disciple of world renowned Trivarur Vaidyanathan

Thulasidas s/o Vasudevan Das is a mridangam student at the Singapore Fine Arts Society. Like Palla, Das had initial training under Chennai K Deenadayalan and is currently the disciple of world renowned Trivarur Vaidyanathan

Production Team

Chris Cheers Chris is a theatre, multimedia and video artist. He has worked with ATRC in a variety of roles over the last couple of years, his most recent being as director of Asia-in-Theatre's production of Peter Schaffer's Equus.

Chan Man Loon In the past 11 years Loon has done many set designs for theatre companies like Theatreworks, The Necessary Stage and Action Theatre. He also draws comics and dabbles in film. This is his first collaboration with Asia-in-Theatre.

Fran Conan Fran has worked in all aspects of theatre, as well as film & radio. Some of his Stage Managing credits include One Flea Spare (Luna-Id) & Down The Road (Luna-Id). His acting credits include My Name Is Nadra (D'RAMA Productions), Cavalleria Rusticana/Pagliacci (Singapore Lyric Opera) as well as in TV's Spin as the villainous Mr. Frank. Ramayana marks Fran's first collaboration with Asia-In Theatre.

Radiah Aljunied Radiah has been costume designer for all of Asia-in-Theatre's production in recent years.

Sponsors

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InSource Theatre
Mdm Som Said (Sri Warisan)
The Sikh Centre***

The Most Recent Asia-in-Theatre Productions

Equus	17-21 May 2000	Directed by Chris Cheers
Sita	13-16 December 2000	Directed by Elizabeth de Roza

**Productions directed by William Teo under the banner of Asia-in-Theatre
1987 to 2000**

The House of Bernarda Alba	October 22 - 25, 1987, <i>The Drama Centre</i>
Medea	February 26 - March 1, 1988, <i>Fort Canning Park</i>
Mother Courage and Her Children	June 15 - 16, 23 - 25, 1989, <i>Fort Canning Park</i>
The Conference of the Birds	September 12 - 15, 17 - 21, 1991, <i>Merbau Road Warehouses 19/21</i>
The Tragedy of Macbeth	March 16 - 21, 23 - 28, March 31 - April 3, 1993, <i>Merbau Road Warehouses 19/21</i>
The Dragon King & The Register of Ghosts	July 13 - 17, 19 - 24, 26 - 30, 1994, <i>Fort Canning Park</i>
The Mahabharata Part 1: The Game of Dice	July 14 - 15, 1995, <i>LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts</i> July 18 - 23, 1995, <i>The Substation Garden</i> July 25 - 26, 1995, <i>Victoria Theatre</i>
Year Zero: The Historical Tragedy of Cambodia	February 24 - March 3, 1996, <i>Guinness Theatre, The Substation</i> March 13 - 14, 1996, <i>PUB Auditorium</i>
Harold and Maude	November 26 - 28, 1996, <i>The Drama Centre</i>
Siddhartha	March 11 - 19, 1997, <i>Guinness Theatre, The Substation</i>
The Sunflower	November 5 - 8, 1997, <i>The Drama Centre</i> November 18 - 20, 1997, <i>Fort Canning Park</i>
Kasturdes: The Gateless Gate	July, 1998, <i>Guinness Theatre, The Substation</i>
If They Should Come In The Night	September 1 - 5, 1999, <i>TAPAC</i> September 15, 17, 1999, <i>Berlin</i>
To See	November 17 - 21, 1999, <i>The Substation</i>
The Painted House	January 5 - 7, 2000, <i>719 Bukit Timah Rd</i>
The Painted House - Collection One	February 18 - 20, 2000, <i>TAPAC</i>
The Painted House - Collection Two	March 31 - April 2, 2000, <i>TAPAC</i>

Productions directed by William Teo for other theatre companies

The Maids (Genet)	April 1986 <i>Theatreworks</i>
Rashomon	May 1986 <i>Theatreworks</i>
The Maids (Genet)/Diary of a Madman (Gogol)	September 1986 <i>Theatreworks</i>
The Gypsies	March 1987 <i>The Theatre Practice</i>
Hanjo/Kantan (Mishima)	May 1987 <i>Theatreworks</i>
The Sword Has Two Edges (Li Lien Fung)	1990 <i>Theatreworks</i>
Lest The Demons Get To Me (Russell Heng)	1992 <i>Theatreworks</i>