

LEGACY

AND THE EXPANDED CLASSIC

2014
singapore
international
festival of
arts



FESTIVAL HEART: INTO THE WILD

BY

Theater HORA/

Association for Persons with Special Needs

(APSN) Centre for Adults/

Down Syndrome Association (S)/

The Y-Stars

MESSAGE FROM THE FESTIVAL DIRECTOR

This project was born when I saw Theater HORA in Vienna last July. I heard about their desire to make new international projects and not simply tour endlessly the showcase of *Disabled Theater*. I felt suddenly that it would be interesting to create just such a possibility in Singapore. Often, there is a breakthrough work which brings 'outsiders' into the mainstream but, very soon, this breakthrough also begins to become another pigeonhole. Who is the 'outsider'? How can challenged individuals in our societies define the world themselves? How can we engage beyond seminal works like *Disabled Theater* and see how artists have previously worked with disability, and continue to do so tirelessly, with or without the intervention of Bel?

I visited Theater HORA's premises in Zurich and met Michael Elber, Giancarlo Marinucci and Ketty Ghnassia. The workshop comprised many of the HORA performers in another context from the on-stage show that I had seen in Vienna. Michael talked about a workshop series he had conducted in Russia and what that entailed. The special quality of HORA is that they train challenged individuals who desire to become professional actors and artists. I left Zurich thinking that it could be wonderful to have Theater HORA in-residence for two weeks with Singapore International Festival of Arts, collaborating with Singaporean artists with disabilities. The Festival can move beyond consuming yet another marvellous show and narrow the gap between ability/disability.

For this is the gap in Singapore. We still have a distance to go in Singapore with challenged individuals who fall out of the 'success' trajectory. It is only exceptional individuals who are perceived to be role models. But what is exceptional? Perhaps we are already exceptional when we act on our desires, when we allow our imaginations to be free, when we harness our courage to be different in our 'disabled' society obsessed with materialism.

A big thank you to all who have made this possible, especially Ascendas Gives Foundation, Association for Persons with Special Needs (APSN) Centre for Adults, Down Syndrome Association (S) and The Y-Stars.

Ong Keng Sen



SYNOPSIS

Following *Disabled Theater*, SIFA 2014 facilitates a unique knowledge transfer between artists from Theater HORA and participants from Association for Persons with Special Needs (APSN) Centre for Adults, Down Syndrome Association (S), The Y-Stars and the respective Singaporean educators and theatre artists. For two weeks, the Swiss and Singapore counterparts have shared their strategies and work processes. They have worked with movement, gesture, voice, as well as music to create moments of theatre through play and improvisation.

The presentations over the next two nights showcase the exercises and activities they have encountered throughout the two-week intensive workshop. The participants are divided into two groups: one group presents on 19 September and the other on 20 September. Each night's presentation features different scenarios and participants are invited to spontaneously create in the moment. Each night is a surprise. Each surprise reveals moments of connection, the commitment to respond openly, and relationships built through an engagement with the arts.



INTERVIEW WITH FACILITATORS FROM THEATER HORA

What has the workshop process been like for all of you?

MICHAEL ELBER: It is much easier than I thought it would be. I must admit I was afraid at first. I have never worked with 50 participants all in one room. Maybe, at first, they feel a little strange. But they are here and they are all very interested to work and I think we can work towards creating something together. What is special about them is that they are extremely tolerant; they are inclusive, integrative. For many Theater HORA artists, this is the first time they are interacting with Asians. But they are very open. Even when we did this in Russia, intercultural problems usually don't exist between mentally handicapped people. That was and is my experience.

What do you hope to discover in the workshop space of *Into The Wild*?

OLE SCHMIDT: We hope to produce gold, like the ancient alchemists.

CHRIS WEINHEIMER: Gold out of nothing. When I started today, the first thing I did was to put two chairs in the playing area and have them seated outside the area. I invited Theresa to enter, and the minute she sat down, people in the audience began to laugh. She looked at me and she started laughing too. It was nothing but there came joy out of it, and fun, and the possibility that they can make fun out of nothing, stories out of nothing, invent worlds out of nothing.

ELBER: Disabled people, they live in the moment. And because of that, there is a great possibility to make a kind of theatre that brings all of them together, people who would be able to make things from just experimenting and discovering moments and being in the moment. It would not be possible if you want to teach them to do something perfect, like learn to play violin to perfection.

But it is not without its discipline. We rehearse every day. In the rehearsals, we develop their listening skills, focus, to make connections, to form relationships with another person.

To have the ability to watch and connect with what they are watching, and to feel and get a sense of one another without words, to connect with music.

NELE JAHNKE: And with their body movement as well: they create and [are, at the same time,] connected with how their bodies move.

What would you like audiences to take away from *Into The Wild*?

ELBER: 99% of the parents will be disappointed. [laughs] I experience this with many of the parents in Switzerland in the way they relate to this special, free and risky improvisation work. For the last 20 years that I have been doing this, I have had to tell them that I don't want to help them to normalise or tame their disabled children. I just want to take their wonderful energy, and I want to play with them as they are. Why should I train them, change them? I don't want to drill them. I choose to enhance their abilities, not to change their disabilities. I think they are beautiful on stage the way they are.

SCHMIDT: We want to produce moments that you cannot repeat – it is not about making something better and better, but what these performers wish to do in that moment.

CARL LUDWIG HÜBSCH: I think it is interesting to tell the audience that they should avoid thinking of the disabilities of the players. They should just watch it, and not try too hard to make sense of it. Sometimes it may be unexciting, sometimes unbelievable. Just be there. Be present with them. For parents, I wish for them to see their children presenting their own planet, their own world. And [I hope they understand that] they are not responsible for their children's performance, but are there to simply enjoy them.

WEINHEIMER: We have to understand how the participants learn and how they express themselves, so we need to learn their vocabulary, their entry points. Their way of perceiving the world can be different from ours. I try to watch them and guess what might be the way that works best with them. And then, I adapt to work better with them and I am always experimenting, observing them, and I'm never quite sure what they are thinking. So it's an adventure. **We would rather change the theatre to fit their world than change them for the theatre.**

REFLECTIONS FROM SOME SINGAPORE PARTICIPANTS

"I'm learning a lot from watching the workshop. Learning about the way I relate to my child. One of the things that struck me was the way the artists from Theater HORA insist on letting the participants with special needs learn for themselves, do things for themselves. As a parent, I want to help my child. But they are not children anymore. That's an important lesson. They need to be able to do things for themselves. And I have to learn to let go."

Regina Aun, The Y-Stars

"We're very thankful for the opportunity that our clients have had over the past two weeks. They had a chance to learn something new everyday and looked forward to attending the workshops. It is all about theatre. Within that, our clients found different ways to express themselves and forged new friendships with the participants from Theater HORA, The Y-Stars and DSA."

Theresa Anthony and Lee Siew Cheng, instructors for APSN, CFA

"Working with the artists from Theater HORA feels like a homecoming for me. There is a sense of familiarity, security and trust. It is like coming home to an extended family with distant relations. They are like people you meet for the first time but at once feel connected to through common values and ideologies. It has been a thoroughly rewarding and enjoyable experience."

Julius Foo, theatre artist and instructor for Down Syndrome Association (S)

"We are not doing community theatre, special-needs theatre, educational theatre, applied theatre... none of those labels apply. We are just doing theatre. Theatre that is alive at every moment. In this theatre, everyone is the same and everyone is different. Everyone has to follow the rules and everyone can break the rules. The group affects and decides. I affect and decide. We wait, we listen, we watch. And... we play!"

Jean Ng, theatre artist and instructor for Down Syndrome Association (S)



CREDITS

Concept: Michael Elber, Chris Weinheimer, Ole Schmidt, Nele Jahnke, Carl Ludwig Hübsch

Video Documentation: Sarah Marinucci

Backstage Assistance: Ricco Bonfranchi and Conny Marinucci

19 SEPTEMBER

Participants: Andy Wong Yi Shu, Ang Dun Ye, Ang Seow Chuan, Aruna d/o Moorthy, Chua Si Hui, Danny Tan Pei Kang, David Tan Jun Liang, Damian Bright, Julia Häusermann, Kenny Chen Zhao Ming, Matthias Brücker, Mohamed Zulfadly Rozali, Paragi Chetan Parikh, Remo Beuggert, Remo Zarentonello, Reuben Khanal, Samantha Teo Yi Yun, Saw Wei Yuan, Tay Xin Yu, Theresa Ann Ovinis

Facilitators: Chris Weinheimer, Jean Ng Li Sin, Lee Siew Cheng, Ole Schmidt, Theresa Anthony

20 SEPTEMBER

Participants: Alfred Lim Teck Huat, Ali Sabri Samsudin, Ariel Koh Szu Chyi, Benjamin Lee Wai Hon, Benjamin Yao Qi Guang, Brandon Wong Ling Zheng, Cheng Ching Kang, David Tan Yeong Qian, Gabriella Allan, Gianni Blumer, Grace Marie Lee Shu Min, Koong Su Yao, Matthias Grandjean, Michelle Lee Zi Yan, Nadhrah Daud, Natalie Patricia Mordecai, Nikolai Gralak, Ng Wen Si, Sara Hess, Teng Sok Sin, Tiziana Pagliaro, Woon Tai Yuan

Facilitators: Carl Ludwig Hübsch, Julius Foo Jong Soon, Nele Jahnke

With special thanks to: Himal Ruparel and Satya Venugopal of Down Syndrome Association (S); Philip Li of Association for Persons with Special Needs Centre for Adults; Regina Aun of The Y-Stars; and Felicia Low of Community Cultural Development.



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PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Theater HORA was established in 1993 in Zurich, Switzerland by theatre-pedagogue Michael Elber. Its objective is to promote the artistic development of people with learning difficulties, and to give them the opportunity to exhibit their extraordinary abilities to a wide audience at a professional level. To that end, Theater HORA has produced 54 productions, including performances in eight international festivals, and toured over 100 cities. Theater HORA believes that people with learning disabilities are endowed with special abilities and strengths and the unfiltered perception of the HORA artists reveals hidden worlds which the observer can understand intuitively.
www.hora.ch/2013/index.php?s=2

The Association for Persons with Special Needs (APSN) Centre for Adults was established in 1997 to provide a comprehensive range of programmes and services for adults with mild intellectual disability, above 16 years old. The Centre is an Employment and Support Service Centre. It aims to equip persons with special needs through best practices in education, training and support services, for open employment and life-long learning, in partnership with our stakeholders and community. Its sheltered work-training programmes are tailored to suit the needs of the special-needs persons to maximise the learning experience and, ultimately, their readiness for open employment.
www.apsn.org.sg/schools/centre-for-adults/

The Down Syndrome Association (S) was established in 1995 to support and educate families, professionals and the public about Down Syndrome. It received official recognition by the National Council of Social Services on 4 July 1997. As a self-funding, non-profit organisation, the DSA works closely and regularly with health and educational professionals and other voluntary welfare organisations. The Association is affiliated to international bodies such as Down Syndrome International (DSI), the Asia-Pacific Down Syndrome Federation (APDSF), Asian Federation of Mental Retardation (AFMR) and the International Association of the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disabilities (IASSID), and regularly works with other Down Syndrome associations worldwide.

www.downsyndrome-singapore.org

The Y-Stars comprise a group of 21 young adults with Down Syndrome and other intellectual challenges. It is a self-supporting group with parents/caregivers/volunteers as advocates seeking to provide opportunities for the Y-Stars to enjoy and appreciate visual and performing arts, using the same platforms for physical & intellectual stimulation, and increasing public awareness through integration with volunteers and public performances. The Y-Stars convene at Goodman Arts Centre, where their dance, art and drama classes are held. The Y-Stars also integrate volunteers into the art classes to create better understanding and awareness amongst young volunteers.

www.ccd.sg/the-y-stars

INTO THE WILD: THE PLEASURE OF PLAY



ARTS HOUSE LIMITED

Arts House Limited (AHL) is a not-for-profit organisation committed to enriching lives through arts and culture. AHL runs The Arts House, a multi-disciplinary arts centre with a focus on literary programming located in the heart of Singapore's Civic District; presents the Singapore International Festival of Arts, an annual celebration of performing arts; and manages Goodman Arts Centre and Aliwal Arts Centre, two creative enclaves for artists, arts groups and creative businesses, as well as the exhibition and performance spaces located at ARTrium @ MCI. AHL was incorporated in April 2014.

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Yvette Ng **Wardrobe crew:** Emma Koh, Fanny Phua, Jaclyn Tan,

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How Pang **Production Interns:** Nurul Rafiqah bte Ramli, Tara MS

Netto **Artist Liaison Officers:** Alena Kristine Yeo, Cheng Kunda,

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Akanksha Raja **The O.P.E.N. Team:** Noorlinah Mohamed, Tan Kheng

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19-20 SEPTEMBER

8PM, 72-13

1h40, with intermission included
Post-presentation discussion follows

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