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8 June 2011



A Festival to Remember for Artists and Audiences

The Singapore Arts Festival celebrated the end of its three-week run with two free mass events - a four-hour-karaoke session and a live dangdut concert party - at the Festival Village on 5 June 2011. Dangdut stars, Zaleha Hamid and Rosalina Musa performed at the open stage, against the spectacular Central Business District skyline to an appreciative audience of families, young and old, which cut across various ethnic groups.

For 42-year-old homemaker Anahlizah Abu Samah, the night was special because her entire family of over 20 members had turned up at the Village to support her husband Hammassi Bin Shariff, 51, a bassist in the band accompanying the dangdut singers. Being five months pregnant did not slow her down as she showed Low Kee Hong, general manager of the Festival a dangdut move or two.

"My wife and family totally enjoyed themselves," said Hammassi, who was participating in the Festival for the first time as a performer. "We are happy and proud to be here. The crowd response tonight has been amazing. I love music and I hope to see the Festival bringing in different genres of music for future editions."

Ticket sales for the Festival stood at 50%, with five of the 35 ticketed productions sold out. The sold out productions were *Platform Campus - Re: Almost Left Behind*, *Internal*, *The 1955 Baling Talks*, *A Game of You* and *SINGAPORE*.

A People's Festival

The 2010 Singapore Arts Festival set in place initiatives to create a meaningful relationship with audiences and art makers. This year's Festival built on those initiatives to connect audiences and artists even more.

Low said, "This year's programming, based on the theme of *I Want to Remember*, has resonated strongly with many people. For the past three weeks, I have had artists, volunteers and strangers coming up to me to share their experiences of how the Festival had connected with them personally. It is this intimate level of engagement with each individual that the Festival is interested in establishing through its curated content. The Festival would have met its goal of reaching out to the public by instilling in them a greater consciousness of and curiosity in the artistic process behind each production and the desire as well as initiative to participate in the arts."

Using participation as a yardstick, the Festival is a success. The Village drew 20,000 people, with the inaugural Kids Arts Village, attracting 2,700 visitors. Close to 600 Festival Ambassadors were actively involved in the Festival while the People's Exhibition was viewed by 300,000 people.

Indeed, Singaporeans from all walks of life who participated in the Festival as audience members and volunteers walked away with unique memories of a Festival that they could call their own.

Low Wong Fook, a director at Singapore Polytechnic International in his 60s, stood in the rain for an hour listening to the broadcast of Rediffusion's Lei Dai Sor at the Festival Village. The stories told in a variety of Chinese dialects transported him back to his childhood, where the master storyteller held court in many Singaporean households.

23-year-old student Krystal Kong had an unforgettable experience as one of 11 local volunteer performers for the Festival's opening show, *When A Gray Taiwanese Cow Stretched*. She said, "It was really fun and challenging – each movement was very precise and the timing was so important. I had participated in school dramas before but this has opened my mind to a completely different type of art form. It took about one week of rehearsals and another week of performing and I loved it. For two whole weeks, my life revolved around the performance; now that it's over, I almost feel a little lost."

The Festival was equally memorable for 10-year-old Jacob Joseph Maxson, one of eight children selected to be on the first Kids Advisory Panel. He said: "The exciting part of this journey was being able to watch wonderful shows, immersing myself in the arts and getting great ideas along the way. Some of the challenges were creating ideas and finding performances for Kids Arts Village that follow the theme *I Want to Remember*."

31-year-old teacher Claire Liu will remember this Festival because she made Festival history by winning its first Super Fan contest. She gets a Festival all-access pass – the equivalent of a pair of Category 1 tickets to every production in the 2012 Festival, worth up to \$5000. She said, "Being selected as the first Singapore Arts Festival Super Fan was such a pleasant surprise. I signed up for the contest because my sister and I had already planned to catch a number of shows, and the prize caught my eye. What I liked about this year's Singapore Arts Festival was the fact that there was quite a good mix of local and

international productions. I also enjoyed the ambience and the rustic feel of the Festival Village. I especially liked the Kids Arts Village, because it gave my three young kids plenty to do. I'm really looking forward to next year's Festival, and I plan to bring my sister along for the shows next year – it seems only fair since I signed up for the contest with her!"

A Creation Festival

The Festival was also a platform for the creation of new works, with an emphasis on art making in Asia. This year's Festival had a record 18 commissions, of which 13 works were from Singapore. Of the 81 artists and arts companies featured, 64 (80%) of them were Asian while 49 (60%) of them were local. The artists worked for an average of two years on their respective productions, which involved rigorous research, rehearsals and showings.

"The nature of commissions is that you are igniting a creative process. As with any commission, you can never be certain with the result – some are hits, others are misses. It's great that the Festival is willing to take a gamble on commissioned work," said Lionel Tan, a member of the T'ang Quartet, which collaborated with award-winning Chinese composer, Hu Xiao-Ou to present the Festival-commissioned *Soul Capture*.

He added, "This year's commission allowed the quartet to create a unique product that was exciting and successful, not just musically but visually. Commissioned work takes you through a learning process. In *Soul Capture*, there were musical exchanges with Chinese composer Hu Xiao-Ou and historical visits to Jinsha and Sanxingdui museums in Chengdu, China; experimenting with sound effects and non-string instruments and handling a production independently as a quartet. We hope the Festival will continue to seed this creative process."

Similarly, choreographer Kuik Swee Boon of T.H.E. Dance Company, who was commissioned to produce *As It Fades*, recognised the important function the Festival served as a commissioning platform. "Art is about creation. A festival that supports active creation by artists is heading in the right direction." This view was further echoed by Foo Yun Ying, an up-and-coming local choreographer from the same dance company. She was commissioned to produce work under the Platform Campus series which supports and develops student-led and performed work. She said, "For emerging artists like me, the Festival offers a rare chance to showcase our work on a major regional platform."

Beyond the formal commissioning process, the Festival also saw collaborations emerging between artists at the Festival Village where audience and artists interacted freely before and after performances. It was where local filmmaker Royston Tan met Japanese Director Yukichi Matsumoto following the preview of *When A Gray Taiwanese Cow Stretched*. Upon hearing that Tan was on the lookout for an elderly Japanese gentleman to voice the role of 'mountain' in the short film he was editing for the

Festival – *Fish Love* – Matsumoto spontaneously volunteered for the role. The resulting short film was subsequently screened, fittingly, at the Festival Village's *Filem Filem*.

The Festival in 2012

The 2012 edition of the Singapore Arts Festival will complete the trilogy that was first started in 2010 to investigate our sense of self, identity and who we are.

Between You and Me, I Want To Remember, Our Lost Poems

“We will continue with our journey of self-discovery and recovery through the 2012 curatorial theme ‘Our Lost Poems’. The Taiwanese phrase for myth, 迷思, (literally meaning reflecting on a riddle) and its homonymic transliterations 迷诗 (lost poems, lost riddles; wandering thoughts or reflection) 迷失 (to be lost, hidden) is at the heart of this inspired investigation. I want to evoke the individual as well as the society’s capacity for constant invention, creating or perhaps illuminating new meanings previously hidden or lost; to see that there are so many different approaches to reaching an understanding of ourselves and relating to the world around us. By excavating ancient stories – legends, myths, folklore, teachings that had been passed down from generations – we are provided with clues to unlock the past and shed new light on our present and the future,” said Low.

The 2012 Festival will run from 18 May 2012, with the popular Festival Village still at the Esplanade Park, transformed in accordance to the curatorial theme to be a site where new legends, myths, folklore and mysteries are created. The second Kids’ Arts Village will be housed within the same space, under the curatorial direction of the second generation of the Kids Advisory Panel.

Annex: Individuals who have connected with Festival 2011

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Name: Pat Weisel **Age:** 84

What made the Festival memorable: Regular Festival-goer Pat Weisel was excited about the return of the Festival Village after a ten-year hiatus. The 84-year-old gamely walked up the ramp to attend the Village's opening show, *When a Gray Taiwanese Cow Stretched* and loved the novel outdoor experience, telling us she would be emailing all her friends to visit the Village.

Name: Low Wong Fook **Age:** 60s

What made the Festival memorable: Mr. Low stood in the rain for an hour listening to the broadcast of Rediffusion's Lei Dai Sor at the Festival Village. He brought his wife along when he visited the Festival Village the following day.

Name: Timothy de Geer

What made the Festival memorable: Mr. de Geer teaches English, French and Drama at Bandung International School in Indonesia. He led a group of 12 students and two of their guardians to see several shows at the Festival. This is the second year running he has organised this trip for his students.

Name: Jacob Joseph Maxson **Age:** 10

Occupation: Student, Anglo-Chinese School (Primary)

What made the Festival memorable: One of eight children selected to be on the first Kids Advisory Panel, Jacob has since seen his year-long labour of love come to fruition.

Name: Beatrice Chien **Age:** 70

What made the Festival memorable: A member of senior citizen performing arts group The Glowers, Beatrice was part of the Festival Community Tours, a series of travelling roadshows where customers at hawker centres around the island were given lessons on conversational Mandarin and dialects through the re-telling of radio stories and community songs.

Name: Krystal Kong **Age:** 23

What made the Festival memorable: Krystal was one of 11 local volunteer performers for the Festival's opening show, *When A Gray Taiwanese Cow Stretched*. After a week of intense rehearsals, she performed alongside seasoned performers and loved every minute of it.