

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A CULTURE OF CREATION:
A PLAN FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

National Arts Council, Singapore

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A snapshot of the performing arts sector

{2003}

117 companies +

152 societies

Music 96

Dance 35

Theatre 138

{2012}

490 companies +
226 societies

Music 247

Dance 85

Theatre 158

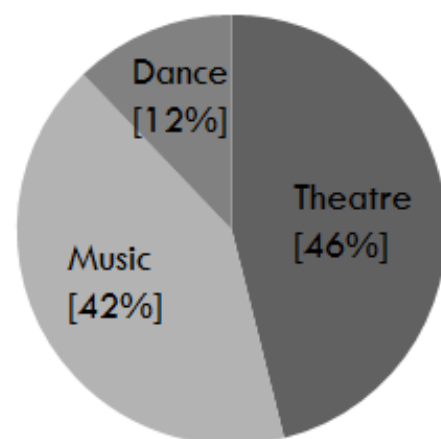
There was a 90% increase in **number of performances** from 2003 to 2012.

Bolstered by opening of the Esplanade in 2002 + Integrated Resorts in 2011.

However, this growth is beginning to stagnate.

On average, there are 3000 distinct productions a year
7000 performances a year
20 performing arts activities a day.

Breakdown of performances by art-form:



AT A TURNING POINT...

1. Singapore's performing arts sector is at a turning point. As society matures and audiences become more sophisticated, the arts lover has never been more spoiled for choice. Whether it is a stage play asking hard questions about self-identity, stirring music and dance to move the soul or traditional art forms which make us reflect on our roots, there is clearly a diversity of options in our arts calendar. Audience numbers have grown substantially from a decade ago. Still, challenges remain. Is the market saturated? Are we winning over new audiences? Have we remembered to document and study our precious cultural legacies? More importantly, where do we go from here?

2. Drawing from the National Arts Council's (NAC) assessment of the sector and consultation with the industry, this Plan for the Performing Arts casts a collective vision for the scene, and sets out our work with the sector for the next 5 years. It is a reflection of the performing arts sector's aspirations for their individual practice, the arts, and at a higher level, Singapore society. It consolidates and builds on previous reviews and plans (such as the Report of the Advisory Council for Culture and the Arts¹, Renaissance City Plans² and the more recent Arts and Culture Strategic Review³), as well as the recent revamp of NAC's developmental tools (e.g. Grants Framework and Arts Housing Scheme⁴).

3. For this plan to succeed, the National Arts Council, the rest of the government, and the arts sector will need to work together and support each other with mutual respect and trust.

¹ Published in 1989

² Three successive iterations were published, each building upon the previous, in 2000, 2004 and 2008

³ The ACSR report was published in 2011

⁴ This led to the launch of the new Framework for Arts Spaces in Dec 2010 and the New Grants Framework in Feb 2013.

What are the Performing Arts?

4. In the Performing Arts, artists use their body and/or voice to express ideas, thoughts, and artistic intent to an audience. It is a range of art forms, including dance, music and theatre; each encompassing multiple genres across the classical/traditional and contemporary spectrum. It is a hugely collaborative creative and production process, involving many different professional roles both on- and off-stage⁵. The “end product” is often a multi-sensory experience best encountered “live” in a space shared with many others. Whether participating as one of the creators or as an audience member, it can be an enjoyable, enriching, and transformative experience.

5. The value of the Performing Arts is multi-fold. They are:

6. *Intrinsic and Powerful Forms of Expression:* As a form, it presents stories and narratives that reflect our culture, way of life and values. It explores issues of contemporary life in Singapore and allows audiences to see new and multiple perspectives. The traditional and classical art forms reflect our heritage and enable a greater appreciation of our evolution over time.

7. *A Part of Holistic Education and Development:* Through participation in performance and practice, the Performing Arts develops confidence, a stronger sense of self, the ability to work in teams, and self-discipline in individuals. It also contributes kinaesthetic, linguistic and creative abilities that are essential for cognitive growth.

8. *Shared Experiences for Communities and Societies:* Participation can take place at all levels including school, community and amateur groups. As a collaborative effort experienced in a shared space, the Performing Arts can unite performers, audiences and the larger community, creating common experiences and a sense of identity and belonging.

9. *Major Part of Arts and Entertainment Offerings in a Global City:* At another level, the Performing Arts, together with other entertainment options, provide cultural vibrancy and add character to a city. This makes a city more attractive to mobile talents of the world who are looking for destinations that provide unique experiences and a vibrant environment to live, work and play. This also appeals to tourists in search of authentic encounters. In this way, the Performing Arts are a necessary dimension to the aspiration of being a “Global City” and a strong complement to economic life.

⁵ For example, performers, artistic directors, producers, production managers, stage managers, stage / lighting / sound designers, technicians, stagehands, ushers, box office staff etc.

How the NAC Currently Supports the Performing Arts

10. These are some of the ways that NAC currently supports the Performing Arts.



11. Some of the channels of support above have been in NAC's scope of work for a long time. In recent years, however, we decided to rethink the suitability of these tools in the present context. For example, the new Framework for Arts Spaces was launched in 2010, designed to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse arts sector, including new and emerging artists and arts groups. More recently, we reviewed our approach to funding the arts and launched a new, streamlined grants framework in 2013 that introduced greater flexibility and support for different stages of art-making and presentation.

12. Also, under the Arts and Culture Strategic Review, we were able to introduce new programmes and initiatives that bring artists and the arts into different pockets of Singapore society. For example, the **Arts@Work** initiative brings arts programmes into the workplace so that working adults have more opportunities to engage in the arts. **Matchbox**, previously known as Pocket Rocket, provides mentoring and financial support to young people wanting to start their own creative projects. The **Silver Arts** programme advocates meaningful possibilities for seniors in the arts. The NAC works with artists and community partners to provide such opportunities for creative development⁶.

13. This suite of programmes under the NAC complements the work of other government agencies to form a comprehensive support network to develop the Performing Arts sector.

⁶ Other examples of NAC programmes include the **NAC-Arts Education Programmes**, **NOISE Singapore** for youths (15-35 years), **ArtReach** that brings the arts into the social sector etc.

PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS

14. A collective sense of vision, purpose and ownership that takes into consideration the range of perspectives in the industry is fundamental to the future growth of the scene. With this in mind, industry consultation sessions were essential in developing this plan. These helped to validate NAC's assessment and provided feedback on key recommendations needed to move the scene forward.

15. In 2012 and 2013, NAC continued conversations on the future of Singapore's performing arts scene – challenges faced today and possible developments going forward. We consulted about 200 people through various ways, from CEO-hosted dialogues, town hall sessions, as well as art form focus groups on specific topics. Many of these conversations will continue after the release of this document to shape the implementation of the key recommendations. *[Refer to Appendices II-VI for notes of the consultation sessions.]*

16. A number of common themes arose from the series of discussions:

Greater Support for Artistic Creation

“Artists need a space to develop a work for a stretch of time without being saddled by time or financial concerns.”

17. There was consensus that the scene today is an output-driven one, fuelled by practical concerns. Due to high costs (e.g. rental, labour, and material), companies need to churn out more shows per year to increase revenue from ticket sales, in order to sustain overall operations. There is also a preference for new works, a continuation of the quest to evolve and find a Singapore voice and identity. As a result, creative processes and runs are short⁷ - new works are staged as full-scale productions immediately and rarely staged again, even though the iterative process of refinement is essential to produce more complex, quality works that resonate and could potentially gain repute both in Singapore and abroad. As the scene develops, we need to encourage an extended creative process, together with longer runs and/or re-stagings to build audiences and evolve a Singapore canon over time.

Greater Dialogue and Exchange within the Sector for Artists

“If companies and artists in the Singapore scene could...come together to collaborate more often, a lot of exciting things could happen. “

18. Many arts practitioners felt that there was not enough dialogue and collaboration within the arts sector; artists were not reaching out sufficiently to each other to build networks and explore collaboration opportunities as they were often caught up in staging shows. There was the sense that there was tremendous potential for exciting collaborations amongst artists in Singapore. The practitioners voiced their hope that there would be more platforms that could host such exchanges, and that NAC would play a role in facilitating this.

Create Greater Awareness and Understanding Surrounding the Art Form Among Audiences

⁷ Typically works are produced in 3 – 6 months, and runs are only 3 – 7 days long.

“Need to focus on the larger advocacy work of convincing the public that the arts is worthy of their support because of its intrinsic value.”

19. A vibrant scene involves audiences and patrons who are engaged in meaningful and long-term relationships with arts companies. If audiences and patrons perceive no value from their participation, attendances will fall. There will also be little reason for patrons and the government to fund the arts. Hence, there needs to be an increase in public engagement to widen the range of arts-going audiences to build social and cultural capital for Singaporeans. Engagement strategies will also need to address both practical⁸ and perceptual⁹ barriers. Some practical barriers can be resolved by marketing; however, perceptual barriers are intangible and require longer-term investment by arts companies to address them. In addition, quality arts experiences from young are absolutely critical to build future audiences and patrons. Children and youths are a key demographic whom artists need to capture imaginations of, as they will be the future audience, supporters and even patrons for the sector.

20. In today’s society where: (a) screen and online media as well as other popular entertainment are cheaper, more accessible, have a stronger marketing machinery and therefore higher market penetration, and (b) the Singaporean populace is well travelled and much more exposed to quality performances from around the world, the advocacy and promotion of local artists and their works needs to be more aggressive to compete for attention. Engagement efforts also need to be more considered to make audiences and potential audiences conscious of the value of the arts to their lives.

Critical Discourse, Research, Documentation of the Scene

“An archival centre is important as a resource for creating indigenous theatre, where young Singaporeans can find out more about the history and future of theatre-making in Singapore.”

“It is important that such understanding of the contributions of our past practitioners is passed down through generations. “

21. The role of critical writing, research and documentation is essential to the development of all arts sectors so as to build knowledge and common understanding that will inform and provide depth to future development. By writing, researching and documenting, arts writers help to cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation of the art forms, the artists and their works, as well as their development over time and their impact on the larger cultural scene and society. Practitioners are then able to engage in critical discourse regarding their own and others’ works, which will help sharpen their practice. Audiences and public are also able to develop a strong affiliation to Singapore artists and their works. While there have been some efforts¹⁰ and support available through NAC’s Research and Development grant, there needs to be a more systematic and comprehensive approach to develop this aspect of the arts.

⁸ E.g. high cost, inaccessible locations, scheduling difficulties, lack of information.

⁹ This stems from inexperience and ignorance about the arts which creates resistance to participation.

¹⁰ E.g. the National Library’s NORA initiative, National Archives, publication of plays, compilation of music album information, recordings and scores on MusicSG, etc.

A Partnership between Government and Sector

22. Practitioners shared their hope that there would be a greater spirit of collaboration between the government and the sector in developing the scene. They wanted the Council to support, and not over-prescribe in areas where industry would be better placed to own and drive the scene forward. They also hoped that the NAC would ensure greater diversity in the ecosystem by supporting a range of artists / arts groups with varied specialisations and by helping to develop the critical roles that are missing from the ecosystem today. NAC should decentralise the development role and resources, by growing more players who can help develop the scene.

INTRODUCING THE PLAN FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS – FIVE FOCUS AREAS

VISION

The Performing Arts embraced and celebrated by everyone as:

- Integral to our lives;
- A universal language to express our collective aspirations, stories and heritage;
- Meaningful careers for talented Singaporeans.



23. The objective of the Plan is to put in place the foundation blocks for the sector's next chapter of development. With the abovementioned themes forming the guiding principles for the Plan, there are five strategic focus areas that are covered. It starts off looking at the specific needs of artistic creation, shifting the emphasis from the 'product' to the 'process'. It also looks at the larger relationships within the sector; joining the dots and building common information points that foster connections and streamline communication. Then, the Plan connects the sector to its audience, aiming to increase awareness, appreciation, and support of the value and place of the performing arts in society. While looking forward, the Plan also looks back to improve research and documentation effort in order to deepen our cultural knowledge, history and heritage. Then, it looks beyond our shores as a part of the global arts community, showcasing our work and learning from the best out there.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Before you begin...just a note:

The following sections highlight the major recommendations under the Plan, providing a quick overview of the intent and form of the ideas. If you wish to read about specific recommendations in greater detail, please refer to the corresponding individual art form annexes.

In general, the Plan for the Performing Arts embraces cross-disciplinary possibilities, and acknowledges that the contemporary is influenced by the traditional and the traditional can be reinterpreted and contemporised. A number of recommendations were developed with this in mind, and do cut across multiple strategies and art forms. However, for the purposes of giving structure to the Plan, the highlights have been categorised respectively according to the most relevant of the five strategies.

Supporting the Artistic Creation Process

24. Artistic creation is a way of interacting, processing and responding to the issues and stimuli around us. It is an iterative process - there needs to be space for experimentation and failure, in order for a work to emerge. In the Performing Arts, support for creation is critical as it is often a collaborative effort that requires space and a “third eye” to offer views, making it a resource-intensive process. While the NAC currently supports creation through our suite of grants and residencies, the following recommendations aim to provide more active and structured support for this process.

Centre for Text-Based Works

25. The future development of the Singapore theatre scene is dependent on our ability to create quality texts that can be developed into the next landmark production. During the 2012/13 consultation sessions, there was a clear indication that supporting infrastructure to incubate new writing and playwriting talent was needed, with the understanding that writing was a process-oriented effort that requires substantial time and resources. There was also a call to find a systematic way of documenting the history and growth of the Singapore theatre scene.

26. Through an Open Call, the NAC identified a partner to jointly develop a space for the creative process at 42 Waterloo Street. Named Centre 42¹¹, its mission is to be a centre that is dedicated to the documenting, promoting, and creating of writing for Singapore Theatre, and will house programmes such as writing residencies, play reads, a digital archive etc. Centre 42 was launched in July 2014, with full operations by end 2014.

11 A tribute to Centre 65, Singapore’s first arts centre started by theatre pioneer Goh Poh Seng.

Support for Independent Artists & Producers

27. Some practitioners want to work independently, outside of a company structure, and with different people to explore different artistic possibilities and to challenge their own limits. This approach is typical of the arts sector and the larger creative industries in other cities. In Singapore, the lack of targeted support for the creation of works by these independent artists is a most obvious gap today, on top of other prevailing issues such as welfare, fee payment, insurance etc. While some companies support independent artists, there are not enough opportunities to go around due to competing demands on the companies' end. As a result, these independent artists are not able to reach their full creative potential, and develop as practitioners in their own right.

28. This is a new area for the NAC, and we are eager to explore the creation of a platform that will embrace practitioners from all art form backgrounds¹² to create performance works. It is process-driven, and will be a platform for artists to share their work and collaborate. It also aims to facilitate connections between the artists, and producers and presenters, as well as to provide professional development opportunities for the arts community (e.g. master classes, workshops).

29. In the dance sector, there is an increasing number of artists want to do independent work. Constant generation and exploration of new ideas, concepts and artistic practice is critical for Singapore's emerging dance scene. A space where ideas are valued and risk-taking is celebrated would encourage our dancers and choreographers to push boundaries and create works of high artistic values. With the aggregation of four dance companies at the Goodman Arts Centre, the GAC Dance Studio is an ideal nucleus for such a purpose. Regular technique training, master classes and residencies will be a key feature of this Dance Nucleus for Independent Artists. It will also provide opportunities for dance artists to explore, incubate, and collaborate on works. NAC will explore potential models of operation; whether it should manage this programme directly, or work with partners-

30. Similar support for the creative process can then be extended to multi-disciplinary art forms.

¹² For e.g. dancer, choreographer, actors, directors, lighting designer, sound designer, stage designer, multimedia designer, visual artists, composers, musicians, etc.

Connections within the Industry

31. While the diversity and complexity of the Performing Arts sector is to be celebrated, it can pose challenges as information and resources are often inadvertently dispersed and difficult to find and access. On a broader level, there are not many organisations that play an intermediary role; these are relationship builders needed to facilitate connections between creators, producers, and presenters. By working with some of the key organisations in our landscape today, and by streamlining and consolidating these resources, NAC can help foster better connections between artists and groups within the sector.

Creating a One-Stop Resource for Music

32. Support for the music sector has been spread out across different government agencies¹³, as part of a whole-of-government effort. In order to provide more holistic support for our musicians, NAC will take the lead in promoting the music sector. While the MDA will continue to regulate and oversee policy issues of the music industry, their existing assistance grants for music will be subsumed under NAC's support schemes. NAC will work closely with the various agencies towards achieving a more concerted effort in growing local and world audiences for Singapore music and musicians. This includes: (i) augmenting our support for organisations that can aggregate capability development and networking opportunities for their respective genres: for example, SGMUSO for contemporary music, and the Singapore Symphony Orchestra for classical music; (ii) facilitating opportunities for musicians in the adjacent sectors of broadcast, film and multimedia through curated pitching sessions with the relevant agencies; and (iii) finding international markets that are relevant for the diverse genres of Singapore music.

Helping Dancers Plan their Careers

33. Pursuing a career in the arts is always perceived as a risky. The lack of a clear career pathway and information on the practice has deterred many. This is especially so for dancers, as the career span of dancers is short and the physical demands of this art form put them at risk of injuries that could shorten their performing career. To address this, it is necessary to consolidate and clarify the options that are available as a professional dancer in Singapore.

34. Local dance graduates need access to information on the opportunities available for building their careers. Career talks, resources on pre-employment education opportunities, employment opportunities, etc. should be readily available to guide young dancers. Formalised structures for internships worked into dance students' curriculum will help the students get a practical understanding of the professional dance sector and also introduce the professional companies to talents and future apprentices/employees. Providing options for a second career as well as resources for retraining will help retiring dancers plan and build up their skills and knowledge to move on to jobs that will allow them to continue to contribute to the scene in a different capacity. In the long term, the vision is for a dance intermediary to provide career-counselling service and help to guide dancers in making more informed choices and point them to possible options and resources.

¹³ For e.g. National Arts Council, Economic Development Board, Media Development Authority, Singapore Tourism Board etc.

Connecting with the Audience

35. The Performing Arts cannot do without its audience. We want to spark interest and excitement about what the Performing Arts has to offer. We want to see the Performing Arts permeate the lives of those who live in Singapore, to nurture eager and appreciative participants who believe in the value of the arts, and then to take the next step to give to the arts as a vote of their confidence and support.

Reaching Out to Young Audiences

36. Reaching out to young audiences is a way for the performing arts to seep into family life - children and their families will get to experience the arts together, with access to quality, age-appropriate content. There is a huge opportunity to impact the next generation who will be our future artists, loyal audiences, or even patrons.

37. The goal is to establish a dedicated arts space customised for young audiences, with regular, curated, and holistic programmes across all art forms. In the meantime, however, NAC will be working on an expanded season of programmes¹⁴ housed in interim spaces to try out this vision. We will be piloting it with theatre in 2015, and collaborating with practitioners who are active in this genre. At the same time, NAC will also be identifying and investing in training opportunities, to train practitioners and arts companies who are interested and passionate about creating art for children.

Developing an Appetite for Singapore Music

38. There is a huge diversity of music available here in Singapore, both by local and international artists. However, this means that Singapore musicians have to compete with the ubiquitous American top 40s, Britpop, J-Pop, K-Pop and so on. In order to develop a taste for Singapore music and music performed by Singapore musicians, the NAC will be embarking on a Singapore Music Movement (working title). Our strategy is to improve access to such music, increase publicity for the plethora of music venues and events, and connect musicians with their audiences via broadcast / online media. To this end, we'll be working with (i) media partners to increase airplay and broadcast exposure on local radio and TV stations; (ii) venues for performance opportunities; and (iii) international platforms to develop overseas audiences.

Putting a Spotlight on Dance

39. Given the growing interest in dance at both the recreational and professional level, the potential for dance in Singapore is significant. With this momentum, it would be apt to initiate a national platform to celebrate dance, reach out to the everyday person, and make dance a visible part of mainstream consciousness. NAC will take the lead and put in the necessary resources to kick-start a day to celebrate dance in Singapore from 2015.

¹⁴ For example, apart from just presenting works, there could be additional fringe activities that enhance the child's experience and learning.

40. To ensure everyone is part of this celebration, NAC will collaborate with the dance community to organise activities during the week-long celebration. Activities can take the form of workshops, open studios, community mass dance sessions, writing competitions about dance etc.

Advocating the Value of the Arts

41. Underpinning the NAC's advocacy efforts is the need to better understand the barriers and motivations for attendance and participation in arts activities. This helps in articulating a strong case for the arts so as to build broad-based awareness of the relevance of the arts in our everyday lives.

42. Targeted advocacy messages that draw direct links between the arts and its ability to enhance the quality and meaning of life will be featured in a nation-wide marketing campaign. One of the key features of this campaign is an arts guide. Noting that Singaporeans have diverse preferences in their consumption of information, the arts guide would be presented through a variety of media formats to reach different segments of the population. It will feature different art forms, prospective arts news, events listings, amongst others. NAC sees this as augmenting prevailing communication efforts to increase the profile and understanding of the arts to the public.

43. Recognising that arts advocacy is a collaborative effort with the arts industry, NAC also hopes to work closely with the arts community to advocate for the arts in a manner that resonates with Singaporeans and their lives.

Giving to the Arts – Cultural Philanthropy

44. A vibrant arts ecosystem involves audiences and patrons who are engaged in meaningful and long-term relationships with arts companies. In mature and large markets like those of the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, specialised companies that look into audience development have long existed¹⁵. These intermediaries provide know-how, best practices, research, and other resources that help improve arts companies' engagement with audiences and patrons. Their scope of work could include: organisational consultancy; research and market intelligence; marketing communications strategy; facilitation of sponsorship opportunities; and training. While it is unclear if the local market size is large enough to sustain such a specialised organisation, NAC welcomes proposals that carefully consider the feasibility of doing so in Singapore.

45. In the meantime, until such a specialised entity emerges, NAC will enhance its support in arts philanthropy in a number of ways. Firstly, NAC wants to build capabilities of arts companies in the areas of marketing and sponsorship. We had received positive feedback on a pilot workshop in 2013, where topics such as understanding the sponsorship environment, identifying and making contacts as well as writing sponsorship proposals were discussed. We will deepen efforts in this area and continue to build on these programmes. Secondly, NAC intends to develop resources such as videos to equip arts companies with a marketing tool to complement their publicity and fund-raising efforts. In addition to cultivating

¹⁵ Examples include *Creative Partnerships Australia* www.creativepartnershipsaustralia.org.au, *Co UK* www.andco.uk and *Theatre Development Fund* www.tdf.org.

current and new donors in order to maximise their giving capacity through joint engagement efforts with the arts community, the NAC also plans to embark on a cultural philanthropy survey of Singapore.

46. The initiatives above will provide an added boost to cultural giving and patronage in the arts, complementing NAC's existing philanthropy efforts in the Patron of the Arts Awards, Give2Arts initiative and the Cultural Matching Fund¹⁶.

¹⁶ The Cultural Matching Fund is a fund set up in 2014 by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) to provide dollar-for-dollar matching grants for private cash donations to arts and heritage charities and Institutes of Public Character (IPC).

Improving Research & Documentation

47. The role of research, documentation, and critical writing is essential to the maturation of the performing arts sectors. This helps to build knowledge and common understanding that will inform and provide depth to future development. By writing, researching and documenting, arts writers help to cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation of the art-forms, the artists and their works, as well as their development over time and impact on the larger cultural scene and society, among practitioners, audiences and public. Practitioners are then able to engage in critical discourse regarding their own and others' works, which will help sharpen their practice, while audiences and public are able to develop a strong affiliation to Singapore artists and their works.

Documenting our Local Arts Scene

48. NAC needs to encourage more research and documentation of the local scene. We have previously published works such as *Narratives* (which captured the lives and achievements of our Cultural Medallion recipients), and have also commissioned studies in specific areas (e.g. youth participation in the arts¹⁷, employment in the arts¹⁸). Moving forward we will continue to encourage and commission studies and documentation efforts.

49. In particular, there is a dearth of research in Traditional Arts (TA) despite its long history in Singapore. To help increase practitioners' understanding of their respective forms, as well as to ensure the continued appreciation and practice of TA NAC will be undertaking a research study that will explore how certain TA forms were introduced, evolved and gained traction in their respective communities.

Critical Arts Writing

50. Other than performance reviews and the occasional trend articles in mainstream press, there has been very little writing about the arts in Singapore. While there have been a number of attempts to start dedicated arts journals, the cost of sustaining them have been prohibitive, with most eventually shutting down. Also, with a small scene in Singapore, NAC recognises that very few can sustain themselves as a full-time arts writer. Currently, the arts writing scene comprises the mainstream press media (e.g. The Straits Times, The Business Times and Today) and a scattering of online review sites (e.g. The Flying Inkpot) that provide limited coverage of the scene. Arts writers, both young and seasoned, have few options to practice their craft, which stunts critical exchange and discourse about the scene.

51. To this end, our priorities are to nurture young writers within the arts sector or in related sectors; and support online platforms that can carry and disseminate quality arts writing, which will be more sustainable than hardcopy publications. For these priorities, NAC will work with partners with the required reach, expertise and resources, including major platforms such as the Singapore International Festival of Arts, the traditional and online media, and Centre 42.

¹⁷ Youth Arts Research Study 2011

¹⁸ Arts & Culture Employment Study (commenced in 2013, results to be out sometime 2014)

Internationalisation – Growing Beyond Our Shores

52. The NAC supports international exchanges and engagements as we recognise the need for our artists to gain greater exposure on a global stage, to contribute to international dialogue and scholarship, and to reach out to more new audiences. Much of our support has been focused on building the capability of our local arts scene, including the nurturing of intermediaries like impresarios, galleries, publishers who can help artists and arts groups engage the international market. We also focused on enabling individual artists and groups to strengthen their own connections with foreign counterparts, via artist residencies, training programmes, co-commissions and collaborations, participation in festivals etc.

53. Going forward, these existing support channels will be enhanced with the setup of a \$25M Cultural Diplomacy Fund (CDF), supported by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. NAC will access the CDF as a source of additional funding to support more international activities; proactively build relationships with key institutions/ platforms in priority countries, and; expand and deepen international networks, through our partners and intermediaries.

54. There are three main strands that the CDF will focus on: Capability Development, Market Development, and Showcasing.

I) *Capability Development: Building sustained partnerships with leading centres and institutions*

55. International exchanges are critical for our arts practitioners and professionals to pick up skills, knowledge, networks and best practices from experts based overseas. At the same time, we want to encourage our practitioners to contribute to international dialogue and scholarship. Under this strand, NAC will deepen and expand existing networks, and proactively broker new partnerships with the region and beyond. These will likely be opportunities at the inter-governmental level (e.g. through Government-to-Government agreements, Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)) that the arts sector might not be able to achieve on its own.

II) *Market Development: Actively promoting promising Singapore artists and content at international arts platforms in Singapore and overseas*

56. To enable talent or content to reach new audiences overseas and build an international presence, NAC will be targeting platforms with greater opportunities for exposure and networking (e.g. international conferences and festivals).

III) *Showcasing: Profiling Singapore artists as part of whole-of-government efforts to project Singapore positively overseas*

57. Under this strand, we want to showcase our artistic talents to international audiences to create greater awareness of and stronger affinity to Singapore arts and culture. Here, NAC will work closely with agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Singapore Tourism Board (STB), and other partners to showcase a range of quality Singapore art at

key events. NAC will also engage Singapore corporates based overseas, to explore further opportunities for Singapore artists to be presented.

WORKING WITH NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

58. In carrying out the recommendations of this Plan, NAC needs to engage a number of organisations with platforms that are beneficial for the wider industry, including the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, The Esplanade Co. Ltd (TECL; which has multiple festivals and presentation platforms), and Arts House Ltd (which organises the Singapore International Festival of the Arts; SIFA). These are the organisations that have the facilities, resources, and scope to take on leadership roles in the scene.

59. TECL and Arts House Ltd, in particular, with their multi-art form programming and platforms, are key strategic partners in fulfilling multiple aspects of this Plan. As a presenting venue that hosts major platforms, the Esplanade is plugged into a network of international arts centres.¹⁹ Complementing this, SIFA under its new setup has strong international links. The NAC will engage with both institutions to organise specialised workshops, symposiums, or discussions between international and Singapore practitioners and networking sessions with overseas festival and artistic directors. Local artists and companies could also be brought to overseas platforms based on a similar model of engagement.) Beyond presentation, we will also create opportunities for “process-oriented” engagements and “artistic sparring” that are critical to the development of our scene. With these opportunities, local artists and companies will build their artistic standing, and market expansion would come naturally.

The Case for Esplanade Phase II: Need for mid-sized presenting / producing venues to catalyse growth.

60. Since its opening in 2003, the Esplanade has been integral to the growth of the arts scene. It can do much more, particularly with the planned development of the Esplanade’s second phase, introducing essential arts infrastructure that will impact our maturity as city for the arts, and our ability to create stories for the world stage.

61. Today’s arts infrastructure landscape is dominated by small black boxes and large commercial presentation venues. However, arts productions (both locally and internationally) are increasingly created and staged for mid-sized theatres²⁰, which are significantly lacking in Singapore. The existing mid-sized theatres in Singapore are purely for-hire spaces, such as Drama Centre and Victoria Theatre & Concert Hall which has been in great demand by our local arts groups. Such purpose-built for-hire venues enjoy above 80% utilisation rates²¹.

¹⁹ For example, the Esplanade is one of the founding members of the Association of Asia Pacific Performing Arts Centres (AAPPAC) and has been hosting the secretariat since April 2004. It is also a member of the International Society for the Performing Arts (ISPA).

²⁰ Mid-sized theatres typically refer to those which can sit 500 to 900.

²¹ An utilisation rate of above 80% is high, taking into account the need for maintenance periods for the venue and its equipment. Utilisation rates are also dependent on the purpose and function of the venue. For example, venues that target long-running commercial productions will spot higher utilisation due to lesser changeovers and resulting “dark nights” between productions. Utilisation rates also depend on whether it is a for-hire venue or one that is programmed in-house. Utilisation rates of for-hire venues may vary more widely than those programmed in-house. In cases where such for-hire venues are housed within schools, utilisation rates may be lower as there would be a need to prioritise needs of the school, versus optimal scheduling to accommodate maximum hire. For venues that are programmed in-house, some international references are The Adelaide Festival Centre’s Festival Theatre (almost 2000 seats) which has utilisation of 78% (FY11/12 annual report). The Arts Centre Melbourne’s State Theatre (2085 seats) and Playhouse (884 seats) has utilisation of 82% and 95% respectively. In general, not

62. While the existing mid-sized venues will continue to meet the demand for for-hire performing spaces, a programmed mid-sized venue able to actively produce and present works, will be critical to the next phase of Singapore's performing arts development. More than 80-85% of work that is produced throughout the world – in theatre, dance and music – both traditional as well as contemporary, take place in mid-sized spaces²². This is true for local works as well; the lack of mid-sized spaces limits not only the local works that our national arts centre can present to our domestic and international audiences, but also international works from being effectively presented in Singapore. For this reason, most performing arts centres in the world are equipped with a full suite of different-sized spaces.

63. Also, for-hire venues, unlike programmed venues, do not undertake the roles of producing, presenting and marketing works, nor do they develop a specific programme direction. Our arts groups therefore produce, present and market themselves today, and undertake the full financial risk of doing so in for-hire venues. This is anomalous, compared to more mature arts scenes like the US, UK or Australia, where there are mid-sized producing houses and venues, as well as for-hire venues.

64. A few of our arts groups that are on an upward trajectory are in need of their own mid-sized performing venue – this would allow them to grow as a producing house / repertory company, scale up to develop works of a more significant scale, quality and impact, as well as to ramp up education, outreach and industry development efforts. Today, the concept of a resident company in a venue is almost absent in Singapore, save for the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and the Singapore Chinese Orchestra who have their own purpose-built presentation venues²³. The majority of our performing arts companies, without their own dedicated venue nor the support of a producing/presenting venue such as the Esplanade, will not be able to fully achieve artistic, audience, market and international success.

65. Esplanade Phase II would enable a paradigm shift where Singapore co-creates content with Asian and international counterparts, beyond simply presenting foreign content. International co-productions at a significant scale (beyond black box sized theatres) are rare in Singapore today. With the international and Asian linkages that TECL has built up over the years, it is best placed with the right capabilities to help our local companies make those connections and co-produce / co-present works that speaks of Singapore and Asia, and have the potential to tour regionally and internationally after premiering in Singapore. As the new arts centres in the region (e.g. West Kowloon Cultural District²⁴ and Gwangju Hub City of Asian Culture²⁵) open over the next few years, they will develop these networks and

many arts centres typically report on utilisation, declare their formula for calculating utilisation, or make such information public in their annual reports.

²² There are 2 key reasons for this. Firstly, the size of a space – its volume, size of stage, and proximity of audience to stage/performance - influences the nature of the work. Small, informal spaces favour experimental works that confront audiences or accommodate fewer performers/less elaborate sets. Large spaces require works of scale to make an impact. Mid-sized venues allow for some audience intimacy while providing sufficient staging space and technical support. Secondly, the size of a space has implications for a work's financial viability. Larger scale works are costly, which places even greater pressure to sell out a larger venue. Small blackbox venues often do not provide sufficient seats for performances to be financially viable. Most mainstream works, and works designed to tour, are often designed for mid-sized venues.

²³ The other company that has its own theatre is the Singapore Repertory Theatre. However, at 380 seats, it is considered a small-sized venue.

²⁴ Target opening: in phases from 2015 onwards

²⁵ Target opening: 2014

capabilities in no time and Singapore will lose the edge that it has built up since Esplanade's opening.

66. Besides its potential to boost artistic growth and grow audiences, Phase II would potentially expand the Esplanade's role²⁶ in capability development for the arts and the wider entertainment and hospitality scene. A technical training studio along with the new medium-sized spaces will enable Esplanade to train personnel and address the shortage of skilled professionals in technical theatre, production management, venue management and production.

²⁶ A strategic partnership between NAC and Esplanade was formed in 2010 for Esplanade to manage the Drama Centre and leverage on the facilities to develop industry capabilities in technical theatre, production and venue management.

CONCLUSION - STEPPING INTO THE FUTURE

67. While the vision articulated in this document lays the foundation for the next stage of development of the performing arts scene, the NAC cannot realise it alone. This plan proposes a collaborative effort with other government agencies, the arts community, sponsors and patrons, educators and every Singaporean.

68. We want to see the performing arts become an integral part of the lives of all Singaporeans. The arts can tell our stories, ground us in a rich heritage, be relevant to our local audiences yet speak to the universal human experience, and touch the lives of audiences beyond our shores. In the not-too-distant future, attending a contemporary dance or theatre performance, or a concert by a local band, will be a regular and anticipated after-work or weekend option. Children will grow up with the arts, alive to its potential to inspire, becoming a new generation of passionate advocates and audiences. Some will be moved and encouraged to become practitioners themselves, forming the next generation of art-makers, taking the curtain call to resounding applause.

69. It is a bright future ahead, and we are excited to see where the journey will take us. This is only the beginning.