

APPENDIX I - TRADITIONAL PERFORMING ART FORMS IN SINGAPORE

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVE TRADITIONAL PERFORMING ART FORMS IN SINGAPORE

CHINESE TRADITIONAL ARTS

While the general scene is vibrant, the level of development across traditional Chinese music, dance and theatre (opera) is different. The traditional Chinese music sector has enjoyed a concerted development of its practitioners' artistic and professional standards, and audience base. However, dance and opera have generally lagged behind.

Chinese Music

The traditional Chinese music sector has flourished and is perceptibly the most active, with a healthy range of professionals and amateurs across various forms. Many schools and community centres have Chinese orchestras as well as a variety of other Chinese instrumental ensembles (*guzheng*, *ruan*, Chinese percussion etc.). On the professional front, there is the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO), established in 1997. A few amateur and semi-professional music groups have also achieved a measure of success in terms of recognition and profile. These include Ding Yi Music Company and Siong Leng Musical Association. In addition, Singapore Chinese Music Federation was also set up in March 2014 to galvanise the scene and lead the development of the sector.

Chinese Dance

The base of Chinese dance practitioners is small and comprises mostly amateurs. The sector is largely dominated by school-based activities and independent instructors who are focused solely on preparing students for the annual Singapore Youth Festival (SYF); there are few avenues for further professional development after students leave school. Public performances tend to be during Chinese festive events. There has been some recent development in the scene- the formation of a new professional Chinese dance company, the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan Dance Theatre, indicates a strong interest from the clan association to preserve, promote and develop the art form. In addition, a number of students have also started pursuing professional Chinese dance training overseas at renowned institutions such the Beijing Dance Academy and Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts in recent years, some of whom are NAC's scholarship recipients. However, there is a need for stronger leadership within the dance community to rally the various constituents together and bring the art form and its practitioners forward

Overall, the activities level is low and the standard of the local scene can be further developed. There is also a lack of quality foreign productions that could inspire the scene and develop audience for this form.

Chinese Opera

While there are frequent and regular Chinese opera performances, these take place primarily at the amateur level, with few full-time groups. The sector is diverse, with about 30-40 groups covering different genres such as Teochew opera, Hokkien opera, Cantonese

opera, Beijing opera, Hainanese Opera, Shanghai Yue Opera etc. However, the sector is also fragmented, due to the frequent splintering of established groups into separate, smaller groups. There are also commercial opera groups that primarily perform at temple celebrations and during the Hungry Ghost Festival; however, these are usually not of high standards.

While there are frequent Chinese Opera performances, the audience demographic tends to be middle-aged to senior citizens. The aging audience for opera is a worrying trend, but there have been some efforts by various groups to conduct public engagement workshops and performances, as well as Arts Education Programme programmes. For example, the Traditional Arts Centre managed to put together a Huangmei Opera performance by primary and secondary school students from 5 schools in September 2013 in an effort to reach out to a younger demographic.

The Chinese Opera Institute (COI) was set up in 1995 to assume a leadership role in coordinating these diverse groups, providing direction, and facilitating training needs and strategic research. With the appointment of a new Director in 2011, COI is making effort to reposition itself as a training and resource centre, so that it can take on a lead facilitator role in developing the Chinese Opera scene in Singapore.

MALAY TRADITIONAL ARTS

The performance and practice of traditional Malay music and dance is highly integrated into the fabric of Malay community life, and most commonly associated with Malay weddings and other festive events. However, while the People's Association has numerous active music and dance groups under its wing, trained professionals and full-time practitioners are few and far between.

Malay Dance

In recent years, other than a few Malay dance companies that are gradually moving towards full-time operations and emerging groups aspiring towards a more formal set-up, the general standards and level of practice of the Malay dance sector generally remains at an amateur level due to a lack of professional dance training system for Malay dance.

The Malay dance sector is active, with regular performances throughout the year. There is strong cohesion among the key players and groups; they come together to drive industry initiatives, including training workshops and a festival platform, Muara. The large base of student and amateur dancers in schools and community centres are also invited to participate in these programmes and platforms. The Malay community, both young and old, supports the platforms as audience.

Since 2010, representatives from 7 Malay Dance Groups namely Era Dance Theatre, Sri Warisan, Sriwana, Majlis Pusat, Persadaku ASB Fuchun CC, Perkumpulan Seni and Azpirasi Dance Group have met to drive initiatives for the development of Malay Dance in Singapore. Led by Osman Hamid, and coordinated by Era Dance Theatre, the workgroup has organised a series of Skills Development Workshops for local Malay dancers, leading to a combined Malay dance production in Esplanade Theatre in 2013. This major production

marked a milestone in the industry as it attempted to raise the standards of Malay dance production, and created opportunities for sharing and exchange of ideas and resources.

The rootedness in the Malay culture and heritage can be seen in their choreography where inspirations and elements are drawn from Malay poems, theatre and music. There is also an interest among the young practitioners to integrate contemporary ideas and approaches in Malay dance.

In terms of international opportunities, these companies and groups are frequently invited to attend folk festivals and cultural events abroad.

Malay Music

Given that Malay music functions more as a complement to community cultural activities (e.g. at weddings, celebrations), there are very few groups dedicated to performing Malay music at ticketed public events. There are also a handful of loosely-formed groups based in the community centres, mainly supporting the local grassroots functions and events.

However, in recent years, Malay music has begun to gain traction, due to the development of and increased activity in the local Malay dance scene. Malay musicians have expanded their practice to include live accompaniment and provision of recorded music for Malay dance performances. This expansion has generated greater demand for local Malay musicians and increased public exposure towards our local practitioners and their works. Malay Music is also receiving attention among the young people. In 2013, NADI Singapura with a large membership base of youths was set up to champion traditional Malay drums. Thus far, Nadi has been performing regularly in various platforms both locally and abroad. Malay Music Enrichment Course which NAC organised in partnership with PERKAMUS has received good response from the freelance musicians who seek to build on their theoretical knowledge and musicianship.

Additionally, producers and programmers like TECL and Malay Heritage Centre are opening up their doors to programming traditional Malay music ensembles like Sri Mahligai, Nobat Kota Singa, Orkes Mutiara and Orkestra Sri Temasek, although often at outdoor venues. This expansion in practice has encouraged the emergence of some young freelance musicians who pursue Malay music on a full-time basis.

The leaders of these music groups have expressed interest in more networking and exchange with other groups, as well as opportunities to learn how to perform authentic traditional Malay music in a more systematic and structured way..

INDIAN TRADITIONAL ARTS

The Indian traditional performing arts scene is equipped with strong infrastructure for structured training (provided by both non-profit arts groups and commercial schools) and performance platforms, and is largely driven by the Indian community.

The scene is active with regular dance and music performances by established institutions such as the People's Association's Singapore Indian Orchestra and Choir, Singapore Indian

Fine Arts Society (SIFAS), Bhaskar's Arts Academy, Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society, Apsaras Arts, Temple of Fine Arts etc. SIFAS also organises a high-profile annual Indian Music and Dance Festival featuring internationally renowned Indian artists as well as their own students. The NAC's triennial National Indian Music Competition (NIMC) also facilitates the nurturing of new talents. Beyond these long-established players, many new groups are also emerging (largely headed by expats) or setting up their international wing here. These new outfits tend to cater more to the growing expatriate community in Singapore.

There have been recent efforts to address the professional development gap for Indian dance, in particular, Dance India Asia-Pacific organised by Apsaras Arts in collaboration with Milapfest (UK) and The Esplanade. Reaching out to students, teachers and performing artists of Indian classical dance in Singapore and the region, this was a residency programme that offered an opportunity for participants to learn and refine their technical finesse under the mentorship of some of the best dance practitioners.

The recent increase in the number of Indian expatriates has gradually impacted the scene in terms of art form presence and practitioner numbers. For instance, while Bharathanatyam has had (and continues to have) the greatest presence in terms of teaching institutions/student numbers and audience, Odissi has also started to generate more interest here due to a larger number of expats from northern India. There are now more collectives and small arts groups dedicated to teaching and performing this dance form.

Overall, there is a need for stronger leadership within the dance community to rally the various constituents together and bring the art form and its practitioners forward. Meanwhile, individual Indian musicians have carved out their own niches in the Singapore music scene – for example, percussionist Maniam with cultural fusion group E-Tree^[3], and flautist Ghanavenothan Retnam, who performs regularly with traditional and contemporary musicians.

However, even the most serious students of traditional Indian music and dance eventually do not pursue full-time careers in the art, leading to a dearth of locally trained professional dancers and musicians. This leads to many groups seeking foreign artistes to complement their manpower needs as teachers and performers.

^[3] source: <http://pachome2.pacific.net.sg/~flutes/Etree.htm>

**APPENDIX II – NOTES OF MEETING CONSULTATIONS ON THE PERFORMING ARTS
SCENE**

**NOTES OF DISCUSSION FOR NAC CEO'S INFORMAL DIALOGUE WITH INDUSTRY
ON THE NAC PERFORMING ARTS PLAN**

**Held on 28 November 2012 at 4pm
Pantry, Blk A Level 1, Goodman Arts Centre**

Present:

No.	Name	Specialisation / Designation
1.	Ms Christina Chan	Dancer, Frontier Danceland
2.	Mr Nelson Chia	Artistic Director, Nine Years Theatre
3.	Ms Emily Hoe	General Manager, The Substation
4.	Ms Kavitha Krishnan	Creative Director, Maya Dance Theatre
5.	Ms Melissa Lim	Company Manager, The Necessary Stage
6.	Mr Kenny Low	Founder and Managing Director, O School
7.	Mr Adrian Tan	Music Director / Conductor (Braddell Heights Symphony Orchestra & Singapore Wind Symphony)
8.	Mr Marcia Tan	Music manager, publicist, producer
9.	Mr Riduan Zalani	Percussionist OrkeStar Trio, Orkestra Melayu Singapura, Wicked Aura and Founder/ Nadi

Background	
	NAC had invited members of the arts community for an informal dialogue on the future of Singapore's performing arts scene – the challenges faced today and possible developments going forward. This is the first of a series of such dialogues involving arts practitioners, arts writers and advocates as part of the process of developing a masterplan for Singapore's future performing arts scene.
1.	Introduction
1.1	CEO/Mr Benson Pua welcomed all to the chat and said he hoped that this conversation would be an imagining of the future which we could all get excited with and work towards collectively. It was to also help determine the new areas which NAC should come in to help. Mr Pua also highlighted that the wide range of industry practitioners present for this chat were invited based on their varied backgrounds, and he urged all to look beyond current constraints and imagine new possibilities.
2.	Need to be comfortable with our own Cultural Language and Identity
2.1	Mr Kenny Low shared that based on his observation of the street dance scene, the appetite for performing and attending performances among the youth is growing and he hoped that more professional venues could be opened up for the youths to perform, thereby increasing their visibility and public exposure. He also noted that

	visibility for original local shows (e.g. by way of street banners) was low vis popular commercial shows. To this, Mr Benson Puah commented that commercial companies would naturally bring in popular acts and hence the question should be how could we create more excitement and support for local acts? What could be done to develop audiences?
2.2	Mr Puah opined that in exploring issues of identity we need to have a certain confidence of how we view ourselves in the context of our own diverse cultural heritage as well as the influences of the world around us. With reference to successes such as the Korean wave, can Singapore also create our own “wave” and stop being followers or “borrowers” of other people’s culture? As a truly cosmopolitan city, Singapore has what it takes to be a leader in the cultural sphere, riding on Asia’s growing influence in the West. Agreeing that youths had a critical role to play in shaping Singapore’s future cultural landscape, Mr Puah felt that in areas such as indie music and contemporary dance, our youths were in a position to come up with their new “waves” that other cosmopolitan youths around the world could easily relate to and put Singapore in the forefront. The question would be how could this be encouraged and supported?
2.3	Ms Christina Chan agreed that Singapore needed to create its own culture and the arts has to have a place in all aspects of our cultural life. To this, Ms Kavitha Krishnan reflected that youths were typically drawn towards “media culture” and not “artistic culture”. The challenge would be for arts practitioners to go into the “media culture” to draw youths into the “artistic culture”. She asked what the message to youths should be: Was it that they had to choose either, or that they should choose whichever that would lead them to realise their own identity and dream?
3.	Avoid Categorisation
3.1	Mr Benson Puah raised the problem of categorising art forms. He illustrated that theatre in its simplistic form was simply about telling a story, but there were now so many categories attached to “Theatre”. Similarly, dance was just a form of a cultural expression, but it had now been divided into genres and categories as well, which had complicated the way these forms were being perceived, and in a way created limitations and narrowed possibilities. Mr Benson Puah opined that if the masterplan was based on current structures and categories, while it would be thorough in addressing each category’s issues, it could in fact limit the more organic growth of the scene.
3.2	Ms Melissa Lim concurred and commented that The Necessary Stage (TNS) faced the same problem. Others had questioned whether TNS was doing English Theatre, or community theatre, or even folk theatre. She shared the recent experience arising from <i>October</i> which was staged by TNS’ Theatre for Seniors, where there were some artists who viewed it with disdain as they perceived it as a piece of community theatre. These artists, she opined, chose to distance themselves from community theatre and maybe artists were the ones who first needed to break down the structures they had erected for themselves.

4.	Focus on Artists as Creators
4.1	Mr Adrian Tan pointed out that perhaps the best arts policy was for there to be none. He posed this question: if there was no NAC, would the artists stop creating art? The answer was no, as artists would continue to create. As such, he was of the opinion that the master plan should focus on people, and support should be given to the artists, irrespective of genres.
4.2	Mr Nelson Chia then added that in setting up his new company Nine Years Theatre, he did not try to categorise his company based on genres but chose to establish the focus of the company on the creator/actor. Accordingly, he felt that in the master plan, the attention needed to be on the creators.
4.3	Ms Melissa Lim also indicated that she would not want the master plan to be art-form centric and NAC should invest more on the artists and the community. She also commented that the plan should be less prescriptive as possible so that artists would be able have the flexibility to respond in their best way.
4.4	Ms Kavitha Krishnan commented that the people in each arts company needed to drive the changes that were required in the ecosystem of each art form. Artists needed to be more proactive and not rely on NAC's plan. She felt that the plan should equip artists with the required tools to implement the required changes.
4.5	Mr Riduan Zalani shared that his own artistic growth was not guided by any policies or arts masterplan. As it was, there were already many things that could be done in the absence of a performing arts master plan and if there was going to be such a plan, he would want to know how the plan would help him, as a creator / artist, achieve his dreams.
4.6	Mr Benson Puah concurred that it was important that Singapore artists focused on creating their own unique work. He reflected that currently there appeared to be a tendency for government to want to support individuals to become institutions and agreed that this might not be tenable in the longer term.
5.	Need For Greater Dialogue And Collaboration Amongst The Arts Community
5.1	Ms Christina Chan responded that having more dialogues between artists across disciplines would be useful. She shared that if companies and artists in the Singapore scene could share visibility and come together to collaborate more often, a lot of exciting things could happen. She indicated that she would love to work with different artists outside of her current circle, but wondered who could help to facilitate such exchanges.
5.2	Mr Kenny Low agreed, sharing the experience of O School working with T.H.E. Dance Company in 2011 when both companies presented a double bill at SOTA. The street dance audience who normally would not attend T.H.E's performances were impressed by what they saw. He commented that more collaborations of this sort would be good, but support for these initiatives was needed.

5.3	To this, Mr Benson Puah agreed that artists should talk more amongst themselves and take the initiative to lead discourse or collaborate. Mr Riduan Zalani commented that perhaps such discussions usually only took place within the same discipline and not across disciplines.
5.4	Ms Kavitha Krishnan concurred that artists were not reaching out enough to each other to build networks and explore collaboration opportunities as they were often caught up in doing shows, either out of passion or to fulfil their funding obligations. Mr Nelson Chia agreed that the scene was dispersed and people needed to come together.
6.	Emphasize the Value of the Arts
6.1	Mr Adrian Tan then stated that the value of the arts needs to be articulated in the master plan in order to get people involved. He noted that the arts was always needing to be tagged with something else (e.g. arts for community bonding, arts for business etc.) in order to justify its value. He added that NAC should not just be mouthpiece of the government to the artists, but should also help to represent the interests of artists to the government. NAC needed to help the government to understand that the arts was not a commodity.
7.	Bringing the Arts to the Larger Community
7.1	Ms Kavitha Krishnan commented that bringing shows to the community was the best way to reach people. She noted, however, that insufficient suitable facilities in community spaces made it difficult for good performances to be brought there. She thus asked if NAC could look into this.
7.2	Mr Benson Puah shared that while NAC was looking into this area, there was significant costs involved to outfit these community spaces, and opined that artists could also look beyond spaces in community centres and consider other types of spaces. The key consideration in bringing arts to the community was that we wanted people to be excited about the arts, but herein lies the question of what art did we want to bring to the community?
7.3	Ms Emily Hoe shared that she was concerned about keeping the community audience engaged for a sustained period of time to grow their appreciation for the non-linear and experimental type of works that The Substation presented.
7.4	Ms Kavitha Krishnan then asked how the value of the arts came to be appreciated in the healthcare sector and whether the success in this sector could be formulated into a working model for future engagements with other sectors. She also asked whether NAC could facilitate dialogue between artists and leaders in these community sectors. In response, Mr Benson Puah stated that while NAC would try to facilitate some of these, there were actually many other pockets of opportunities out there, but not all artists were sufficiently motivated to find out about these sources.

8.	Providing More Opportunities to Youths
8.1	Mr Kenny Low shared that based on his observation of the street dance scene, that appetite for performing and attending performances among the youth was growing and he hoped that more professional venues such as Esplanade could be made available to youths to perform, thereby increasing their visibility and public exposure.
9.	Encourage Greater Private Sector Support for the Arts
9.1	Mr Adrian Tan felt that NAC needed to articulate the future of arts funding: would government funding continue to be the main source of income for artists and groups, or more effort would be made to increase private funding, benchmarking the level of private funding with countries such as the United States. He noted that there were many local profit-making companies who were not interested in the arts and he would like the master plan to address this.
9.2	Mr Benson Puah agreed that private sector support was important, but it would take another generation for business leaders to become strong supporters of the arts as the current generation had grown up without the arts being a significant part of their consciousness. On the other hand, however, even when artists enjoyed private support, he noted that they sometimes did not know how to build or maintain good relationships with their benefactors and word of mouth between private funders could either encourage or discourage more private funding. Artists had to take responsibility to create positive experiences for private funders. He cited the example of some arts companies not even showing up for the Patron of the Arts and Arts Supporters events organised for them to thank their supporters.
10.	Encourage Greater Support from the Media
10.1	Mr Adrian Tan stressed that media support was needed if artists were to get public support. Ms Kavitha Krishnan expressed that she hoped newspapers would play a role and write more about the arts. She suggested that the master plan could perhaps include a proposal to allow an arts column in the major papers and artists could help write articles if the press did not have enough journalists. Ms Christina Chan added that existing media coverage was often merely a listing of events and overall, arts journalism and critical writing was lacking.
10.2	Ms Emily Hoe voiced that there was simply too much content for the media to cover and advertising revenue was insufficient to cover cost. She suggested that perhaps the private sector could sponsor by adopting the paper that had a strong focus on the arts. Mr Benson Puah added that newspapers would cover what they thought readers wanted to read and he shared that business leaders rarely read the Life! section of The Straits Times. Even if funds were pumped in to increase media coverage, there might not be readers or audiences. What was more critical to address was how audiences could be developed.

10.3	Ms Marcia Tan then commented that perhaps sometimes the content itself was not interesting enough for journalists to pick up, especially since they would be bombarded by tons of press releases daily. Hence, maybe the onus was on the artists to up their ante.
11.	The need for the right people to do the job
11.1	Ms Marcia Tan asked whether the right people were making the selections in the grants process. Mr Benson Puah shared that although NAC had external panels of advisors for such reviewing and selection purposes, the problem exists that NAC did not know enough qualified external assessors and artists themselves had not been able to recommend good assessors for NAC's consideration. Consequently, this gave rise to the situation of the same panel of assessors being involved over and over again. To this, Ms Emily Hoe offered to recommend new panel names for NAC's consideration.
11.2	Mr Adrian Tan then commented that NAC needed to ensure that there would be the right people to execute the master plan, asking if there was a community of arts managers who could come together to talk to policy makers. He used this to highlight the need for more arts managers and technical managers in the scene, urging NAC to look into the training provided by local arts institutions in these areas.
11.3	In response, Mr Benson Puah agreed that there were not enough arts managers and hence, more funding had been devoted towards helping arts companies hire and develop arts managers.
11.4	Ms Melissa Lim then shared that she was very enlightened by her attachment to the Canadian Arts Council while she was NAC staff. She observed that the Canadian Council hired quite a number of artists who decided to cross into arts management. She hoped that NAC would be less of an arts "police" and indicated that TNS would be more than happy to host NAC staff for staff exchange. To this, Mr Benson Puah commented that he hoped artists would also become NAC staff.
12.	Conclusion
12.1	Mr Benson Puah surmised from the conversation that the wish was for the masterplan to enable artists to do great art reflective of who we were, and the masterplan should be less prescriptive and avoid categorisation based on genres or art-form. He noted that there could be challenges faced by NAC in drawing up this masterplan and downstream implications on how NAC would fund the arts. To this, Ms Elaine Ng noted that the issues faced by each art form would not be similar due to the different ecosystem and stage of development, and wondered if different approaches would be necessary.

12.2	In closing, Mr Benson PuaH reiterated that NAC would need the help of artists to imagine the scene we want so as to point NAC in the right direction in the mapping of the master plan. He noted the desire for a less prescriptive plan but raised the question of how NAC could do so and where NAC could be most helpful, bearing in mind NAC's role in disbursing public funds.
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Recorded by: Karen Loh, Manager/Sector Development

Irdawati Roslan, Manager/ Sector Development

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**NOTES OF DISCUSSION FOR NAC CEO'S INFORMAL DIALOGUE WITH INDUSTRY
ON THE NAC PERFORMING ARTS PLAN
Held on 7 January 2013, 4-6:30pm
Pantry, Blk A Level 1, Goodman Arts Centre**

Present:

No.	Name	Specialisation / Designation
1.	Mr Rydwan Anwar	Programming Officer, Esplanade
2.	Ms Adeline Chia	Ex-Straits Times Arts Journalist; Writer, Artinfo
3.	Ms Koh Hui Ling	Associate Artistic Director, Dramabox; NAC Bursary Recipient for Applied Drama
4.	Ms Charlotte Nors	Executive Director, Singapore Repertory Theatre
5.	Mr Quek Ling Kiong	Associate Conductor, SCO Conductor, SYCO Conductor, Ding Yi Music Company
6.	Mr Nick Shen	Teochew Opera Practitioner, Tok Tok Chiang
7.	Ms Selena Tan	Founder, Dream Academy Productions

1	Background
1.1	NAC had invited members of the arts community for an informal dialogue on the future of Singapore's performing arts scene – the challenges faced today and possible developments going forward. This was the second session of a series of such dialogues involving arts practitioners, arts writers and advocates as part of the process of developing a masterplan for Singapore's future performing arts scene.
2	Introduction
2.1	CEO/Mr Benson Puah welcomed all to the chat and shared that the NAC had started a series of conversations with people from various art forms to brainstorm ideas for the Performing Arts (PA) in Singapore. Mr Puah noted that the performing arts was very diverse and difficult to define. He asked whether the scene as a whole was restricted by what we were familiar with and knew, whether forms were evolving and what kind of evolution and transformation we wished to encourage?
2.2	Mr Benson Puah invited all to “re-imagine” what we wanted for the scene and the roles NAC could meaningfully play to support this development.
3	Challenges in Audience and Market Development
3.1	<u>Role of Education</u> To develop audiences and the ‘market’, the role of education was an area which participants unanimously felt was critical. In particular, Ms Selena Tan commented that Singapore had lost 10 – 15 years of time in developing a generation of people who appreciated the arts. She felt that for a period of time, mainstream education curriculum was not broad enough and did not emphasise the arts. She was concerned that this would perpetuate further and hoped that NAC could work more closely with MOE.

3.2	Ms Koh Hui Ling agreed that NAC needed to work closer with MOE and their principals to make the arts compulsory and enable students to make personal connection with the arts and use the arts as a tool for self-expression. Beyond education, it was also necessary to educate working adults to see the value of the arts and make that personal connection on why the arts was necessary in their lives. She noted that working adults would also be the ones making purchasing decisions.
3.3	Mr Quek Leng Kiong noted that changes to curriculum and the Singapore Youth Festival also had downstream impact. Ms Selena Tan added that the arts had become competitive when it used to be fun and enjoyable. The meeting noted that schools would sometimes offer monetary incentives to coaches who guaranteed gold for the SYF.
3.4	Ms Charlotte Nors shared that there were some teachers who wanted to engage with the arts groups but were daunted by the paperwork. Some teachers were also not familiar with the arts and could benefit from some learning experience. She hoped that NAC could help to cultivate school principals.
3.5	Mr Rydwan Anwar agreed with Selena and noted that people in their 30s were no longer going to the theatres and questioned how we could bring them back. He also agreed with Ms Koh Hui Ling that it was necessary to start dialogues with principals to start bringing in the students first.
3.6	Mr Benson Puah shared that the NAC had been in talks with the MOE and the dialogues were gaining some traction. For example, drama was now employed as a pedagogical tool in teaching other subjects like Maths and Science. On the other hand, he opined that arts groups also needed to build a relationship with the schools as principals and teachers had to be excited by the works they saw, to be personally inspired and motivated to make the effort to bring the arts to their students.
3.7	To this, Ms Koh Hui Ling felt that both a “bottom-up” and “top-down” approach was necessary as arts groups might not have the necessary resources and there was a limit to what they could do. She shared that schools also had the mindset that they were paying for performances as an end-product rather than seeing it as part of the process of engagement / education. In such instances, “top-down” intervention would be helpful in understanding and effecting change. Mr Benson Puah opined that some of these issues would require a cultural change to take place and effect of changes could possibly be felt only in the future generations. In the meantime, he asked if we should be looking after present or future audiences and how our plans should address these issues.
3.8	Mr Nick Shen shared that perhaps it was even more challenging to develop and sustain young people’s interest in traditional forms such as Chinese Opera. He felt that it was important for students and audiences to experience the form personally and therefore had invested effort in bringing Chinese opera into schools through workshops.

3.9	Ms Selena Tan noted that an impact of our broader education policies was also that while people were generally still interested in practising in the arts, Singapore was still far from having the abundance of outstanding talents in certain fields (e.g. designers, writers, etc). Mr Quek Ling Kiong added that while the Chinese orchestra scene had been well supported by the government, there were still an insufficient number of young local talents interested in pursuing a career in the traditional arts.
3.10	<u>Impact of the Integrated Resorts</u> Ms Selena Tan felt that there needed to both depth and diversity in the scene. She added that with the entry of the Integrated Resorts and the blockbuster shows they brought in, the scene in Singapore had reached saturation point for such blockbuster shows (including musicals). This had impacted ticket sales of local musicals which had the same audience base. Shows even had to be cut down.
3.11	Ms Adeline Chia shared that with all the IR shows added to the calendar, there was still about the same number of local theatre productions each year (about 70 – 80) and it seemed that the scene had reached its natural equilibrium. Mr Benson Puah added that typically, impresarios had little impetus to present theatre pieces due to the risks involved and there was a lack of suitably-sized venues that would make a strong business case for them.
3.12	<u>Issues of Cost</u> Ms Selena Tan also noted that ticket prices were more expensive in Singapore than in UK and this had impacted on the success of local productions. Ms Charlotte Nors shared that even for productions like King Lear, it was difficult to push for a run beyond three weeks. Mr Benson Puah shared that the cost of production in Singapore was the same as in London and New York, but overall ticketing income in Singapore was much lower as there is a limit to the number of performances that the market can support.
4	Infrastructure Needs in Support of a Growing and Evolving Performing Arts Sector
4.1	Ms Koh Hui Ling noted that arts venues in other countries (eg. London) were distinctive and each were known for a special focus and had their own “signature”. She asked if this was possible in Singapore, but recognised the need for the right capabilities to curate and manage these venues. Mr Benson Puah surmised that this was akin to producing houses with a distinctive personality.
4.2	Mr Benson Puah noted that there were limited mid-size venues and recognised that this played an important role in the future development of Singapore’s performing arts. He asked for views on whether it was critical for the Singapore scene to have venues like this.
4.3	Ms Koh Hui Ling responded that having smaller venues would allow shows to run longer for greater economies of scale, as well as for artists and groups to experiment, train and practise over a longer period of time to polish their craft and work.

4.4	In response to this and referring to her earlier point about having depth and diversity in what the scene could offer in terms of programmes, Ms Selena Tan shared that Dream Academy had in the initial phase sought to provide entertainment for people who wanted to unwind and ‘escape’ from their day-to-day challenges. Now that they had a strong base of captive audience, she wanted to experiment and take some risks to expose Dream Academy’s audiences to more challenging works. However, she was aware that they could lose some audiences and said that NAC’s support for such experiments would be appreciated. Ms Selena Tan added that to do this well, there needed to be smaller, affordable venues to make economic sense for groups to experiment and produce more intellectually challenging works.
4.5	Ms Selena Tan asked if the NAC could provide companies or individual artists with residency programmes where an allocated space would be given for a period of time for experiments and development to take place. Ms Koh Hui Ling shared that currently HK Arts Centre was working with such a model where groups and artists were provided with the access to free space, tied to outcomes and deliverables. This helped the venue to grow as artists challenged the technicalities of the theatre as well as encouraged further collaborations.
4.6	Ms Koh Hui Ling enquired whether there were old or abandoned buildings (e.g. Chinatown shophouses) which artists / groups could rent cheaply and convert with minimal cost to become an “alternative” performance or working space, and not a fully equipped theatre. She opined that this would present interesting possibilities and attract different types of audiences. However, Mr Benson Puah commented that from NAC’s experience such buildings were costly to maintain and groups would have limited flexibility to make adjustments to the layout of these buildings. Such buildings would also likely present safety issues. He shared that there were no longer cheap spaces readily available and overall, NAC had been trying to consolidate the spaces under its purview to ensure that they are properly run and managed and this was how Goodman Arts Centre and Aliwal Arts Centre came about. He agreed that it was important these spaces had their own identity.
5	Need for Greater Support of the Artistic Process to Create Quality Works
5.1	Ms Selena Tan felt that it was important for students to be exposed to good international productions which could inspire them to eventually make a decision to go into the arts. She cited an example of a poor production and Mr Benson Puah added that it was also critical for local productions to be of high standard. He wondered whether there was too much focus on continually churning out new works and whether enough time was given to fully develop works before they are presented. He was of the view that audiences in Singapore would expect the same quality of productions from local groups as they would of foreign productions. However, in a small market like Singapore without an ‘off off theatre’ market and scene to test bed works, the close scrutiny by the public and media of every local production presented can be unforgiving..
5.2	Mr Benson Puah asked for comments and views on the possibility of a National Theatre in Singapore. The National Theatre could be one which was not defined by

	<p>language (multi-lingual) and should support both new and old Singapore works. Ms Selena Tan shared that there was a shortage of good writing and that support to the first stage of creation was critical. She also proposed that NAC could fund writers to be attached to producing companies to create works over a period of time (e.g. 1 year). Ms Adeline Chia raised the example of the Royal Court Theatre in London where writers were funded publicly. She shared that there needed to be a platform to fund the incubation of writers and the opportunity for them to pitch to companies to produce and stage their works. The support for the entire process was critical. She added that there was a shortage of dramaturges and this impacted the quality of works. Mr Benson Puah agreed and added that the engagement of a dramaturg is not something all local companies are used to.</p>
6	Supporting Forms that Contribute Towards Developing A Distinctive Artistic Language For Singapore
6.1	<p>Noting the diversity of the performing arts scene, Mr Benson Puah invited the group to consider the forms that we may wish to better support and sought views on the new forms that were emerging. Ms Selena Tan felt that all forms should be supported. Mr Benson Puah added that while there should be diversity, he wondered whether we needed to focus support on some forms that we feel may help define us better. For example, some forms, whilst universally important, were inherited from other cultures while some existed for social-political reasons. The forms that we may choose to embrace should represent our understanding of our identities and aspirations, and perhaps help us develop our own distinctive language. For example, while western classical ballet could hold meaning to an individual, but as a society, was the form itself relevant or was it a 'borrowed language'?</p>
6.2	<p>On the other hand, and with reference to Mr Quek Ling Kiong's earlier comment on young people's interest in traditional forms, Mr Benson Puah reflected that people often tended to separate the traditional and contemporary forms, but he felt that the two were actually part of a continuum and ethnicity did influence artistic expression to an extent. However, the traditional arts were not well-entrenched in Singapore. For it to be funded and supported, it was important that the traditional arts was something which people understood and embraced.</p>
6.3	<p>He noted too that there almost seemed to be three parallel universes between "street" forms embraced by youths (e.g. hip hop, indie music), "high" art forms (e.g. classical music, ballet) and traditional forms (e.g. Chinese opera). Forms such as those embraced by youths (who would be part of Singapore's future) also contributed to the richness and vibrancy of the scene. How do we incorporate them and support them as part of mainstream society?</p>
6.4	<p>On a separate note, Mr Quek Ling Kiong felt that some artists seemed to be becoming too specialised in one genre or art form and questioned if this was desirable as it could be limiting. He shared that as conductor of Ding Yi Music Company, he had started exploring more collaborations with musicians of other genres and artists from other art forms (e.g dancer, painter etc). To this, Mr Benson</p>

	Puah wondered whether the conversations across art forms were taking place and whether these were leading to collaboration opportunities. He also noted that young people were generally less prescribed by specific forms and tended to have a cross-disciplinary approach to art-making.
7	Building Private Patronage and Corporate Sponsorship
7.1	Ms Koh Hui Ling shared that Drama Box did not have the right capabilities to meet the expectations of corporate sponsors in terms of reach. She felt that many companies lacked a 'marketing' engine to expand their reach. She hoped that NAC could intervene to encourage more corporate sponsorship and help groups expand their sources of income.
7.2	Mr Benson Puah observed that local small and medium enterprises tended to be more receptive than multi-national corporations in making donations to Singapore companies as they probably identified with their causes. Seeking donations could sometimes work better than sponsorships as sponsorships were tied to marketing budgets and a key criterion would be the reach.
8	Issue of Censorship
8.1	Ms Koh Hui Ling also shared that censorship was still a concern among the arts scene, especially outdoor shows which did not take place within a confined space.
9	Conclusion
9.1	In closing, Mr Benson Puah reiterated that NAC would need the help of the industry to reimagine the future scene and to help outline how NAC could play a more helpful and meaningful role in developing the scene. He also expressed that he would like these conversations to continue.

Recorded by: Elena Tan, Manager/Sector Development
Rachel Lim, Manager/ Sector Development

Circulated on 31 January 2013 to participants, with amendments incorporated.

**NOTES OF DISCUSSION FOR NAC CEO'S INFORMAL DIALOGUE WITH INDUSTRY
ON THE NAC PERFORMING ARTS PLAN
Held on 6 February 2013, 4-6:30pm
Pantry, Blk A Level 1, Goodman Arts Centre**

Present:

No.	Name	Specialisation / Designation
1.	Ms Melissa Quek	Programme Leader, Dance, LASALLE College of the Arts
2.	Ms Elysa Wendi	Independent choreographer/dancer
3.	Mr Graham Perkins	President, Singapore Music Society (SGMUSO)
4.	Mr Bani Haykal	Musician, The Observatory
5.	Mr Nawaz Mirajkar	Instructor, Temple of Fine Arts
6.	Ms Kuo Jian Hong	Artistic Director, The Theatre Practice
7.	Dr Robin Loon	Playwright, director and academic
8.	Ms Lim Woan Wen	Independent lighting designer

1	Background
1.1	NAC had invited members of the arts community for an informal dialogue on the future of Singapore's performing arts scene – the challenges faced today and possible developments going forward. This was the third session of a series of such dialogues involving arts practitioners, arts writers and advocates as part of the process of developing a masterplan for Singapore's future performing arts scene.
2	Introduction
2.1	CEO/Mr Benson Puah welcomed all to the chat and shared that the NAC had started a series of conversations with people from various art forms to brainstorm ideas for Singapore's evolving performing arts scene. Mr Benson Puah invited all to "re-imagine" what we wanted to see for the future and asked for views on where NAC could meaningfully play a role to support this development and where NAC should get out of the way to enable organic growth. He wondered if it was possible for some sort of a framework for the performing arts to be articulated. Such a framework should liberate and enable rather than prescribe.
3	Need for Greater Diversity and Decentralisation
3.1	Ms Kuo Jian Hong shared that diversity in the scene was key to continual and even development of the scene. She added that foresight was needed to enable a diverse ecosystem where all players could thrive and the current scene would need to mature to that stage.
3.2	Mr Robin Loon added that maturing took time and the process should not be forced to accelerate and the progress should not be quantified. For Singapore, this could mean another 10 years to reach that state of maturity. Regardless, we needed to be prepared to invest in very long-term plans and also in the infrastructure to support the industry. Noting the comments, Mr Benson Puah added that while some things would need a longer runway to evolve, there could be others where fast action was

	needed when opportunities arose and circumstances were right.
3.3	Ms Kuo Jian Hong opined that generally, people were used to and often looked for structure and while this was essential, what was of interest to her was whether such structures could be deconstructed. She brought up the idea of decentralisation and said that it was necessary in ensuring diversity in the scene. She felt that NAC should not be the only organisation that controlled resources and had full decision-making powers on art making. The question was how such decentralisation could be made possible. Mr Benson Puah agreed that it was important to “populate” the scene to ensure a diversity of players and the development of critical roles (e.g. producers) was a long haul.
4	Focus on the Artist and the Art-Making Process
4.1	Mr Graham Perkins felt that it was important for artists to focus on developing their arts practice, and not entrepreneurial skills. While he acknowledged that picking up business skills could be helpful to artists in making their practice more sustainable, he was concerned that this would distract them from creating good art. Ms Kuo Jian Hong agreed and stressed that it was important that as individuals, artists had the support and space to create their works and develop their craft. Responding to this, Mr Benson Puah noted that NAC’s support had largely been focused on developing companies, and agreed that it was important to seed individual artists’ ambitions and vision as these would help define the scene.
4.2	Mr Robin Loon added that there was also a difference between art-making versus producing (products). While one was a manifestation of the other, they were not the same. He felt that more could be done to help independent artists. Aside from funding support, he suggested that infrastructure support alongside production and marketing support, an endorsement from NAC or for NAC to receive donations on behalf of independent artists (with double tax deduction to donors) would be helpful. Such support to independent artists would be necessary to encourage risk-taking.
4.3	Ms Melissa Quek agreed that the artistic creation process was very important and was often more interesting than the final product/presentation. However, very few artists documented their creation processes. She added that the Internet had made documentation easier. For instance, rehearsal processes could be uploaded onto the web for public reference, and development of these artists could be easily tracked. On this note, she opined that NAC could support and encourage artists to document their processes and make such resources publicly available. NAC could also match-make artists with writers who could help with the documentation.
4.4	Adding to this, Mr Benson Puah noted the changing relationship between artists and audiences, and how various platforms played different roles in developing these relationships. For instance, a stage performance and one on YouTube offered different experiences for the audience. He added that the young were relating to the world differently, and would be interested to hear ideas on how NAC could anticipate and support this.

5	Future Direction of Singapore’s Performing Arts Scene
5.1	Mr Bani Haykal said that the beauty of the arts was to have things happen without a set direction, where artists became their own curators and not having a direction was necessary in pushing artistic boundaries. He shared that he was bored with music in Singapore which was very “20 th century”, and felt that there needed to be a serious rethink of the scene. Musicians needed to more conscious with the space they occupied, the people they worked with and what it meant to be a musician. Artists should start defining what people around them experienced. He agreed that developing that sense of maturity and identity would take time. Mr Bani Haykal added that money played a very small part in the development of the arts. It should be the responsibility of everyone in the scene to move the scene forward and create a Singaporean identity.
5.2	Responding to Mr Bani Haykal’s comment that Singaporeans were “cultural orphans” and on evolving a Singapore identity, Mr Benson Puah noted that other major cities around the world also faced a similar problem, and there was a lot of uncertainty and a sense of displacement. He felt that Singapore was ahead of many of these cities, but tended to underrate our capabilities and limit our artistic ideas.
5.3	In response to Mr Benson Puah’s question on where the theatre landscape was headed, Ms Kuo Jian Hong said that it would not be very exciting if there was a clear direction. She added that the unimaginable was the most exciting. She felt that in Singapore, arts and culture were being considered in a very pragmatic way for the sake of accountability, benchmarking and to develop an “industry”. As such, there was a lack of imagination. She added that she did not want to say what the future would be as once it was defined, there would be no unknowns and the future would no longer be exciting.
5.4	Reflecting on this and the earlier point on diversity, Mr Benson Puah said that in the overall landscape, there would be some art forms which would continue because they related to our heritage and traditions, including our colonial past. However, there could also be openness towards the emergence of new forms. This was where we could let imagination thrive and allow a broader spectrum of forms and activities to happen. The question was how NAC could enable this to happen.
5.5	Mr Graham Perkins shared that in the current contemporary music scene, music formats were changing and there could be a deeper research into how music was constructed to evolve new forms / format. He noted that both the film and theatre sectors have gone through such phases which saw significant breakthroughs, but this has yet to happen for the music scene. He suggested that NAC could help catalyse such explorations and noted that this was a multi-billion dollar industry.
6	Need for a deeper understanding of our pioneers and cultural past through research, documentation and critical discourse
6.1	Mr Benson Puah sought Mr Nawaz Mirajkar’s thoughts on the traditional arts scene. Nawaz responded that the traditional arts scene was constantly evolving to adapt to societal trends as well as the changing mindsets of the younger generation. He

	mentioned that digital devices were fast replacing traditional pen and paper, and that could change the way people look at notation, for example.
6.2	<p>Mr Benson Puah then queried what exactly were Singapore's traditions?</p> <p>Mr Graham Perkins responded that tradition and culture was largely influenced by the country's history. He shared that he did not feel inspired by Singapore's history as many of our traditions have already been lost and only remnants were left.</p> <p>Mr Bani Haykal noted that even with the remnants of our history and traditions, there was very little discussion on historical figures in literature and the arts (e.g. P. Ramlee). Research and discourse have been a letdown as the cultural significance of their works was not discussed. There needed to be deeper analysis from a critical perspective. It was important that such understanding of the contributions of our past practitioners was passed down through generations.</p> <p>Mr Benson Puah agreed that there really needed to be more efforts and this could also come from academia. He shared that NAC had been trying to encourage research but it had been challenging find people who were willing to do it. He added that while NAC had a role to play in supporting such efforts, the arts community needed to embrace this and also engage in constructive peer criticism and interaction. It was important to deepen practice and counter the trend of having 'instant' artists and companies.</p>
7	Motivations for Pursuing a Career in the Arts
7.1	<p>Mr Graham Perkins shared that when he started out as a musician, it was not money that motivated and excited him to want to be in this industry. He felt that it was about whether one knew exactly what he/she wanted to do and whether one was 'hungry' enough. He reflected that this sense of hunger was missing in some art forms. He opined that artists could be more proactive and not rely on NAC's grants. In fact, he wondered if NAC should do away with grants as it developed reliance. He also disagreed with general comments from other practitioners that grant forms were troublesome. Mr Benson Puah reflected that there did seem to be a sense of entitlement that was prevalent in our society.</p>
7.2	<p>Regarding the concept of 'hunger', Mr Benson Puah asked Mr Robin Loon if people were hungry to write. Mr Robin Loon responded that it was easy to encourage people to write their first play, but difficult to get them to continue writing. He added that the younger generation wanted tangible and instantaneous outcomes. They only wrote if they knew their work was going to be staged and not because they wanted to, and this was a very short-term mindset.</p> <p>Mr Loon added that there were very few full-time playwrights today, especially independent ones, as the larger environment was generally not a supportive one. As a result writing had suffered and there was now very few new writing. He also felt that there could be more good critical writing (whether in the press or beyond).</p>

	<p>He also shared that young people were generally tentative about the voice they wanted. Instead of sending people to playwriting courses, it was more valuable to learn “life writing” (e.g. blogging) so that writers developed their own voice. He added that the universities were now teaching “life writing” and it was a good way in getting the young interested in writing as they could write about issues that they were passionate about and closer to their hearts. This way, they would write because they wanted to, because they realised the intrinsic value of writing and wanted to do it because they felt great and liked it, and would be personally motivated to continue.</p>
8	Recognising the Role and Value of Different Careers in the Performing Arts
8.1	<p>Mr Robin Loon noted that not everyone who worked in the performing arts would be performing. Some would want to work in a technical role, while others would want to produce a show. However, artists were now doing everything.</p> <p>Mr Graham Perkins added that it was a common perception that success could only be achieved at the top. However, he felt that success could also be achieved at the various stages of one’s career and he pointed out that not all skills could be learnt through an academic route. He shared that while some people might think of some jobs as being “low level” (e.g. stagehands), but these were important roles. Ms Kuo Jian Hong agreed and added that stage management as a career required significant skills and knowledge and was a long-term career which people undertook. Ms Elyssa Wendi added that there needed to be a different understanding of career progression where going deep, with a strong understanding of the role and value of one’s job, might be a more important consideration than going up hierarchies. Mr Graham Perkins surmised that this phenomenon in Singapore could be due to our system of meritocracy where people viewed that success could only be achieved at the top, instead of being possible at the “middle” or wherever one was.</p> <p>Responding to these observations, Mr Benson Puah shared that young people in the workforce today had high expectations and even in the arts, many wanted to be artists and designers. As more people wanted to be artists, it was a question of whether the market could absorb so many of them and how many NAC could or should support. An ecosystem with a diversity of players was needed. He added that this was not an issue that NAC could solve, but the consequence was something which NAC had to deal with. Ms Yvonne Tham added that NAC could address these issues and better validate the value of arts to society through its communication channels and advocacy work.</p>
9	Need for greater openness and a stronger collaborative spirit across government and the arts community
9.1	<p>Mr Graham Perkins shared that as the arts spreads across many industries, artists need the support from not only NAC but also agencies like MDA and URA.</p>
9.2	<p>Ms Kuo Jian Hong opined that arts should be everywhere in people’s lives and “infiltrate” the agenda of government agencies (including economic ones), such as Ministry of Trade & Industry and Ministry of National Development. However, this was not the case and the arts agenda was currently isolated. Ms Yvonne Tham</p>

	<p>added that practitioners also needed to see the relevance of their practice to other realms of life in Singapore.</p> <p>Mr Benson Puah reflected that conversations with other government agencies on the arts were on-going, but it would take time for changes to happen. On the other hand, the arts community needed to change as well. More conversations across art forms, more curiosity about others and discourse amongst peers was needed and that silos needed to be broken down.</p> <p>Ms Kuo Jian Hong agreed that change was necessary. She shared that in the past peers had focused on sustenance and “staying alive”. She noted that now, peers and the younger generation were asking themselves higher order questions. She also felt that while individualism was important, the arts community could be more organised as a collective to push the scene forward.</p> <p>Ms Elysa Wendi agreed that for diversity to happen there needed to be greater openness. She shared that when she started making dance films 5 years ago, it was difficult to get government support. MDA considered her work more as a dance than film, while NAC considered it more as a film than dance. She commented that there needed to be more dialogue and a stronger sense of community within artists as well.</p>
9.3	<p>Mr Graham Perkins shared that some government agencies tended to categorise artforms according to racial groups and language, for various agenda, including commercial ones, e.g. identifying their targeted market segment. However, this might not be helpful in the development of the scene.</p>
9.4	<p>Following this, Ms Kuo Jian Hong cited an example: MOE had a grant scheme that was aimed at promoting the Chinese language through Chinese theatre. However, the work that her company wanted to present was a Chinese language production that incorporated other languages, and MOE deemed it not Chinese theatre. Ms Kuo highlighted that Singapore was not a pure Chinese-speaking environment anyway. She wondered if such a purist approach was helpful.</p>
9.5	<p>Ms Yvonne Tham noted that this might not be helpful for Singapore as a multiracial society. She added that it was good to surface these issues to NAC. Mr Benson Puah agreed and added that multilingualism was part of Singapore and our daily conversations.</p>
9.6	<p>Regarding government agenda, Ms Elysa Wendi cited a recent example where the Hong Kong government supported a group of 18 independent artists to present their work in Taiwan. While this could be a political decision, Elysa said that this still managed to achieve artistic objectives as the artists were given the freedom to perform what they wanted to. She wondered if this could be a model that Singapore could adopt.</p>

9.7	<p>Mr Graham Perkins noted a trend in artists coming together in loose collectives for project based productions, as opposed to setting up organisations. He also urged that artists should take lead in having conversations and breaking barriers, and they should not wait for government agencies to start them.</p> <p>In summary, in relation to the points on traditional arts, languages and categories, Mr Benson Puah said that while it was important to understand and maintain a traditional core, one could depart from the core in artistic explorations and in evolving a distinctive artistic language. Ultimately, the categories would not matter, as long as it was good art. Mr Graham Perkins agreed and said that there was also no need to label local music as “local music” as this created a misperception on its ‘quality’. It should just be ‘music’ and good music would have market potential regardless of origin.</p>
10	Need for More Arts Spaces
10.1	<p>In the spirit of decentralisation, Ms Kuo Jian Hong felt that there more infrastructure was needed and such facilities should be made accessible to artists. Mr Graham Perkins opined that existing spaces could be better used. For instance, he noted that many of our local schools were well-equipped with facilities such as theatres and studio spaces, but many of such spaces were left underutilised.</p>
10.2	<p>Ms Elysa Wendi added that in some instances, it was also about working with the space available and creating the space. She cited that she used to dance in her room in her HDB flat. She also gave an example of a Japanese dancer she knew who choreographed in a 2m x 2m space.</p>
11	Conclusion
11.1	<p>In closing, Mr Benson Puah thanked everyone and reiterated that NAC would need the help of practitioners to imagine the future of our arts scene. He noted that the performing arts scene was very diverse and therefore much more complex than the visual arts and literary arts sectors. He also express that these conversations provided NAC with valuable insights and would like for more of such conversations to continue.</p>

Recorded by: Stanley Ang, Manager/Sector Development
Stella Woo, Executive/ Sector Development

**NOTES OF DISCUSSION FOR NAC'S CONSULTATION SESSION ON THE
PERFORMING ARTS PLAN – SESSION ON CRITICAL WRITING**

Held on 20 September, 2013, 5.30-7.30pm
Pantry, Blk A Level 1, Goodman Arts Centre

External Attendees:

No.	Name	Designation/Company
1	Dr Robin Loon	Independent Practitioner; Senior Lecturer/NUS (Theatre Studies)
2	Mr Casey Lim	Independent Practitioner
3	Ms Michele Lim	Independent Consultant/Producer
4	Mr Caleb Lee	Associate Festival Manager/I Theatre; Lecturer (Theatre+Performance)/ LASALLE College of the Arts
5	Mr Haresh Sharma	Resident Playwright/The Necessary Stage
6	Mr Chong Tze Chien	Company Director/The Finger Players
7	Mr Benjamin Ho	Artistic Director/Paper Monkey
8	Mr Low Jia Hua	General Manager/ Metropolitan Festival Orchestra
9	Mr Huzir Sulaiman	Co-Artistic Director/Checkpoint Theatre
10	Dr Stephanie Burridge	Dance Writer and Educator
11	Ms Germaine Cheng	Independent Arts Writer
12	Mr Albert Lin	Independent Arts Writer
13	Mr Matthew Lyon	Editor/ The Flying Inkpot
14	Mr Mayo Martin	Deputy Features Editor/ TODAY
15	Mr Christopher Toh	Features Editor/ TODAY
16	Mr Helmi Yusof	Arts Correspondent/ The Business Times
17	Ms Clarissa Oon	Senior Writer/ The Straits Times

NAC Attendees:

No.	Name	Designation
1	Ms Yvonne Tham	Dy CEO
2	Mr Khor Kok Wah	Senior Director/ Literary Arts
3	Mr Paul Tan (Moderator)	Director / Singapore Writers' Festival and Director/Visual Arts
4	Mr Kenneth Kwok	Director/Arts & Youth
5	Ms Grace Ng	DD/Sector Development
6	Ms Tan Sin Nah	DD/Sector Development
7	Ms Edwina Tang	DD/Capability Development
8	Ms Pamela Tham	AD/Corporate Communications & Marketing Services
9	Ms Grace Ho	AD/Sector Development
10	Ms Karen Loh	Manager/Sector Development
11	Ms Khainurizah Ariff Koh	Manager/Sector Development
12	Ms Kwong Wai Cheng	Manager/Sector Development
13	Ms Joanne Tay	Manager/Sector Development
14	Ms Lynn Yang	Manager/Sector Development
15	Mr Ang Cher Kiat	Manager/Sector Development
16	Ms Kathleen Tan	Manager/Sector Development
17	Ms Irdawati Roslan	Manager/Sector Development
18	Ms Teo Ying Er	Manager/Sector Development
19	Ms Wu Yahui	Manager/Arts Education
20	Ms Clara Dyeo	Manager/ Corporate Communications & Marketing Services

1	Background
1.1	NAC had invited members of the performing arts community for a consultation session on critical writing. This was an extension of the earlier dialogue sessions in 2012 and 2013 hosted by then-CEO Mr Benson Pua and sharing on key ideas at NAC Let's Talk session on 24 Jul 2013. Further to these consultations, NAC had organised a series of art-form specific sessions to go into issues and ideas that were relevant to each art-form.
2	Introduction
2.1	Ms Grace Ng welcomed the participants and introduced a number of preliminary ideas for the Performing Arts Plan. Critical writing was one of the areas that had been identified as an important aspect to develop.
3	Definition of Critical Writing
3.1	Mr Paul Tan suggested that the working definition of critical writing in this context included articles and reviews of arts productions published in mainstream media or on the Internet (i.e. any platform with a broader readership level), and excluded academic writing.
3.2	Mr Haresh Sharma said that academic writing should be included, and that it would be good to have a critical commentary of the current scene and to observe its trends and developments over time.
3.3	Dr Robin Loon categorised critical writing into three levels. Level 1 comprised event-specific reviews that were published in print or online media. Level 2 involved more specialised, thematic writing that was not necessarily born of current events (for e.g. opinion articles on trends or developments in the arts scene, arts magazines), and catered to an interested, informed audience. This level was missing, particularly at the magazine or periodical level. Level 3 encompassed more academic research-based writing that could be further classified into sub-genres ranging from critical commentaries/articles to dedicated books, journals, and conferences.
4	Academic/ Research-based Writing
4.1	Dr Robin Loon said that lower level academic discourse was an area that needed additional support. These included critical commentaries/introductions to plays that framed the work and gave perspective to the reader. He said writing beyond this level was outside of NAC's scope and should be championed by the Institutes of Higher Learning.
4.2	Mr Chong Tze Chien said that there was a lack of concerted, consistent strategy to consolidate the various efforts in researching and documenting the Singapore theatre scene. Past efforts had not complemented each other very well, and lacked a broad readership base. He added that while grants were available, it was a passive approach and there needed to be someone steering the direction of these efforts in order to maximise its impact. He suggested as an example that a part of the new Arts Festival budget could be dedicated to commissioning research about the festival.
4.3	Ms Clarissa Oon said that writers would generally be more inclined to contributing longer, more informed works than editing an entire volume. She referred to the <i>Interlogue</i> series published by Ethos Books as an example, and added that there was a need for such platforms.
4.4	Mr Paul Tan asked about the feasibility of NAC approaching a major international publisher to partner in funding a series on Singapore theatre, which could be

	published bi-annually. Dr Stephanie Burrridge said that such publishers were usually concerned about market size. Dr Robin Loon added that publishers were interested in market relevance as well, and not just funding. He suggested that as a start, NAC could approach a university press to indicate interest in starting a small internationally refereed peer-reviewed journal. Though this might not be as attractive to larger publishers, but it would at least be a start. Factors that would affect its success included a base of regular subscribers and the vision of the editorial team.
4.5	Mr Chong Tze Chien said that the NUS library had compiled all articles on the arts published in the mainstream media from 1980 to 2005. If these articles were published in an anthology, it would be a good historical resource on Singapore theatre.
5	Arts Magazine
5.1	Mr Matthew Lyon said that there was a gap at the trade journal level (intermediate level of accessibility), that used the language of the “industry” and catered to an interested and informed audience. This would have a positive impact on audience development - as people became interested in the art form, they would have a resource to turn to. Currently, the Flying Inkpot was the closest equivalent available; though it only featured reviews, there was potential for more to be included.
5.2	Dr Stephanie Burrridge highlighted the importance of sustainability, citing the example of the <i>Asian Dance Magazine</i> , which started well but eventually had to stop after 3 years. Mr Chong Tze Chien said that Passion Radio met the same fate. Such projects would never recover its cost, much less be commercially viable. Mr Haresh Sharma agreed, and added that such publications were possible, but that someone needed to champion and take on the responsibility with the knowledge that it could never make a profit.
6	Diverse Types of Content and Platforms
6.1	Dr Robin Loon said that there was a need to rethink the definition of ‘publication’ to encompass online or digital forms as modes of communication have changed and it could be a more sustainable option than physical publications. He added that it was important to acknowledge that a publication could not be expected to do everything (i.e. review, profile, archive etc.), and that there was a need to have a diversity of platforms and content focus. For example, he said that he would be interested in doing non-biographical interviews with artists that explored their opinions and thoughts about various topics, and presented in an oral format.
6.2	Mr Low Jia Hua said that in addition to written reviews which are just a third party’s view of a particular performance, it was just as important to help artists to share about their own perception of the work that they do and their experiences in written form. As not all artists are able to articulate their points of view well enough in writing, it is important to have writers who have an insiders’ understanding of the respective artforms to help to write and advocate on the artists’ behalf, without seeking to impose their own judgement on the artists’ work.
6.3	Mr Huzir Sulaiman said that it was possible to do something quietly wonderful in the online space if turning a profit was not a priority. Sharing his experience as publisher of online lifestyle magazine on contemporary Singapore (poskod.sg), he said that there were many people interested in writing for the platform. He added that he was motivated by his passion for the project, and paid for publication using his own resources. It has been indirectly successful for him, leading to work opportunities for his consultancy firm, which in turn sustained the online platform.

6.4	Mr Helmi Yusof said that www.saatchionline.com was a possible model to consider as well, where new artists were given a platform to put up a profile and images of their work. Visitors to the site could then peruse the directory and choose to interact with the artist as they wished. He suggested that NAC could host a platform like this, which would add buzz and foster interactivity between artists and audience.
6.5	Mr Christopher Toh also emphasised the necessity of exposure and audience for critical writing; otherwise, all these efforts would be to no avail.
7	Developing Young Writers
7.1	Ms Germaine Cheng said that unlike other countries, there was no longevity among Singapore's arts writers and as a result, no consistency in voice over the years. As a young writer, she said that she wanted to access this collective history, but was unable to. Mr Christopher Toh agreed, saying that young writers do not know the history of the performing arts in Singapore as well and that more needed to be done to educate them by going to schools. Ms Clarissa Oon suggested that having courses to educate aspiring journalists on specific art forms, or visiting professional arts reviewers to give talks in schools were plausible starts.
7.2	Ms Clarissa Oon said that not many people stayed in the arts scene for long, and that it was not easy to find freelance reviewers. Younger writers were typically more enthusiastic than senior writers. Mr Christopher Toh added that young writers were astute, and able to pick up on things that older writers did not. He said that there was a need to appeal to young people in order to grow the arts scene, and young writers were better placed to do that.
7.3	Mr Caleb Lee shared that without a safe platform where young writers could experiment and fail, they would be intimidated to go into writing. He asked if the lack of such platforms stunted both the growth of arts reading and writing. Mr Benjamin Ho said that it was important to start seeding the idea of arts writing as a career from a young age. One way would be to expose students to an interactive, online platform where they could review, contribute and discuss the work in a classroom setting.
7.4	Ms Michele Lim shared that the 2011 Singapore Biennale had an art writing outreach program for young people which took place over multiple phases. The first phase introduced interested young writers to contemporary art and different types of art writing (e.g. art journalism, creating writing where a contemporary visual art work is a stimuli) over several days of workshops featuring arts writers and curators from various platforms. The second phase invited participants to visit the Biennale, following which they had to submit at least one piece of writing reflecting their views on the art work. She said that the participants came from diverse backgrounds, and emphasised the need to look at the quality (over quantity) of engagement efforts. She added that as part of this art writing programme, the Biennale found platforms where the writings could be published as it was important as part of the learning process that the pieces could be published. Mr Mayo Martin added that the best pieces from this workshop were published in the TODAY papers.
8	Career in Arts Writing/ Journalism
8.1	Mr Helmi Yusof explained that newspapers did not hire writers or reviewers to take specific arts writing roles but were hired as journalists. There was usually limited space for arts writing in the paper as well. In the case of The Business Times, it only publishes arts on Fridays. As Business Times only full-time arts writer, he was responsible for reviewing multiple art forms, and also has to write occasional fashion and travel stories. He explained that arts typically did not attract as many

	advertisements as other topics such as property and banking, and that may impact how arts journalism is viewed. Mr Mayo Martin added that arts writers were not taken seriously at times.
8.2	Ms Clarissa Oon said that journalists would face a fork in the road after several years of writing, and start to consider other options. For example, if she wanted to do more serious work on critical arts writing, she would have to pursue further education. She added that passion was an important ingredient, and after years of writing, journalists needed to take time off to recharge.
8.3	Mr Matthew Lyon said that there were few employers in the Singapore market and few sustainable platforms. Thus, it was difficult for writers to move laterally and have a sustainable career in art writing. Writing in Singapore was also limited to a journalistic writing style. He said that it was important to make it easy for people to enter the field and practice.
9	Association for Arts Writing
9.1	Mr Chong Tze Chien suggested that arts writers could set up a collective or form an association similar to SDEA, and apply for funding. This would be the central gathering point for arts writing, and give it legitimacy as a discipline. Ms Yvonne Tham shared that there was the International Association of Art Critics which could be a reference point.
9.2	While Mr Matthew Lyon acknowledged the value such an entity could bring, he was doubtful about the level of interest in such an organisation if it did not have an associated publication. He suggested that training could be a part of the suite of services offered.
10	Ownership
10.1	Mr Haresh Sharma said that the responsibility of championing critical writing should not always fall to the artists and theatre companies, citing The Necessary Stage's previous efforts through the publication <i>focas</i> and <i>9 Lives: 10 Years of Singapore Theatre</i> , but that other institutions could easily fulfil this role.
10.2	Mr Huzir Sulaiman said that both artists and NAC needed to take responsibility for this, as they were the parties that stood to gain the most from any developments in this area. However, unlike artists, NAC had the mandate and greater resources, and should take the lead in championing this cause.
11	Closing Remarks
11.1	Ms Grace Ng thanked the participants for their contributions and time.
11.2	The meeting ended at 5.30pm.

Recorded by: Lynn Yang, Manager/Sector Development

With comments from participants incorporated on 1 November, 2013

APPENDIX III - CONSULTATIONS WITH THE DANCE SECTOR

NOTES OF MEETING FROM NAC'S INFORMAL DIALOGUE WITH INDUSTRY ON NAC'S DANCE PLAN HELD ON TUESDAY, 1 OCTOBER 2013, 5PM GOODMAN ARTS CENTRE, BLOCK B, MEETING ROOM 3

Present:

No.	Name	Designation
1	Kuik Swee Boon	Artistic Director, T.H.E Dance Company
2	Angela Liong	Artistic Director, The Arts Fission Company
3	Ricky Sim	Artistic Director, RawMoves
4	Kavitha Krishnan	Artistic Director, Maya Dance Theatre
5	Santha Bhaskar	Artistic Director, Bhaskar's Arts Academy
6	Cai Shi Ji	Creative Director, Dance Ensemble Singapore
7	Aravinth Kumarasamy	Creative and Managing Director, Apsaras Arts
8	Osman Abdul Hamid	Artistic Director, Era Dance Theatre
9	Lim Moi Kim	Artistic Director, Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan Dance Theatre
10	Janek Schergen	Artistic Director, Singapore Dance Theatre
11-14	Albert Tiong, Danny Tan, Low Mei Yoke, Janek Schergen	Artistic Directors of Re:Dance Theatre, Odyssey Dance Theatre, Frontier Danceland and Singapore Dance Theatre <i>Note: they were separately consulted as they were unable to attend the consultation session on 1 Oct.</i>

NAC

No.	Name	Designation
1	Ms Elaine Ng	Director, Sector Development
2	Ms Tan Sin Nah	Deputy Director, Sector Development
3	Ms Shivashni Subramaniam	Assistant Director, Sector Development
4	Ms Sharon Koh	Manager, Sector Development
5	Ms Zuraini Hamid	Manager, Sector Development
6	Ms Vinitha Jayaram	Manager, Sector Development
7	Ms Teo Ying Er	Manager, Sector Development
8	Ms Stella Woo	Executive, Sector Development
9	Ms Abhirami Krishnaswamy	Executive, Sector Development

1	Background and Overview
1.1	NAC had invited members of the dance community for a consultation session to find out the challenges and needs of dance artists, and their views on issues like networks, spaces, dance centre, dancers' development and research and documentation scenes. This was one of a series of art form dialogues involving arts practitioners, writers, administrators and advocates, as part of the process of developing a plan for Singapore's future performing arts scene.
1.2	NAC shared an overview of the dance scene in Singapore, highlighting 4 major trends: a) Increase in number of dance companies b) More training options for dance students c) Better infrastructure and an increase in performing arts spaces d) An increase in performances and tickets sold.
2	Dance Centre
2.1	NAC raised the idea of dance centre in Singapore, a neutral space to provide rehearsal space for the creation of works, resources for production support or information and for the running of programmes and residencies. While it has been highlighted that such a dance centre would be beneficial to the independent dance scene, NAC asked the attendees if they thought likewise and solicited their views on the relevance of a dance centre and if a physical building was necessary or the functions could be carried out in different spaces and hosted by different parties.
2.2	After some discussion, there was general consensus that a space like this would be vital for the independent sector, dance companies as well as dance students to tap on for residency opportunities or to seek guidance on career progression. They elaborated that more of such residency opportunities will be useful to improve the foreign exchanges of the dance scene. There was a suggestion that a choreography centre be set up to facilitate residencies between local and international artists, encourage foreigners to create new works about local artists and to grow the dance scene. This would profile Singapore as a dance centre in Asia. It was also noted that there are already existing players providing programming and festivals, the dance centre should complement rather than duplicate efforts
2.3	The artists concurred that there was no need for a new physical structure to house the dance centre. Rather, it would be better to look at existing spaces and better activate these spaces to perform the proposed roles of the dance centre. They also recommended a neutral party should coordinate this activation of different spaces and nominate different companies to take on the role of running residency/incubation programmes during different seasons. All agreed that GAC could be a possible space.
2.4	It was highlighted that the most important area the dance centre could support with would be the provision of venue and administrative support for the independent artists in particular. They explained that the dance centre should be a curative space which allows young artists to morph and grow in their own space and time without inhibitions or barriers related to financial resources and time.

3	Connections and Networks
3.1	NAC shared that a dance association would typically bring the dance community together, facilitate linkages between different stakeholders and organise activities such as workshops, training courses and dialogues. NAC sought the views of those present on the need for such an industry body in Singapore.
3.2	The meeting agreed that it was crucial to have a network amongst the dance organisations and practitioners in Singapore, and that the current dance sector could work towards a more united dance community. They elaborated that the connections fostered through a network would be able to lead to more training opportunities, sharing sessions and collaborations for the next generation of dancers.
3.3	They also acknowledged that regardless of the existence of infrastructure for a dance association, the foremost important element would be to have a purpose for the dance community to come together and build connections. Various members of the dance community shared examples of how networks in other countries served the purpose of connecting companies and artists through various online platforms. They elaborated that the overseas dancers saw a clear purpose for the network, and that was to tap on it to find the people or resources that they needed for their artistic works, hence the network became vital. It was emphasised that it a neutral party should drive the association and network.
4	Spaces
4.1	To NAC's question of whether there were sufficient rehearsal spaces and performance venues for the local dance companies, the artists shared that many of the venues were usually fully booked and the demands seems to be high. They shared that fully-booked performance spaces could be attributed to the increase in use of the same spaces by growing local dance companies, foreign performers and other dance groups.
4.2	It was expressed that renting spaces for performances or rehearsals were too costly for local companies, and this could possibly be due to the increased competition for similar spaces. They also shared that there were not many mid-sized venues available in Singapore that are ideal for booking i.e. have suitable time slots and affordable. The location of performance venues too could be a barrier to attract audiences. They shared that the performance spaces at University Cultural Centre and Republic Polytechnic were some examples of such spaces.

4.3	The artists suggested using alternative spaces such as community centres and warehouses as performance spaces. Some also shared that they currently use school auditoriums as performance venues. They also recommended for local arts groups to be given preferential rates by arts venues in order to help them cope with high venue costs.
5	Dancers' Development
5.1	It was shared that there was a need to train students in traditional dance in Singapore schools, as there was a lack of new dancers entering the scene with traditional dance background. The artists also shared that there was need for more links between Arts Institutions and local dance companies, in order for dance students to understand the professional dance scene in Singapore.
5.2	It was raised that career transition is an issue faced by all their company dancers at some point in time. They shared that many of the dancers and managers looked to them for advice related to career progression. They also shared that some foreign dance companies have set aside financial resources for retired dancers to use for training and development and that there were schemes for them to move on to when they stepped down from the company as professional dancers. They expressed that these were some options to facilitate career progression for professional dancers in Singapore. The artists expressed interest in leadership programmes such as Dance East in UK, which was a programme for artistic directors on management and visioning for companies. They also expressed interest in learning from other established foreign dance companies, if the opportunities arise.
5.3	The meeting brought up that many of the dancers in their companies teach part-time in schools to supplement their income. While this sometimes posed as a distraction for dancers' professional training, they acknowledged that this was important for the dancers to support themselves financially. They highlighted that an eligibility criteria be set for anyone teaching dance in schools and this should be standardized by the Ministry of Education. This was expressed in light that the current scene of dance instructors' qualifications and capabilities are varied resulting in inconsistency in the quality of teaching.
5.4	NAC shared that the medical sector was keen to provide services and support to meet the needs of dancers in terms of injury prevention and physical assessment to enhance their performance. The artists agreed that such services will be beneficial to dancers given that the professional span of a dancer is short and injuries could shorten it even further. They agreed that the medical support in Singapore is very costly, and that it would be good if special privileges and such services could be provided to dancers to support their physical maintenance.

6	Research and Documentation
6.1	NAC sought comments on documentation of dance in Singapore and on potential areas for research. NAC shared that among the performing arts, dance is an area that has the least research and documentation. The artists shared that the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts has plans for a dance library where companies could donate materials such as programme booklets and posters to house in the library. Currently there are no updates on the status of the library. It was also raised that the National Library Board is also undertaking some documentation of dance. They felt that such documentation is important to for archival and research purposes and more could be done.
6.2	It was agreed that critical writing is important to develop the dance scene in Singapore. They expressed that it was important for dance companies and artists to receive critical feedback to inform them of how to work towards better performances and move forward as a dance company. They felt that there should be more platforms and support to develop this area of writing.
7	Closing remarks
7.1	NAC summarised the points discussed and thanked the participants for their contributions and time. There being no other matters, the meeting ended at 7.30pm

**NOTES OF MEETING FROM NAC'S INFORMAL DIALOGUE WITH INDUSTRY ON
NAC'S DANCE PLAN
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 2 OCTOBER 2013 AT 5.30PM
ALIWAL ARTS CENTRE MUSIC ROOM 3**

Present:

No.	Name	Designation
1	Bernice Lee	Dancer, Frontier Danceland
2	Jereh Leong	Dancer, Frontier Danceland
3	Germaine Cheng	Freelance dance artist and writer
4	Chan Sze Wei	Freelance dance artist
5	Hazel Tng	Dancer, T.H.E 2 nd Company
6	Shahrin Johri	Dancer, Maya Dance Theatre
7	Christina Chan	Dancer, Frontier Danceland
8	Norisham Osman	Freelance dance artist

NAC

No.	Name	Designation
1	Ms Elaine Ng	Director, Sector Development
2	Ms Tan Sin Nah	Deputy Director, Sector Development
3	Ms Shivashni Subramaniam	Assistant Director, Sector Development
4	Ms Sharon Koh	Manager, Sector Development
5	Ms Zuraini Hamid	Manager, Sector Development
6	Ms Vinitha Jayaram	Manager, Sector Development
7	Ms Teo Ying Er	Manager, Sector Development
8	Ms Stella Woo	Executive, Sector Development

1	Background and Overview
1.1	NAC had invited members of the dance community for a consultation session to find out the challenges and needs of independent artists, and their views on issues like networks, spaces, dance centre, dancers' development and research and documentation scenes. This was one of a series of art form dialogues involving arts practitioners, writers, administrators and advocates, as part of the process of developing a plan for Singapore's future performing arts scene.

1.2	NAC shared an overview of the dance scene in Singapore, highlighting 4 major trends: a) Increase in number of dance companies b) More training options for dance students c) Better infrastructure and an increase in performing arts spaces d) An increase in performances and tickets sold.
2	Support for independent artists
2.1	Overall, the artists felt that there is a lack of resources for independent artists, which leads to difficulty in getting administrative, technical and publicity support, hiring a producer, and renting rehearsal and performance spaces etc. They hope there could be residencies, mentorships and spaces that provide independent artists the necessary support.
2.2	Some artists pointed out that support in Singapore seems to be geared towards companies, and that artists who are not part of a company are often not considered to be serious in their craft. Educators in local dance institutions also do not encourage independent practice, and do not see it as a career option, due to their personal experiences. It was noted that there is more support and acceptance for independent practice overseas e.g. Indonesia. When asked whether there is a need for independent artists to practise at a professional level, NAC opined that there are different levels of art making, and that it is up to the individual's aspiration on whether he wants to pursue a professional career path.
2.3	It was also expressed that companies in Singapore could be more open to their artists doing independent work outside the companies. There seem to be concern that independent projects carried out by their dancers might not align with the company's direction and affect the reputation of their organisation.
2.4	With regards to venue, they felt that spaces like Goodman Arts Centre should not just provide subsidised rental rates for their resident groups, but also for independent artists, who are in need of more support. They added that for independent artists, a reasonable rate for the rental of dance studios would be about \$10 per hour.
2.5	Besides venue support, they also requested for advice on contracts, payment etc. There could be short courses on contracts, templates for press releases etc. to assist independent artists.
3	Dance Centre
3.1	NAC enquired if a Dance Centre that provides space, production & administrative support, career counselling etc. for independent artists would benefit the scene. The Dance Centre could take the form of a physical space or could be a programme that taps on existing spaces. Some of the functions e.g. administrative support could also be provided online. The Dance Centre could also work as a focal point for the independent artists to network.

3.2	The artists felt that instead of a physical dance centre, it would be better to work with existing spaces e.g. Substation, Community Centres, 72-13, schools, Frontier's studio, Maya's studio, Goodman Arts Centre etc., which were under-utilised, or not utilised at certain times of the day. Alternative spaces like warehouses could also be tapped on. However it was acknowledged that working with companies' spaces may be sensitive and a neutral space would be preferred.
3.3	The artists also opined that the Dance Centre should not be a space that catered solely for mainstream dance, but should also include works that are not clearly defined as 'dance', or works that are multi-disciplinary.
3.4	It was pointed out that I Dance Central had tried to set up a dance centre previously, but it did not work out eventually due to high rental costs. It could also be that the scene was not ready at that point in time as there were not as many dancers then.
3.5	All agreed that some spaces e.g. Goodman Arts Centre could be branded as a dance space, to gain more visibility. There could also be clear seasons for such spaces and innovative programme such as late night series could also be considered to add excitement to the dance scene.
4	Network/Associations
4.1	The artists that having a network for independent artists to connect was very important. It was mentioned that such connections could take place online, for example, in the form of a forum. It was pointed out that there was some effort made previously (by Yong Wei) to connect the independent artists in the scene, but did not sustain eventually.
4.2	It was also pointed out that there is also a contact improvisation jam held every month which provides a platform for artists to connect. however, it was highlighted that finding a neutral and affordable space for the session is an issue
4.3	There was concurrence that the current scene is lacking a network to bring dance artists together. It was also re-iterated that a neutral party should lead the network to support the dance industry.
5	Training & Development
5.1	The artists expressed that training is especially important for dancers, and that there is a lack of dance classes for independent artists in Singapore. There seems to be a sense of weariness among companies to open up their classes to dancers outside of their company.

5.2	It was suggested that there could be special rates for artists to attend training classes and performances by companies. Currently only very few companies provide such concessions. Dance institutions like NAFA could open up their classes to their alumni. There could also be a programme or arts centre to curate dance classes by inviting guest teachers to provide training. However, it was acknowledged that there are currently too few independent artists to sustain such a programme, and therefore the programme could open up to students in tertiary institutions like NUS as well.
5.3	It was pointed out that a lot of students are not aware of the dance programmes available overseas, and thus may not be able to make informed choices. It was suggested that NAC could forward EDMs on dance programmes available overseas to keep local artists and students updated.
5.4	It was brought up that there seem to be a gap between traditional and contemporary dance, in terms of the understanding of dance as an art form and as a profession, as well as the resources available. Some felt that the fundamental problem for the traditional dance scene was a lack of openness, and that there should be more collaboration among traditional dance groups and dancers.
5.5	It was noted that local dance institutions like SOTA, offer western-centric dance training and traditional arts is not a focus in their curriculum. A dance school that offers a wider range of structured dance training, including traditional dance forms, would be ideal. However finding suitable and qualified trainers would be an issue. NAC shared that artists could tap on the Capability Development Grant for short term training in traditional dance. However, it had noted that the demand for structured traditional dance training seems to be lacking as there were no takers for a fully supported course to Institut Seni Indonesia when NAC did an open call a few years ago.
6	Research and Documentation/ Dance writing
6.1	It was shared that among local artists, there is a lack of knowledge of the history of dance in Singapore. In fact, some may be more familiar of the history of dance overseas due to their dance training background. It was also pointed out that local dance institutions do not specifically cover dance history in Singapore in their curriculum, and that the Esplanade Library does not carry such resources on local dance history as well.
6.2	It was raised that there is a general lack of understanding of dance from the press, which is reflected in their writing and the scope of their interviews. The artists also pointed out that it is more difficult for independent work to attract media attention and to get reviewers to write on their work.
6.3	There was consensus that raising the quality of dance writing, though an ambitious task, is important for the growth of the scene.

7	Dance Health
7.1	The artists felt that medical insurance is especially important to dancers as they are very vulnerable to injuries etc. As physiotherapy for dancers is extremely expensive, they felt that subsidised rates would be helpful. A general awareness of dance safety and related issues should also be cultivated.
8	Closing remarks
7.2	NAC summarised the points discussed and thanked the participants for their contributions and time. There being no other matters, the meeting ended at 7pm.

APPENDIX IV - CONSULTATIONS WITH THE MUSIC SECTOR

NOTES OF MEETING FROM NAC'S INFORMAL DIALOGUE WITH INDUSTRY ON NAC'S MUSIC PLAN HELD ON MONDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 3.00PM BLK B #04-13, NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL

Present:

No.	Name	Designation
1	Adrian Tan	Music Director/Conductor, BHSO & SWS
2	Albert Tay	Artistic Director, International Festival Chorus
3	Anthony Brice	General Manager, Singapore Symphony Orchestra
4	Foong Hak Luen	Chairman, Choral Directors' Association (Singapore)
5	Jennifer Tham	Choral Director, SYC Ensemble Singers
6	Julie Tan	President, Singapore Music Teachers Association
7	Kelly Tang	Dean, School of the Arts
8	Leonard Tan	Assistant Professor, National Institute of Education

1	<u>Background</u>
1.1	NAC had invited members of the music community for an informal dialogue, to discuss issues faced by the music scene today, and possible developments for the future. This was the first in a series of such dialogues involving music practitioners, arts managers, educators, academics and advocates, as part of the process of developing a plan for the local music scene.
2	<u>Introduction</u>
2.1	Ms Elaine Ng (Director/Performing Arts, NAC) welcomed everyone and shared that this was one of several dialogues taking place across the various art forms, to brainstorm ideas for the development of the Performing Arts plan. The music industry consultation sessions were separated into two sessions: Classical & Choral, and Contemporary & Indie music. She invited everyone to share their views on the 4 areas of discussion (Artistic Growth, Music Education, Audience Development and Local Music Advocacy & Promotion).
2.2	Ms Grace Ho (Assistant Director/Music, NAC) started by summarising trends in the music scene in the past 4 years. Over the past decade, the music scene in Singapore had become increasingly vibrant. 8 years ago, there were only 24 music groups; today, there were nearly three times as many. The educational infrastructure was also the most substantial of all the performance arts, encompassing arts institutions such as the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and LaSalle College of the Arts, as well as MOE schools and private schools. The music scene also sees the greatest number of music students enrolled in the various CCAs, which is around 75,000 per year. Ticket sales were also growing, albeit at a low rate. There was a relatively high proportion of unsold and complimentary tickets.

2.3	Ms Jennifer Tham remarked that while the trends indicated that there was an overall growth in music groups in the sector, the numbers were plateauing. She shared that the music scene's large growth could be ascribed to the vibrancy of the music scene in the 1970s-1990s.
2.4	Mr Adrian Tan added that a juxtaposition of music CCA participation figures and ticket sales figures appeared to indicate that the large number of music CCA students was not translating into concert-going audiences. He also shared that the audience figures for free concerts appeared to have stagnated over the past few years.
3	<u>Achieving Artistic Growth</u>
3.1	Ms Elaine Ng inquired if new initiatives were necessary to further galvanise the scene's growth.
3.2	Mr Adrian Tan pointed out that MOE played an important role as the largest employer of arts graduates. However, its efforts to temper the competitive element of the Singapore Youth Festival had inadvertently caused a reduction of employment for arts freelancers across the choral, Chinese orchestral and band scene, as some schools had started to cut back on their investment in these programmes.
3.3	Mr Anthony Brice said that the problem went deeper, and seemed to be embedded in years of inculcation of the prioritisation of academic excellence over other practices. He found most local school choirs and bands excellent. However, these groups excelled only in the 2-3 songs they had spent the entire year to perfect. This behaviour was also regularly observed in the ABRSM examinations.
3.4	Ms Jennifer Tham opined that the best solution would have to begin at home and in schools, as teachers and parents had the greatest control over students' time. However, due to the overriding drive for academic excellence, many preferred not invest as much time in the arts. She added that it might be difficult to hold out for an overnight shift in mentality, and that it could be more realistic to grow the scene organically.
3.5	Ms Elaine Ng then inquired if the scene needed more platforms that would constitute "highlights" in the local music calendar, in order to inspire the scene. Ms Jennifer Tham responded that the Esplanade and the various large music institutions and companies already provided a wide range of good music selections throughout the year. There was even the possibility that there was too much going on at the same time.
3.6	Mr Anthony Brice remarked that there could be a two-way process in the promotion of artistic growth in the scene. Singapore had hitherto been importing many good foreign acts, and could now perhaps move towards presenting more local groups internationally so as to gain a foothold on the international music stage.

3.7	Mr Adrian Tan and Ms Jennifer Tham suggested that a stock take of Singapore arts and artists should be done to coincide with Singapore's 50 th birthday in 2015, as the arts was an important part of national identity.
4	<u>Building Music Awareness & Appreciation Through Education</u>
4.1	On the topic of music education in schools, Mr Albert Tay said that some primary school teachers who were not music literate were roped in to conduct music lessons. He emphasised the importance of the role that music teachers and CCA instructors played in the development of children's interest in the arts, and their influence in encouraging students to attend concerts.
4.2	Mr Leonard Tan said that in discussing areas for improvement, one could distinguish 3 groups of teachers; namely: (i) the MOE in-service teachers, (ii) CCA instructors and (iii) the music teachers of private music schools. On (i), he acknowledged that there were skills gaps due to the manpower crunch faced by MOE. However, he urged the panel to remain optimistic, as MOE was already moving into improving the quality of arts education amongst teachers through the implementation of various programmes such as the NIE Diploma in Pedagogy and the NAFA-MOE Diploma in Art Education. On (ii), Mr Adrian Tan suggested that CCA instructors could be incorporated as part of schools' regular staff, which would provide them with the employment stability that they currently lacked. It would also be an affirmation that music CCAs were an integral part of the school identity. On (iii), Ms Julie Tan felt that more could be done in the private music sector, as music teachers in this sector had greater flexibility in deciding on the syllabus and methods of teaching they wished to employ.
4.3	Mr Albert Tay stated that the school music curriculum currently did not include many important local composers and cultural icons. As a result, many teachers overlooked the importance of educating students on Singapore's cultural heroes, and students themselves were not equipped with basic information to find out more about local arts and culture.
4.4	Mr Kelly Tang added that the situation was compounded by a deeply rooted sense of self-deprecation among locals. A Singaporean arts group or artist would be recognised locally as a high quality artist only after they had received international recognition and acclaim, even though many of them had achieved comparable international standards.
5	<u>Developing Audiences</u>
5.1	Mr Adrian Tan pointed out that classical and choral music concerts faced a perception issue, i.e. that they were for a particular social class and therefore inaccessible. He believed that more should be done to make music more inclusive, by providing the less-privileged population (such as ITE students, youths at risk etc) with basic music exposure and education, e.g. by bringing classical music performances to them.

5.2	He also expressed the need for a Singapore Arts Festival that would exclusively showcase local art and local art groups, in order to raise more awareness of local offerings.
5.3	Ms Jennifer Tham attributed Music's plateauing ticket sales to the large number of regular music offerings around the year by major music companies, which competed for audience base. She stated that it might be unfair to compare music's situation with that of the dance and theatre scenes, as they had a smaller number of productions and performance seasons that were concentrated within a shorter span of time. She was positive about the idea of having a Singapore Music Day, to increase the visibility of local music.
5.4	Mr Anthony Brice suggested that one solution to increase the classical music scene's visibility in Singapore, was to have an iconic centre and home for classical music. He pointed out that the Victoria Concert Hall (VCH) was a prime venue to explore this option, as it would be home to the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and programmes by other groups. However, given VCH's aspirational value for performers, the venue would need a curator to ensure that venue hirers' performances were compatible with the image and overall programming of the venue. He also mentioned the importance of VCH as a recording venue for live broadcasting and streaming of concert music. Other members of the meeting also agreed that having a recording function was important, as it would greatly help the documentation of performances of local works for future records and circulation.
6	<u>Advocating and Promoting Local Music</u>
6.1	Mr Adrian Tan stated that media had to play a more active role in the development and promotion of local music (and the arts in general). He emphasised the need for government support and influence. Noting that media and press coverage of local arts events had decreased significantly over the past decade, Ms Jennifer Tham suggested that NAC have an arrangement to buy column space in Life!, so as to ensure greater media coverage for the arts. However other members raised concerns that this might be too interventionist..
6.2	Mr Albert Tay raised the need for an information portal where people could easily locate and access local works. This could take the form of a web directory indicating locations of local works. He also requested that there should be more effort to document and record all of Leong Yoon Pin's works.
6.3	Mr Leonard Tan also suggested that an encyclopaedia cataloguing the development of the local music scene be made available, so as to allow great access to this information and to build great public awareness. Ms Jennifer Tham shared that she previously had discussions with other members of the choral scene, to set up a Singapore Music Centre for the archival and storage of all local content. However, due to resource shortages the plan did not come to fruition.

6.4	Mr Anthony Brice shared SSO's plans for recording facilities to facilitate broadcast and live streaming. This would add on to VCH's status as a hub for the development of classical and choral music.
6.5	Mr Leonard Tan also suggested that NTU could work more closely with NAC in playing a larger role in driving arts academic research, as there were currently no other major players in the scene.
7	<u>AOB</u>
7.1	In closing, Ms Elaine Ng reiterated that NAC would need the help of the industry to re-imagine the future scene and to provide their views on how NAC could play a more active and meaningful role in developing the scene. She also noted that the conversation would continue in smaller groups and with various individuals, to tease out more information on how NAC could move forward on specific issues.
7.2	There being no other matters, the meeting ended at 6.00pm.

Recorded by: Kathleen Tan (Manager, Sector Development)

**NOTES OF MEETING FOR NAC'S INFORMAL DIALOGUE WITH MUSIC INDUSTRY
ON THE MUSIC PLAN**

Held on 19 September 2013, 3.30pm – 6.30pm

Goodman Arts Centre, Blk B #03-13

Present:

No.	Name	Specialisation/Designation
1	Cherry Chan	Electronic musician; Founder, SYNDICATE Singapore
2	Clarence Chan	Founder, Bandwagon Pte Ltd
3	Danny Loong	Co-Founder, Timbre Group
4	Syaheed	Vice President and Treasurer, SGMUSO
5	Toh Tze Chin	Composer and pianist; Founder, Tze n Looking Glass
6	Joshua Wan	Producer, composer, musician; Adjunct lecturer, LaSalle College of the Arts

1	Background
1.1	NAC had invited members of the music community for an informal dialogue on the future of Singapore's music scene, to discuss the issues faced today and possible new developments over the next few years. This discussion group comprised artists, educators, managers and various intermediaries in the contemporary music sector.
2	Introduction
2.1	Ms Elaine Ng (Director/Performing Arts, NAC) welcomed everyone and shared that the purpose of the dialogue was to seek input from artists and professionals in the scene for the development of the Performing Arts plan. For the contemporary music scene in particular, she shared that NAC observed that the scene was growing in vibrancy, with an increasing number of bands and artists emerging in recent years and more of them writing original music. To start the discussion, she invited everyone to share their observations on the current state of the contemporary music scene.
2.2	Mr Syaheed concurred with NAC's observation, stating that there was a new vigour and excitement in the scene and bands seemed less jaded. However, he felt that for artists to be successful, they would need strong infrastructural support – artist managers, administrators able to handle public relations, logistics etc., which would enable artists to focus on creating. This infrastructure was currently lacking, as there was not enough revenue coming in from the public (through ticket and album sales) to build it up. He added that artists should view producing an album not as an end in itself, but the starting point from which to grow and develop their reach.
2.3	Mr Danny Loong observed that more live music venues were hiring local musicians and more original music was being showcased. He felt that young people needed to be exposed to good music created locally, and the media – particularly radio – could play an important part in getting local music out and raising awareness of our local artists among the public. While countries in the region like Thailand had an airplay

	quota of 15% local content, he commented that the solution was not necessarily to impose a quota but to work on progressively getting more local content on the airwaves. In doing so, he was hopeful that it would help to change the perceptions and mindsets of listeners towards local music.
2.4	Ms Cherry Chan commented that it would help to have more radio presenters who were able to push local content. For example, presenters like Chris Ho and Vanessa Fernandez had been very supportive in promoting local electronic music on their programmes. However, she felt that artists should not rely on airplay alone but look beyond radio to grow their own audiences. Apart from radio and newspapers, there was opportunity for greater advocacy of local music in social media and the digital space.
2.5	Mr Syaheed pointed out that Singapore was unlike countries where college radio stations provided channels for young, emerging musicians to be heard. Although many of these musicians might eventually be filtered out downstream, it was still a good starting point. However, he also noted that proper curation was required to help elevate the profile of the better artists, and noted that the scene would need more curators in the media who were able to discern and put good quality music on air.
2.6	Mr Joshua Wan cautioned, however, that increasing airplay for local music would not translate to raising the quality of the music being produced. In addition, it would be problematic if the music showcased was not of high quality. He added that having an abundance of platforms would not necessarily generate greater excellence in local music. He pointed out that growing the “mass” scene should be distinguished from developing the “cream” who were serious about their art. He also noted that it could be difficult to articulate what specific elements or qualities made a band/artist good or caused them to improve, as these were often by nature unquantifiable.
3	Growing Audiences
3.1	On the topic of growing audiences, Ms Cherry Chan observed that the process to developing an audience was a slow one, and different genres would require different approaches. She also shared that the solution to growing audiences was not simply having more showcase platforms, as many musicians continued to struggle with not having minimum wages for their work.
3.2	However, Mr Toh Tze Chin felt that having platforms was also important in developing artists, and shared that his own group Tze n Looking Glass Orchestra (TLGO) would not exist today without the platforms provided by The Esplanade, where the ensemble had performed in its earlier years. He noted that artists would inevitably face some risks when reaching out to audiences, as the returns might only be evident much later down the road. It was nonetheless an investment that artists had to make if they wanted to build their audiences.
3.3	Mr Syaheed remarked that non-ticketed shows might be damaging to audience development in the long run. As such, there was a need to intentionally grow a paying audience, as live performances and merchandising were key income avenues

	for artists. Mr Clarence Chan suggested that another way to raise paid support was to encourage corporate companies to support local music. He added that artists could look into tapping a wider audience base beyond Singapore, by taking up touring and performance opportunities in the region as well. Documentation and videography of these regional/international trips for broadcast on local media, could also help to expand their domestic audience.
3.4	Mr Danny Loong noted a trend that Singapore audiences tended to be unresponsive and at times difficult to engage. He suggested that performance coaching could also help artists to grow in their ability to engage audiences.
4	Profiling local musicians
4.1	Mr Toh Tze Chin shared that a few years ago, he had the opportunity to collaborate and work alongside some established artists from Europe through a project by The Esplanade. He found the experience very enriching for his own practice as well as in raising the profile of Singapore artists amongst the international artist community. He asked if NAC could facilitate such connections with artists overseas. Ms Elaine Ng advised that such connections would need to be made by the artists themselves, while NAC would come in to support in other ways (e.g. travel to perform overseas etc.). Mr Danny Loong also cited a recent example where he had made connections with Australian counterparts, then presented a project proposal to NAC for consideration for support.
4.2	Ms Cherry Chan suggested that another way to raise the profile of local musicians was to have more Singapore artists open for overseas performances here. She shared that in New Zealand, there was a law where foreign acts staging shows in NZ must perform together with local artists there – this came about to ensure that part of the revenue generated would also benefit their local industry. Mr Syaheed added that it would help if opening acts by Singapore artists were publicised or billed together with the main performances. He also observed that for both Recording Industry Association (Singapore) (RIAS) and Composers and Authors Society of Singapore (COMPASS), the bulk of music they handled was foreign content. Mr Danny Loong highlighted that the amount spent per capita on music in Singapore was also much less – \$ 3 per capita, in comparison with other countries where as high as \$25 per capita was spent on music.
4.3	Mr Syaheed shared that SGMUSO had started a platform called Soundcheck where event promoters, presenters and media were invited to preview material by local musicians (selected through an open call) and stay updated with developments in the scene. The exposure had proved beneficial to artists, with some engaged for events after being featured at Soundcheck.
4.4	Mr Clarence Chan noted the rise of new media platforms in recent years, such as gig finders, blogs, social media, and publications like his portal Bandwagon. He felt these platforms could be tapped on to help bands gain greater visibility and also reach out to younger audiences.

5	One agency supporting music sector
5.1	Ms Elaine Ng shared that currently there were support schemes for the music sector under both NAC and MDA, and asked whether it would be helpful if support for the music sector was consolidated under one government agency. Having interacted with and applied for grants from both agencies, Mr Syaheed noted that NAC focused on arts and culture while MDA looked more into industry matters and sustainability. He felt that the one agency model would be effective if it was able to integrate and support all the various aspects currently covered by both agencies, but if there was a need to choose, he would lean towards NAC's current focus.
5.2	Ms Cherry Chan agreed that the effectiveness of having one agency would largely depend on how that agency was driven – while there were also merits to the present situation with two agencies handling different areas, the one agency model might be better organised and provide greater clarity to the music community. Another suggestion raised was to maintain status quo but to organise information on support schemes centrally, i.e. a one-stop portal for musicians to refer to.
6	AOB
6.1	In response to the discussion, Mr Joshua Wan shared that a major issue in the scene was mediocrity, and the question was how to address it and work towards artistic growth. He urged for greater discernment when assessing artists and to be upfront with them when they were not up to standard. He noted that as our musical influence in Singapore was largely Western, how we defined what constituted “local” should be in the light of what was true or legitimate in our experience. He also raised the need to differentiate between those who went to pubs to enjoy music for leisure, and those who truly had an appreciation for good art. Mr Wan emphasised that artistry was ultimately about believing in one's work, and artists should not feel entitled to advance or receive support merely because they were local. He felt that NAC should apply stringent criteria and be selective in the musicians it supported, and that its funding should be targeted at developing the artistry of the group.
6.2	There being no other matters, Ms Elaine Ng thanked everyone for their time and input, and the lively discussion. The meeting ended at 6.30pm.

Recorded by: Andrea Khoo (Manager, Sector Development)

APPENDIX V - CONSULTATIONS WITH THE THEATRE SECTOR

NOTES OF DISCUSSION FOR NAC'S CONSULTATION SESSION WITH THEATRE INDUSTRY ON THE NAC PERFORMING ARTS WORKPLAN

Held on 16 September, 2013, 3-6pm
Pantry, Blk A Level 1, Goodman Arts Centre

External Attendees:

No.	Name	Designation/Company
1	Ms Tay Jiaying	Company Manager/Drama Box
2	Ms Han Xuemei	Resident Artist/ Drama Box
3	Mr Caleb Lee	Associate Festival Manager/I Theatre; Lecturer (Theatre+Performance)/ LASALLE College of the Arts
4	Mr Haresh Sharma	Resident Playwright/ The Necessary Stage
5	Ms Sharon Tang	Producer/ Cake Theatre
6	Ms Alexandre Thio	Project Coordinator/ Cake Theatre
7	Mr Chong Tze Chien	Company Director/ The Finger Players
8	Mr Irfan Kasban	Co-Artistic Director/ Teater Ekamatra
9	Mr Goh Boon Teck	Artistic Director/ Toy Factory
10	Mr Nelson Chia	Artistic Director/ Nine Years Theatre
11	Ms Mia Chee	Company Manager/ Nine Years Theatre
12	Mr Huzir Sulaiman	Joint Artistic Director/ Checkpoint Theatre
13	Ms Claire Wong	Joint Artistic Director/ Checkpoint Theatre
14	Mr Benjamin Ho	Artistic Director/ Paper Monkey
15	Mr Casey Lim	Independent Practitioner
16	Mr Jeremiah Choy	Independent Practitioner
17	Ms Elizabeth de Roza	Independent Practitioner; Programme Leader (Theatre+Performance)/ Lasalle College of the Arts
18	Dr Robin Loon	Independent Practitioner; Senior Lecturer/ NUS (Theatre Studies)
19	Ms Amanda Morris	Dean of Faculty Performing Arts/ Lasalle College of the Arts

NAC Attendees:

No.	Name	Designation
1	Ms Yvonne Tham	Dy CEO
2	Mr Kenneth Kwok	Director/Arts & Youth
3	Ms Grace Ng	DD/Sector Development
4	Ms Karen Loh	Manager/Sector Development
5	Ms Khainurizah Ariff Koh	Manager/Sector Development
6	Ms Kwong Wai Cheng	Manager/Sector Development
7	Ms Joanne Tay	Manager/Sector Development
8	Ms Lynn Yang	Manager/Sector Development

1	Background
1.1	NAC had invited members of the theatre community for a consultation session on the future of Singapore's theatre scene – a stock take of the scene as it is today and possible developments going forward. This was an extension of the earlier dialogue sessions in 2012 and 2013 hosted by then-CEO Mr Benson Puah and sharing on key ideas at NAC Let's Talk session on 24 Jul 2013 with the larger performing arts community. Further to these consultations, NAC had organised a series of art-form specific sessions to go into issues and ideas that were relevant to each art-form. For the theatre sector, a total of 7 sessions were held which involved arts practitioners, arts writers, arts administrators and advocates. The other sessions were on specific topics including: children's theatre, rethinking public engagement strategies, the importance of critical writing, capacity and capabilities, as well as spaces.
2	Introduction
2.1	Dy CEO Ms Yvonne Tham welcomed all to the session and shared that NAC had started a series of consultation sessions with members of the theatre community to get a sense of the scene as it is today, its evolution over the years as well as its aspirations and vision for the future. She added that this was the first time that so many major theatre practitioners were gathered around a table, and that this was a valuable opportunity to brainstorm and cast a collective vision for the scene. DD/SD Ms Grace Ng added that the NAC was working on a Performing Arts plan that would guide the work of NAC for the next five years, and welcomed any thoughts or feedback that the meeting might have on it.
3	Overview of the Theatre Scene
3.1	The participants agreed that the theatre scene today was more diverse and vibrant, and that there were more opportunities available for artists to pursue their work.
3.2	However, Mr Nelson Chia shared that it did not seem clear to him where the scene was headed and that the scene did not seem to be "revolutionary" enough. He reflected that, for example, there had not been new artistic movements which would influence art-making in a significant way. In response, Mr Chong Tze Chien said that artists today did not engage in dialogue unlike in the 1990s, where there were platforms and informal spaces for people to gather and dialogue about larger ideas such as post-modernism and art-making. Instead, the discussions today centred on pragmatic issues such as infrastructure and ticketing. While there was now a sense of a theatre industry, he felt that the investigation of culture had become superficial. Instead of focusing on art-making, artists and theatre companies needed to look into achieving quantitative indicators like the number of seats sold or the scale of a show. He added that it was important to educate the younger generation on the art of theatre-making, so that they did not equate it to mere entertainment. Mr Jeremiah Choy agreed, adding that there used to be a sense of celebration after each performance and regular communication between theatre groups in the 1990s that was missing today.
3.3	Mr Chong Tze Chien suggested that there was a need to re-establish an intellectual "centre" (whether physical or metaphorical) where people could gather to exchange ideas, much like how Mr Kuo Pao Kun was the "centre" in the 1990s.
4	Critical Discourse, Archiving and Documenting Singapore Theatre
4.1	Mr Haresh Sharma acknowledged that the artistic community reaching out to each other was important, but added that outreach to the audience was equally essential. He said that the Necessary Stage still struggled to sell tickets even after being around for 26 years because there was not a wider interest in discourse about Singapore

	<p>theatre. The larger population would not hear about a show until it was about to sell out. Ms Sharon Tang added that even though there had been efforts by the artistic community to engage the public, attendance at such events was still low. For instance, there were only about 20 people at a recent forum “Performing the Local in Singapore Arts” organised by the Substation as part of SeptFest 2013 even though the discussion panel featured established individuals in the arts community.</p>
4.2	<p>Ms Claire Wong posited that an archival centre was important as a resource for creating indigenous theatre, where young Singaporeans could find out more about the history and future of theatre-making in Singapore. She shared that many young people still equated ‘real’ theatre with Western theatre. She wondered what was needed to tell the story of Singapore theatre, and emphasised the need for the theatre community to create their own brand of “propaganda”. Mr Haresh Sharma said that the idea of a central resource would be helpful to students who wanted to find out very basic information on the history and development of theatre companies and artists without going to the companies and artists directly and requesting for interviews on such matters.</p>
4.3	<p>Mr Benjamin Ho asked who was currently documenting the progress of the theatre scene, and stated that the NAC should be taking up this role. He noted that artists and arts groups had been asked by NAC to submit videos of their work and production collateral in the past and there would have been a wealth of information collated. However, the NAC had stopped this practice in recent years.</p>
4.4	<p>Ms Sharon Tang said she liked the idea of a central resource very much, and suggested the idea of a publication focused on Singapore theatre. She emphasised that in order for such an idea to succeed and reach the masses, the backing of a large organisation, such as the NAC, would be needed. It would also need to be branded well. Dr Robin Loon said that Nominated Member of Parliament, Ms Janice Koh, had revived the idea of an arts magazine at NAC’s Let’s Talk Session in July. He then referred to a Taiwanese monthly arts magazine 表演艺术杂志 (Performing Arts Review), lauded its high journalistic standard, and suggested that a Singapore version could be offered in a digital format.</p>
5	Coverage of Local Arts in the Mainstream Media
5.1	<p>Mr Jeremiah Choy commented that there appeared to be insufficient coverage on local arts in the mainstream media. Without this visibility, local productions would constantly be overshadowed by the larger commercial international productions which were backed by strong marketing machineries. Mr Benjamin Ho agreed, saying that children’s productions in particular, were no longer featured in the mainstream media. Mr Nelson Chia mentioned that Chinese papers used to publish multiple reviews for a single production, including long reviews, responses to reviews and more importantly, “unsolicited reviews” – those sent to the press on the writer’s own initiative rather than being invited by the press to write.</p>
5.2	<p>Dr Robin Loon said that based on recent reviews, he was concerned that the standard of theatre was measured by its immediate relevance to society and how “emotional” it was. In the same vein, he added that there has been much emphasis in the public sphere on creating works that were accessible and relevant to the community. He felt that this was a worrying trend because by only giving audiences what was familiar, they would not be exposed to new ideas or ways of thinking.</p>
5.3	<p>Ms Sharon Tang questioned the influence of theatre reviews in bringing audiences into shows, especially for smaller more experimental works. She cited the example of</p>

	<p>Cake Theatre, whose productions were usually staged in a small venue and had short runs, could only reach out to several hundred people. Even though Cake Theatre was fortunate enough to have a niche following of younger theatre-goers, they were still struggling to fill the house, and consequently, to keep supporting these artists' work in order to bring diversity to the local theatre scene. Most audience members would choose to attend shows with more mass appeal, such as the Addams Family.</p>
6	Public Engagement and Audience Development
6.1	<p>Mr Huzir Sulaiman commented that the larger issue at hand was the lack of demand for local theatre, and that audience development was essential at all levels. Unlike other societies, Singapore did not view being a patron of the arts and culture as a necessary marker of success and societal advancement. The arts community needed a public figure to be an advocate and champion for the arts, and be seen attending arts events outside of their official duties. In addition, he emphasised that the arts needed to be a fundamental part of every student's education.</p>
6.2	<p>Ms Amanda Morris agreed, and wondered if arts advocacy could be included in NAC's workplan. The arts needed to be taught in schools and taken seriously within the system. She explained that it took time for the arts to be taken seriously in Australia as well, but once drama had been incorporated into the national syllabus, there was a burgeoning interest in Australian theatre. D/Arts & Youth Mr Kenneth Kwok noted that while art, music and literature were compulsory subjects in schools, drama and dance remained optional or at the CCA / enrichment level. NAC would continue to advocate for a stronger arts presence in schools, including working collaboratively with MOE to develop more teaching resources with Singapore representation. NAC would also gather good case studies from its Artist-in-School Scheme, etc. as evidence to continue strengthening the place of the arts in the education system.</p>
6.3	<p>Mr Nelson Chia commented that there needed to be a change in mindset amongst private corporations with regard to sponsoring the arts, and to channel their funding to local productions instead of the larger international shows. Dr Robin Loon suggested that NAC could do more to encourage private corporations, for example, through a scheme that provided tax concessions. Ms Yvonne Tham replied that these schemes were already in place, noting that the corporate sponsorship arena was highly competitive, not unlike other countries. Ms Yvonne Tham commented that larger cultural shifts would take time, and that advocacy would definitely be a part of NAC's plan, both within government and to the public. She added that it was important to consider how the arts community could be a part of these efforts as well.</p>
7	Support to Independent Artists
7.1	<p>Mr Jeremiah Choy affirmed that there was a need for greater support to independent artists. Such a programme or "centre" could be co-located with other spaces. He emphasised that it was important for independent artists to have support and resources to turn to with regard to basic livelihood issues (e.g. assistance with income tax, employment contracts etc.). It would also be helpful for the centre to take the role of an intermediary, with producers who can assist independent artists to produce, market and sell their works. He added that the people in these roles should be fully employed and salaried, and should not be active practitioners so as to avoid any conflict of interest.</p>
7.2	<p>Ms Elizabeth De Roza said that while independent artists had the freedom to create their own works, they usually felt isolated from the bigger players in the industry. The centre could facilitate dialogue and exchange among independent artists.</p>

7.3	In response to Mr Huzir Sulaiman's comment that these were similar issues faced by arts companies as well, Mr Jeremiah Choy suggested that the services of the centre could be extended to companies as well.
7.4	Mr Huzir Sulaiman asked if NAC could set up an in-house department to fulfil these needs, since the Council already had the relevant knowledge of the sector. This would be a quick solution to an urgent need in the industry. Mr Jeremiah Choy, however, was of the opinion that an independent body would be more effective, especially if the arts community needed to dialogue with NAC or other public agencies/private companies to achieve certain objectives.
8	Need for Space for Creation – Resident Theatre
8.1	Mr Jeremiah Choy said that typically, about 20% of a production budget went to venue and publicity costs even before the project started. He explained that artists did not need a state-of-the-art venue or equipment to create and develop work – a smaller and simpler place where they could experiment would suffice.
8.2	Mr Chong Tze Chien agreed and asserted that artists needed a space to develop a work for a stretch of time without being saddled by time or financial concerns. He explained that the current 4.5 days of average bump in time was driven by cost-minimising efforts and not an acceptable industry standard. Moving a production from the rehearsal to the performance space was a huge endeavour, and artists usually had to rush through this transition within a limited amount of time. As such, the artist's focus had become less about creation, and more about resource management.
8.3	Mr Casey Lim said that the Hong Kong Performing Arts Centre had a resident theatre program, and that a similar model could be developed in Singapore - a theatre company could take residence in the Esplanade Theatre Studios, for example.
8.4	Ms Grace Ng asked if it would be feasible for theatre companies to take residence within the education institutions, which would be mutually beneficial for both parties. Ms Amanda Morris replied that LaSalle's interest was in preparing their graduates for the industry, and would be potentially interested in working with visiting artists. Ms Elizabeth De Roza added that their primary mandate would still be education; any resident theatre company would therefore have to work around the school's calendar and needs.
8.5	Ms Claire Wong wondered if the arts community could look beyond NAC's resources for space – for instance, the performance spaces owned by the People's Association. Ms Sharon Tang suggested approaching private companies who had access to such spaces as well.
8.6	Ms Yvonne Tham explained that the NAC was seriously considering the re-purposing of the Drama Centre Theatre and Black Box to better support the needs of the theatre industry. With reference to the Drama Centre Theatre, Ms Claire Wong expressed her concern that these plans might come at the expense of a mid-sized performance space, which was already lacking in the industry.

9	Manpower Concerns
9.1	Dr Robin Loon pointed out that theatre-making has changed over the years – people were becoming less risk-averse. For example, younger practitioners today were looking for career advancement, in contrast to practitioners in the past who were willing to work for a token sum. Mr Benjamin Ho agreed, adding that actors today seemed to be more motivated by pragmatics (such as their salary, hours of work) than by passion for art-making.
9.2	Dr Robin Loon pointed out that with there would be a large influx of young people in the scene once students from the School of the Arts (SOTA) graduated, and questioned if there was a framework in place to absorb these young artists. Ms Elizabeth De Roza echoed similar concerns that new graduates from LaSalle, especially directors, playwrights and dramaturges, had no place to go.
9.3	Ms Claire Wong noted that there were not enough arts managers in the industry. Dr Robin Loon added that there was a lack of professional training available for arts managers, and most had picked up skills on the job. The administrative aspect of the arts needed to be boosted. Ms Elizabeth De Roza highlighted that there was a cohort of arts managers that would be graduating from LaSalle who were enthusiastic and passionate about working in the arts. They were presently gaining work experience through internships with various arts companies.
10	Re-look NAC's Funding Model for Sector-wide Developmental Projects
10.1	Mr Huzir Sulaiman stated that the NAC needed to relook its partnership model - arts organisations should not be taxed with raising funds for projects that were meant to benefit the sector as a whole (e.g. capacity-building, audience development). While it was reasonable to expect an organisation to raise funds for their own artistic pursuits related to their core activity, NAC should bear the full cost of a sector-wide developmental project.
10.2	Mr Chong Tze Chien and Mr Haresh Sharma both agreed that theatre companies were already overstretched, and these extra projects took away time and energy from their core creative activities.
11	Conclusion
11.1	In closing, Ms Grace Ng thanked the participants for their contributions, and welcomed them to join the next few sessions which would cover more specific aspects of the Performing Arts plan.
11.2	The meeting ended at 6.00pm.

Recorded by: Lynn Yang, Manager/Sector Development
With comments from participants incorporated 21 October 2013.

NOTES OF DISCUSSION FOR NAC'S CONSULTATION SESSION WITH THE THEATRE SECTOR ON THE PERFORMING ARTS PLAN – SESSION ON PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Held on 19 September, 2013, 2:30-4:30pm
Pantry, Blk A Level 1, Goodman Arts Centre

External Attendees:

No.	Name	Designation/Company
1	Mr Ong Keng Sen (Co-Moderator)	Artistic Director/Theatreworks, Singapore International Arts Festival
2	Ms Sharon Tang	Producer/Cake Theatrical Productions
3	Mr Chong Tze Chien	Company Director/The Finger Players
4	Ms Tracie Pang	Co-Artistic Director/Pangdemonium
5	Mr Adrian Pang	Co-Artistic Director/Pangdemonium
6	Mr Nigel Lim	President/ Singapore I-Lien Drama Society
7	Ms Helen Lim	Deputy Treasurer, Singapore I-Lien Drama Society
8	Ms Elizabeth De Roza	Independent Artist & Programme Leader (Theatre+Performance)/Lasalle College of the Arts
9	Mr Caleb Lee	Associate Festival Manager/I Theatre
10	Mr Matt Grey	Senior Lecturer/ Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts
11	Mr Huzir Sulaiman	Joint Artistic Director/Checkpoint Theatre
12	Mr Benjamin Ho	Artistic Director/Paper Monkey
13	Ms Michele Lim	Independent Arts Manager

NAC Attendees:

No.	Name	Designation
1	Ms Grace Ng	DD/Sector Development
2	Mr Kenneth Kwok (Co-Moderator)	D/Arts & Youth
3	Ms Karen Loh	Manager/Sector Development
4	Ms Khainurizah Ariff Koh	Manager/Sector Development
5	Ms Kwong Wai Cheng	Manager/Sector Development
6	Ms Joanne Tay	Manager/Sector Development
7	Ms Lynn Yang	Manager/Sector Development
8	Ms Jasmine Choe	Executive/Youth Arts
9	Ms Pamela Tham	Assistant Director/Corporate Services

1	Background
1.1	NAC invited members of the theatre community for a consultation session on the future of Singapore's theatre scene as a stock take of the scene as it is today and to look at possible developments going forward. This was an extension of the earlier dialogue sessions in 2012 and 2013 hosted by then-CEO Mr Benson Puah as well as the sharing of key ideas at NAC Let's Talk session on 24 Jul 2013 with the larger performing arts community. Further to these consultations, NAC decided to organise a series of art-form specific sessions to go into issues and ideas that were relevant to each art-form. For the theatre sector, a total of 7 sessions were held which involved arts practitioners, arts writers, arts administrators and advocates. The sessions were on specific topics including children's theatre, rethinking public engagement strategies, the importance of critical writing, building capacity and capabilities, as well as spaces. This session on public engagement, brought together company owners, independent artists, arts educators and producers to discuss public engagement principles and practices.
2	Introduction
2.2	Mr Kenneth Kwok invited the attendees to think about possible interventions to improve engagement with the public. He noted that while attendances and ticket sales were tangible aspects of engagement, NAC was also interested in exploring the more 'intangible' aspects such as nurturing public support for the value of the arts. He described strategies that the NAC was already working on in the areas of corporate communications (e.g. engagement with private companies and potential sponsors, national campaigns for arts advocacy), marketing and audience development (e.g. the launch of the Marketing and Audience development Grant), arts education (e.g. Tote Board Arts Grant / NAC-AEP programme and ticket subsidies) and community outreach (e.g. reaching out to new segments of the public). He welcomed any thoughts that the meeting might have on areas for improvement.
3	Changes in the Theatre Scene
3.1	Mr Ong Keng Sen reflected on the changes in the theatre scene since the 1980s and remarked that audiences back then stood by the companies as they struggled to put works on, and over time, became loyal fans and patrons of specific arts groups and artists. He felt that while artists were still struggling today, audiences had more options and were less supportive of individual artists and groups and appreciative of the difficulties they faced.
4	Strategies to Engage with the Public
4.1	<u>Enhancing the Quality of Audience Experience</u> Mr Ong Keng Sen felt that the current mode of public engagement by artists adopted a more "top down" approach and did not seek to achieve and sustain support nor develop a sense of "ground up" ownership by the public towards the arts. We should not look only at how the public can engage with artists' works but also how our works can better engage the public through efforts at co-creation, for example. He reflected that the objectives of engagement needed to be based on long-term rather than short term gains. For example, short term gains would be reflected by quantitative performance indicators such as tickets sold and ticket sales. Instead, qualitative performance indicators to reflect how a work provided value to audiences would be more meaningful.
4.2	Mr Huzir Sulaiman agreed that an economic approach where the arts entered the market as products and services and had to compete for attention, was not tenable. Instead, we needed to focus on the larger advocacy work of convincing the public that

	the arts was worthy of their support because of its intrinsic value. In an ideal state, the public would hold the arts to be incredibly important to life and would support the work of artists even if it did not serve an explicitly economic or practical purpose.
4.3	Mr Huzir Sulaiman therefore agreed with Mr Ong Keng Sen that it was important to ensure the highest quality of productions so that each theatrical experience would have significant positive impact on the individual.
4.4	Mr Huzir Sulaiman said he hoped that the arts would eventually become recognised as a vital component of life and well-being. Educating audiences was thus paramount, either through school or through consistent quality theatrical experiences.
4.5	<p><u>Understanding Obstacles to Public Engagement</u></p> <p>Ms Tracie Pang stated that it had been a challenge to gain public interest in local theatre because of an ingrained misperception that Singapore-produced works were not “good enough”.</p> <p>Mr Matt Grey agreed that the quality of Singapore theatre was high and perhaps there were other more pertinent obstacles that prevented people from going to the theatre. A deeper study would be useful to know whether the cost of ticket prices was prohibitive, or adults lacked energy after a long work day, etc.</p>
4.6	<p><u>Engaging the Young</u></p> <p>Ms Michele Lim pointed out that the scene had changed since the 80s and the arts had become more prominent in the lives of youths. From her own experience, she felt that more of the younger generation now saw the arts as a possible career path and this indicated that they perceived it to be an integral part of Singapore’s landscape. She believed that exposure through children / youth / school programmes had played an important role in nurturing their attitude towards the arts. The question then would not be about whether the arts should be worth supporting, but rather, how the arts would be supported.</p>
4.7	Ms Sharon Tang reflected Ms Michele Lim’s optimism, stating that most of Cake Theatre’s audiences were young people between the ages of 18-26, who had first encountered Cake’s brand of theatre while still in school. While Cake had initially entered the education market to generate income, it had now become a deliberate attempt to engage potential new audiences.
4.8	Mr Benjamin Ho also stated that the first experience with theatre was critical as it set the tone for future interest. He reiterated the importance of cultivating younger audiences, who would be more open to understanding theatre than adults.
4.9	Ms Tracie Pang, however, expressed that not all artists had the expertise to engage young audiences and it was not practical for this to be a priority for all theatre groups if we also wanted to continue to raise professional standards as it would dilute the efforts of a company. She felt that while some groups may specialise in nurturing young audiences, others could focus on other aspects of theatre-making.
4.10	<p><u>Engaging Teachers</u></p> <p>The group agreed that education was important to developing new audiences, but</p>

	<p>teachers too had to be exposed to the intricacies of the arts. They shared that working with teachers had been challenging as not all teachers had a deep appreciation for the arts. This manifested in teachers requesting for more discounts on ticket prices even after receiving subsidies and concessions. To bridge this gap, Mr Ong Keng Sen suggested that NAC consider a teachers-in-residence programme in arts companies, where the teachers had the opportunity to better understand the work of professional theatre companies and, in return, help the companies to develop their educational resources, etc. Mr Kenneth Kwok shared that NAC had just piloted a teacher attachment programme at the Singapore Arts Museum and the Singapore Lyric Opera this year and hoped that this could be extended to more partners over time.</p>
4.11	<p><u>Impact of Subsidised / Free Tickets</u></p> <p>Ms Tracie Pang stated that a season ticket scheme helped to consolidate her audiences and was a good way of reaching out to a core audience who identified with the company. However, she said that it was tough to compete with the many free shows happening - such free shows and subsidies had created a sense of entitlement in audiences who felt that they should not have to pay for theatre.</p>
4.12	<p>Mr Benjamin Ho disagreed, stating that free performances had helped him to reach out to new audiences. It provided an introduction to his works and encouraged audiences to come back for more. He did point out that as his target audience was children, free shows or subsidised tickets were especially important because the decision-makers were not the children themselves but the parents who would consider cost as their priority.</p>
4.13	<p>In response to Ms Tracie Pang's comment, Mr Kenneth Kwok added that the Tote Board Arts Grant remained at 50% (rather than a full 100%) to explicitly signal that there was a true cost to the tickets that was being offset.</p>
5	<u>Need for Specialisation and Focus</u>
5.1	<p>Mr Ong Keng Sen stated that because creating theatre in Singapore was expensive, education and community outreach programmes were sometimes being conducted by companies only as a means to get additional revenue. The monies were then being channelled to support the budget of productions that the companies really wanted to do. As such, the quality of educational and public programmes suffered. He pushed for NAC to look deeper into its support of a diversity of productions and companies.</p>
5.2	<p>Mr Ong Keng Sen also pointed out that theatre companies in Singapore, unlike their foreign counterparts, received significant funding but had to bear a heavy load of expectations that came along with the support. He felt that groups were also driven to spread their work across many areas for the sake of income generation to sustain themselves. Foreign counterparts, he indicated, did not work in so many areas (e.g. education, community) but instead focused on developing their niche and strengths. This was important so as not to dilute the company's core strengths.</p>
5.3	<p>Ms Tracie Pang agreed and stated that Pangdemonium felt the same pressure and that it would be healthier if companies could focus on their strengths, especially because small groups/companies needed to focus on their creative work, in order to help the works go deeper and stronger. She mentioned that it took years to mature as an artist, and hoped to deepen her practice, instead of being pulled in many directions.</p>

	Mr Chong Tze Chien agreed, stating that as a maturing artist, he would prefer to focus on his work as a playwright. He hoped that NAC would look at adopting strategies that allowed companies to focus on certain areas, to complement one another instead of moving in the same direction and market, and fighting for the same funding pie. He pushed for more specialisation, arguing that it would give audiences clarity of mind when it came to understanding Singapore theatre.
5.4	The group unanimously agreed that specialisation was necessary for the scene to grow. Specialisation would allow artists to go deeper and develop quality theatrical experiences. To specialise, artists and arts companies would need to opt out of some work.
5.5	Mr Kenneth Kwok acknowledged the challenges and said that NAC would continue to review its grant model including its evaluation framework and funding guidelines to better support the work of the arts groups. At the same time, he noted that there was currently already a shortage of quality works for young children and youths, a segment of the public which the group had also agreed was a priority for audience development. NAC would therefore continue to encourage artists and arts groups to consider this sector (where appropriate) rather than leave it to chance since this would benefit the scene as a whole.
6	Coverage of Local Arts in the Mainstream Media
6.1	In terms of marketing, Mr Huzir Sulaiman suggested that a subsidy of media spend could alleviate the cost challenges of marketing and help foreground the arts in the public sphere. Mr Ong Keng Sen pushed for NAC to play a role in media buying, to spotlight companies and shows on a weekly basis. Ms Michele Lim suggested that the media buy could focus on the performing arts as a whole, for example, featuring art forms like dance and theatre on different days of the week.
6.2	Mr Huzir Sulaiman added that a group buy on a mass media platform would be better than a specialist publication as it would tap into a larger and more diverse audience base. Ms Grace Ng asked if traditional media such as newspapers was still a useful channel to focus on, especially with shrinking readership. Ms Michele Lim and Ms Tracie Pang stated that while readership was declining, in terms of positioning, the Straits Times was still the leading paper and publicity there would create top-of-mind awareness. It would signal to the public that the arts was important.
6.3	Ms Michele Lim also expressed that execution had to be considered carefully. For example, the pages had to be strategically selected to maximise impact, specifically, coverage had to be placed outside of just the Life! section. Ms Sharon Tang emphasised the need for full-colour publicity in the papers, instead of the standard line listings.
6.4	Ms Sharon Tang also added that the Arts For Life campaign could have been better executed as she felt that it did not resonate with the public. Ms Michele Lim also asked if the money spent on the “Give2Arts” advertisement in the papers could be given to arts groups instead to advertise their work directly.
6.5	NAC agreed that it could play a larger role in the marketing of the arts in Singapore and would explore possibilities.

7	Closing Remarks
7.1	In closing, Mr Kenneth Kwok and Ms Grace Ng thanked the participants for their contributions.

Recorded by: Joanne Tay, Manager/Sector Development
With comments from participants incorporated 1 November 2013.

**NOTES OF DISCUSSION FOR NAC'S CONSULTATION SESSION WITH THE THEATRE
SECTOR ON THE PERFORMING ARTS PLAN – SESSION ON CAPACITY AND
CAPABILITIES**

Held on 24 September, 2013, 3.30-5.30pm
Pantry, Blk A Level 1, Goodman Arts Centre

External Attendees:

No.	Name	Designation/Company
1	Mr Alvin Tan	Artistic Director/ The Necessary Stage
2	Mr Benjamin Ho	Artistic Director/ Paper Monkey
3	Mr Chong Tze Chien	Company Director/ The Finger Players
4	Mr Caleb Lee	Lecturer, Theatre + Performance / LaSalle College of the Arts; Associate Festival Manager/I Theatre
5	Mr Tay Tong	Managing Director / TheatreWorks
6	Mr Adrian Pang	Artistic Director / Pangdemonium
7	Ms Tracie Pang	Artistic Director / Pangdemonium
8	Ms Elena Chia	Vice-President / Singapore I Lien Drama Society
9	Ms Michele Lim	Independent Practitioner
10	Mr Casey Lim	Independent Practitioner
11	Ms Janice Koh	Independent Practitioner; Nominated Member of Parliament
12	Ms Amanda Morris	Dean, Faculty of Performing Arts/ LaSalle College of the Arts
13	Ms Elizabeth de Roza	Programme Leader, BA (Hons) Theatre + Performance / LaSalle College of the Arts; Independent Artist

NAC Attendees:

No.	Name	Designation
1	Ms Elaine Ng	Director/Sector Development
2	Ms Edwina Tang (Co-Moderator)	DD/Capability Development
3	Ms Grace Ng (Co-Moderator)	DD/Sector Development
4	Ms Joanne Tay	Manager/Sector Development
5	Ms Karen Loh	Manager/Sector Development
6	Ms Khainurizah Koh	Manager/Sector Development
7	Ms Kwong Wai Cheng	Manager/Sector Development
8	Ms Lynn Yang	Manager/Sector Development
9	Ms Lu Xiao Hui	Manager/Arts Education
10	Ms Wu Yahui	Manager/Arts Education
11	Ms Jasmine Choe	Executive/Youth Arts

1	Background
1.1	NAC had invited members of the theatre community for a consultation session on the future of Singapore's theatre scene – a stock take of the scene as it is today and possible developments going forward. This was an extension of the earlier dialogue sessions in 2012 and 2013 hosted by then-CEO Mr Benson Puah and sharing on key ideas at NAC Let's Talk session on 24 Jul 2013 with the larger performing arts community. Further to these consultations, NAC had organised a series of art-form specific sessions to go into issues and ideas that were relevant to each art-form. For the theatre sector, a total of 7 sessions were held which involved arts practitioners, arts writers, arts administrators and advocates. The sessions were on specific topics including: children's theatre, rethinking public engagement strategies, the importance of critical writing, capacity and capabilities, as well as spaces.
2	Introduction
2.1	Ms Grace Ng and Ms Edwina Tang welcomed the participants to the session and shared that NAC would like to hear participants' views on: (i) NAC's efforts in building capabilities so far through its training platforms, grant schemes and awards; (ii) the theatre community's aspirations and the capabilities needed to achieve these aspirations; as well as (iii) who would be able to play a role in developing these capabilities.
3	The New Capability Development Grant
3.1	Ms Janice Koh queried if NAC had seen an increase in the number of individuals and organisations tapping on its training related grants in the past 3 to 5 years. Ms Edwina Tang shared that the Capability Development Grant had expanded the scope of the old Arts Professional Development Grant and had only been implemented in April this year as part of the New Grants Framework. The grant had seen organisations making applications for staff training or to develop in-house internship and mentorship programmes. Ms Elaine Ng added that the considerations of the new CD grant allowed for the development of capabilities in arts administration and to encourage organisations to be more proactive in skills upgrading and developing next generation arts professionals. Ms Grace Ng shared that based on observations over the past few months, the number of applications for the new CD grant seemed to be more than what the old Arts Professional Development Grant used to receive in the same duration and the nature of applications were also vastly different. However, the real impact of the change was not conclusive yet and needed to be observed over time. She also shared that NAC wanted to signal the important role which organisations played in training and the CD grant would be open to Major Grant and Seed Grant recipients for the first 3 years from the launch of the New Grants Framework.
3.2	With regard to queries on CD grant's areas of support, Ms Edwina Tang shared that not-for-profit companies could receive up to 70% funding support for the staff's training allowance, capped at \$1,400 per month, for 12 months. On top of that, companies could factor in absentee payroll if they needed to hire a temporary staff to cover the duties of those on training, at \$7.50 per hour or capped at \$1,400 per month. Ms Grace Ng shared that these rates were consistent with those offered by other government agencies such as the Workforce Development Agency.
3.3	Ms Elaine Ng added that under the CD framework, companies could consider taking on mentees or interns, but they needed to bear in mind the long-term sustainability of the additional head count. The grant support would not be recurrent, and the companies would need to build capacity to pay for the staff after the period of grant support ceased.

4	Scholarships
4.1	Ms Janice Koh commented that based on the NAC's annual report, she realised that unlike other art forms, the number of people from the theatre industry going for training overseas on NAC's scholarships has been quite steady and did not seem to have increased. For a prolific theatre industry, she questioned if skills development, particularly technical skills, was being developed at a fast enough pace. Ms Edwina Tang shared that the support for scholarships had increased to support outstanding individuals more substantially, capped at \$100,000 for overseas study, both at the undergraduate and postgraduate level. Over the last three years, NAC offered an average of 25 scholarships a year. This was also the reason that NAC did away with the bursaries as that would spread limited resources over a larger number of individuals. As scholarship is a protracted and targeted talent development approach, she added that practitioners could also look at other opportunities to upgrade their skills, such as short-term programmes. For example, in the area of technical skills, there were programmes offered by the Esplanade. Ms Grace Ng shared that experienced practitioners had a clearer sense of their career direction and the scholarships in recent years had seen an increase in the number of mid-career practitioners going for Masters programmes overseas.
5	Development through Overseas Residencies and Collaborations
5.1	Ms Grace Ng reflected that practitioners would have a better sense of what kinds of training they would need and that with the CD grant available for practitioners to apply for a range of programmes, she asked the meeting for views on whether the international residencies which NAC had been supporting at Suzuki Company of Toga (Japan), La Mama (Italy) and Ecole Phillippe Gaulier (France) were still relevant and whether there were other capability needs that had to be addressed. Secondly, she also queried whether there were sufficient development opportunities locally for different practitioners at the different stages of their career, and whether besides training, collaborations with international partners were also crucial to their development. Ms Grace Ng shared that NAC was beginning to notice a trend of emerging practitioners looking for collaboration opportunities outside of Singapore, and would then need to assess the credibility and suitability of foreign groups in facilitating the learning.
5.2	In response to the first questions, Ms Janice Koh was pleased by the fact that there were measures of success from individuals having gone for training overseas, such as the formation of new collectives and companies, and that while practitioners were previously limited to doing work as actors, they were now more open to try directorial programmes.
5.3	Mr Alvin Tan admitted that the second question was not an easy question to answer as it would depend on the type of learner, amongst many other factors. He encouraged NAC to sponsor such activities and to evaluate the outcome at a later stage, with the view that seeking opportunities overseas would bring about benefits in some form or other.
5.4	Mr Benjamin Ho and Ms Amanda Morris agreed that it would be good for NAC to support international collaborations, and that even with failed endeavours local groups would be able to learn from mistakes. Mr Benjamin Ho also felt that local groups may need a second or third try to get the right working combination, and asked NAC to have faith in the group's choice of foreign collaborators. Ms Tracie Pang agreed and was of the view that regardless whether it was a good partnership or otherwise, the impact of collaborating and the experience from working overseas would show in the group's work at a later stage, even if not in the immediate term. Ms

	Elizabeth de Roza and Mr Benjamin Ho raised the issue of continuity of support for artists post-residency, and that there needed to be room for artists to learn from failures and create their own opportunities.
6	Capability Gaps
6.1	<p><u>Arts Marketing and Audience Development</u></p> <p>Ms Janice Koh raised the importance of consumer information and data to arts companies for their efforts in audience development; this information presently sat with ticketing agents such as SISTIC. She commented that marketing in the arts was not as sophisticated as other sectors and the availability of such data on audiences had a direct impact on the ability of companies reaching out to more people across segments in targeted ways. To this, Ms Michele Lim shared that companies should be able to pay for such information from SISTIC although it could be expensive. Mr Tay Tong was also uncertain about the level of detail that could be provided. Ms Tracie Pang added that nonetheless, knowing where Pangdemonium's audience members lived would be useful to help her company market their productions in those areas.</p>
6.2	To Ms Amanda Morris' query on what arts companies could tap on to build capacity or capabilities to tour their works regionally, Ms Grace Ng mentioned the Market and Audience Development grant could support companies' objective to build new markets via touring their works, as well as understand their audience through studies or research.
6.3	<p><u>Technical and Production Management</u></p> <p>Ms Tracie Pang and Ms Janice Koh raised the issue of the lack of trained production and technical staff for companies to work with, and the costs of supporting them on a full-time basis or even to go on training for long periods of time. Mr Tay Tong wondered about the pathway for trainees after attending programmes such as The Esplanade Technical Theatre Programme as it was an intensive programme over a year and trainees might have missed out on work opportunities and contact. He suggested that short-term courses for those already working in the industry would be useful. Ms Amanda Morris agreed there was a shortage of well-qualified people in technical and production management in Singapore, and urged for a real need to look at how we could nurture future producers, designers, etc. for the theatre, design and entertainment industry.</p>
6.4	<p><u>Playwriting</u></p> <p>Noting that earlier consultations had raised writing as a critical gap, Ms Tracie Pang commented on the underlying issues leading to this gap, including the drop in the number of Literature students in schools, and the lack of exposure to a variety of works for writers to be inspired by. Ms Janice Koh added that NAC could support organisations with existing efforts in these areas, or even to identify other platforms with similar programmes. She said that there was a need for a systemic change in arts education and more outreach efforts by arts companies, to seed interest in this area. Ms Tracie Pang shared that as a company, Pangdemonium had received negative feedback for not producing locally written works. She explained that this was because the company had not been able to find one which they wish to produce, and not because they were unwilling to.</p>

6.5	<p><u>Increased Support for Critical Areas</u></p> <p>Ms Janice Koh suggested that if there were not many organisations able to send their staff for training, whether support at a higher level could be given to these organisations instead, especially if there was indeed a critical need for staff members to upgrade their skills. Ms Tracie Pang agreed that this would ensure that the staff who was sent for training would come back to contribute to the company post-training. Mr Chong Tze Chien raised that it might be even more challenging for freelancers who want to develop themselves further, but lacked the resources to do so. Ms Amanda Morris added that where manpower skills and training was concerned, there was no simple solution, as it boiled down to finding ways to encourage people to want to broaden their horizons and to look at other ways of working in the industry.</p>
6.6	<p>Mr Chong Tze Chien raised the issue of the need for intervention in critical gaps identified such as playwriting, and suggested that grant support be given at 100% as opposed to its current cap of 70%. Mr Tay Tong suggested tailoring grants to model after the way in which NAC had been supporting artists to residencies at La Mama and the Suzuki Company of Toga, i.e. supporting at full cost. Mr Benjamin Ho agreed that with greater support, this would send a signal to practitioners of NAC's support and the value of training.</p>
7 A Programme for Independent Artists	
7.1	<p>Mr Tay Tong asked NAC to consider developing a platform for independent artists at spaces such as the Drama Centre Black Box (DCBB) or Goodman Arts Centre (GAC), where emerging or mid-career artists could be supported by a curated space. Mr Chong Tze Chien noted that independent artists who lacked the ability to organise themselves as a company, or were unable to be supported by existing theatre companies would benefit from a platform like this. Mr Alvin Tan also agreed and shared that he knew of collectives that were formed by independent practitioners who had returned from overseas residencies, but these could not be sustained unfortunately. Ms Janice Koh concurred and commented that the Esplanade Studio Series had done well in providing a needed platform, while festival platforms, institutions and Major Grant companies were in a similarly good position to support independent artists.</p>
7.2	<p>Mr Benjamin Ho expressed that before having the capacity to set up an organisation, artists like him started with doing theatre independently. He believed that actors, like other artists needed to work together to create jobs for themselves, and not to rely on others or even public funding, in order for things to happen. Mr Benjamin Ho shared that for most practitioners, unless they had done productions with theatre companies or with fellow practitioners, most were unaware of what forms of support was available from NAC.</p>
7.3	<p>Ms Janice Koh also raised the importance of activating spaces in Singapore and making them dynamic for the scene, to make the most of its scarcity and high costs. She suggested commissioning new works as a means to spark new ideas, uncover talents, and promote visibility for the space. Citing the example of Wild Rice's recent festival at LaSalle's campus which was well-attended by thousands of audience members, she added that it was necessary to make visible the work that was being done in otherwise closed spaces, to enable greater interaction with the public. It was necessary to give such spaces an identity so that the public would associate the space with a particular form or movement, in this case, a platform for independent artists, where talents can start to emerge.</p>

7.4	<p><u>An arts administration body</u> Mr Tay Tong suggested setting up an independent arts administration body in Singapore funded by NAC, whose job was to provide assistance to independent artists. Possible areas of support included writing grant applications, producing, and publicity. This organisation could be housed at the Drama Centre, with a holistic approach to identifying interesting independent artists and supporting them to produce works.</p>
7.5	<p>Ms Janice Koh added that this organisation could also look at providing short-term arts training to address administrative, marketing and sponsorship needs. Ms Elaine Ng also suggested that the organisation could become a central service provider, and not necessarily be linked or tied to a specific venue.</p>
7.6	<p>Ms Elizabeth de Roza felt that there was already some support to independent artists and shared her experience with the CD grant which allowed her to collaborate on a project with artists based in New York. She affirmed that while there were opportunities presently, what was lacking was valuable information that should be passed on to other artists. She added that the gap to address for independent artists was the lack of space and residencies.</p>
7.7	<p><u>Emerging / Young versus Mid-Career Practitioners</u> Mr Adrian Pang commented that the nature of the theatre scene called for every practitioner or organisation to take the initiative to find out the information necessary to their survival as opposed to waiting for things to happen. Ms Tracie Pang added that it was important for artists to cultivate a sense of determination, to keep going whether there was help available or not, which would encourage artists make stronger works. Mr Alvin Tan recalled that artists in his younger days took the initiative to create their own infrastructure in their response to the environment. He commented that artists would naturally be drawn to working with specific types of companies, and they could take the initiative to approach them to learn and be guided. He questioned the need to overly intervene in guiding them, especially if they were not proactive and did not have the desire to learn from others.</p>
7.8	<p>Mr Alvin Tan concurred that mid-career artists seem more neglected, when compared to emerging artists, and established artists who were likely to have their own platform. He felt that while there were venues available, the question was whether funding was flowing to these programmes to support independent artists. He cited the Substation as having done well to provide support, and commented that support could be given to acknowledge the role that venues played.</p>
7.9	<p>Mr Chong Tze Chien commented that while it was easier to remember fresh faces in the scene, it was harder for mid-career practitioners to obtain institutional support, scholarships or mentorship, and were without the opportunities and space to practice their craft. Mr Alvin Tan agreed particularly with reference to those who have taken a break from the industry and had difficulties finding a place in the scene upon their return.</p>
7.10	<p>Mr Tay Tong commented that mid-career to senior level arts managers were also in need of opportunities to upgrade, or simply to find inspiration. He noted the Cultural Fellowship programme that was recently put in place as an example. However, it appeared to be fairly specific. He hoped that there was room to think about other programmes offering exposure or experience to senior arts managers.</p>

7.11	Ms Grace Ng surmised that from the discussion, the call seemed to be for NAC to go beyond the CD grant (which was available to all) and provide more support for mid-career practitioners through specific programmes. She then asked the meeting who or what type of persons could play the role of leading the administration body or the programme for independent artists. Mr Chong Tze Chien felt that personalities would drive the direction of the organisation and asked if this organisation would stay true to its objectives despite changes in manpower and leadership. He said it was important for the trust between practitioners and the administrators of the organisation to be built over time so that there could be an equal relationship. Building new relationships with a new team every two years would not be beneficial. Mr Casey Lim responded that the direction of the organisation should not be completely personality-driven, qualifying that programmes should not happen simply because of one person, and practitioners should have a role in steering its direction. Ms Elaine Ng added that it was normal for an organisation to face shifts in manpower, and emphasised that the programmes and schemes should have a certain longevity and framework in place to ensure that the needs of the industry would be met.
8	Supporting the Creation Process and Encouraging Experimentation
8.1	Mr Tay Tong was also of the view that the capability development for the scene should encourage experimentation and allow possibilities as well as failures. He noted that any shifts towards conservatism would result in practitioners being less adventurous. Mr Alvin Tan and Ms Janice Koh agreed that experimental works were critical and necessary to ensure diversity in the scene. They added that critical writing as well as the role that arts writers and reviewers played was important to the growth of practitioners, and in helping to keep track and document the development of artists.
8.2	Mr Caleb Lee also shared that in the development of theatre for children, similar concerns in terms of encouraging collaboration, development of future audience and works surfaced. He added that it was also important to support the development of new and experimental works for children.
8.3	Mr Tay Tong expressed that supporting the process of art making work was important. He was conscious of the fact that theatre companies had to fulfil quantitative Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with regard to audience participation and level of activity, which would dampen the exploration of new possibilities.
9	Secondment of NAC staff
9.1	Ms Michele Lim wondered about the possibility of seconding NAC staff to arts companies to help them better understand the work that companies did, and gain insight and experience as arts administrators. Ms Tracie Pang and Mr Chong Tze Chien agreed that this was a good idea in helping NAC gain insight into the company and its struggles, but felt that there would need to be clarity on the role the NAC staff should play. Mr Chong Tze Chien expressed concern that the seconded staff may develop biased opinions towards the company in the event the relationship did not work out and the staff returned to NAC bearing these views. He commented that it might be more beneficial for the staff to understand the company through working on their productions as opposed to doing administrative work, which might not be different from what they would be used to at NAC.

9.2	Ms Janice Koh opined that this was an issue of execution, and suggested that for this to work, it had to be a two-way exchange between like-minded organisations - the theatre company and NAC. She felt that for it to be meaningful, a significant duration to allow the staff to experience the full cycles of two productions was necessary. Mr Adrian Pang acknowledged that this would be a positive step to developing a relationship between theatre companies and NAC. Ms Janice Koh added that NAC staff would need first-hand experience on the ground in order to be in the position to give knowledge and advice to the industry.
10	Conclusion
10.1	In closing, Ms Grace Ng thanked the participants for their contributions and the meeting ended at 6.00pm.

Recorded by: Khainurizah Koh, Manager/Sector Development
With comments from participants incorporated on 4 November 2013.

**NOTES OF DISCUSSION FOR NAC'S CONSULTATION SESSION WITH THE THEATRE
SECTOR ON THE PERFORMING ARTS PLAN – SESSION ON SPACES**

Held on 27 September, 2013, 3.30-5.30pm
Pantry, Blk A Level 1, Goodman Arts Centre

External Attendees:

No.	Name	Designation/Company
1	Mr Caleb Lee	Associate Festival Manager / I Theatre; Lecturer, Theatre+Performance / LASALLE College of the Arts
2	Mr Jeremiah Choy	Independent Artist
3	Mr Peter Sau	Independent Artist
4	Ms Amanda Morris	Dean, Faculty of Performing Arts / LASALLE College of the Arts
5	Ms Elizabeth de Roza	Programming Leader, BA (Hons) Theatre + Performance / LASALLE College of the Arts; Independent Artist
6	Mr Matt Grey	Senior Lecturer / Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts
7	Ms Mia Chee	Company Manager / Nine Years Theatre
8	Mr Nelson Chia	Artistic Director / Nine Years Theatre
9	Mr Benjamin Ho	Artistic Director / Paper Monkey
10	Ms Jobina Tan	Deputy Director, Programming / The Esplanade Co. Ltd
11	Mr Chong Tze Chien	Company Director / The Finger Players
12	Mr Alvin Tan	Artistic Director/ The Necessary Stage
13	Mr Chong Woon Yong	Programme Manager/The Theatre Practice
14	Ms Jo Lim	Company Manager / The Theatre Practice

NAC Attendees:

No.	Name	Designation
1	Ms Yvonne Tham	Dy CEO
2	Ms Grace Ng	DD/Sector Development
3	Ms Lucinda Seah	DD/Strategic Planning
4	Mr Russell Lim	DD/Precinct Development
5	Ms Karen Loh	Manager/Sector Development
6	Ms Khainurizah Ariff Koh	Manager/Sector Development
7	Ms Kwong Wai Cheng	Manager/Sector Development
8	Ms Joanne Tay	Manager/Sector Development
9	Ms Lynn Yang	Manager/Sector Development

1	Background
1.1	NAC had invited members of the theatre community for consultation sessions on the future of Singapore's theatre scene – a stock take of the scene as it was today and possible developments going forward. This was an extension of the earlier dialogue sessions in 2012 and 2013 hosted by then-CEO Mr Benson Puah and sharing on key ideas at NAC Let's Talk session on 24 Jul 2013 with the larger performing arts community. Further to these consultations, NAC had organised a series of art-form specific sessions to go into issues and ideas that were relevant to each art-form. For the Theatre sector, a total of 7 sessions were held which involved arts practitioners, arts writers, arts administrators and advocates. The sessions were on specific topics including: children's theatre, rethinking public engagement strategies, the importance of critical writing, capacity and capabilities, as well as spaces.
2	Introduction
2.1	Dy CEO/ Yvonne Tham welcomed all to the session and noted that the past four sessions had yielded fairly substantial discussions in the areas of public engagement, critical writing, capability development, as well as an overall assessment of the theatre scene.
2.2	Ms Yvonne Tham noted that today, the artistic community took on the role of producing and presenting themselves in for-hire venues and they had to undertake the financial risks as well. However, as the scene developed further, there was the need for intermediaries such as producers to step in to work with the theatre companies and tap on the network of international producers/presenters. For this session on spaces, NAC would like to seek practitioners' feedback on its ideas on how existing venues could move from being purely for-hire to being programmed spaces.
2.3	To guide the discussion, the following questions were posed: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reference the proposed phase two development of The Esplanade, what were practitioners' sentiments about the need for Singapore's national arts centre to be further developed to have a full suite of spaces, including a mid-sized theatre? If phase two did happen, what would be the expectation of the artistic community regarding the way the Esplanade ought to work with them, and how could Singapore artists leverage the Esplanade's international links? 2. If a Resident Company programme, based at either Drama Centre (DC) Theatre and/or Victoria Theatre (VT), were to be implemented, would this be feasible? 3. Could the Drama Centre Black Box (DCBB) be repurposed to focus on incubation of works, since feedback and statistics had shown that the DCBB's small seating capacity proved to be largely unviable for arts companies' productions?
3	The Mid-Sized Theatre
3.1	<u><i>A Space for Experimentation</i></u> <p>Mr Jeremiah Choy commented that while the scene undoubtedly lacked a mid-sized theatre, it need not necessarily mean that this needed to be housed at The Esplanade. He cited two concerns. One was that a programming venue would naturally be led by programmers with their own preferences and tastes, hence subjecting artists to their inclinations. To this, Ms Yvonne Tham opined that the scene did need a diversity of taste-makers for the next phase, which would help develop audiences. Mr Choy stressed that the mid-sized space had to be affordable in order to</p>

	allow artists to spend time on experimenting and work-shopping during the creation process. It would not be possible to workshop at a mid-sized theatre with state-of-the-arts facilities that was expensive to rent as this would put pressure on ticket sales. Mr Jeremiah Choy asked instead for more black boxes or spaces that would not be so fitted out.
3.2	Ms Yvonne Tham queried whether a black box was the right place for such try-outs. Mr Alvin Tan clarified that incubating a piece of work, which was designed for a mid-sized space, at a black box would curtail the development of the work. Mr Chong Tze Chien agreed that an equipped space would be beneficial. To this, Mr Jeremiah Choy agreed and cited the example of a situation where he could possibly need a rehearsal space with proscenium stage for try-outs, but he could not afford one. Even though DC Theatre technically could fulfil this requirement, it was always fully booked and would be expensive to rent for such a purpose.
3.3	Returning to the issue of venue cost, Ms Yvonne Tham asked whether this was the only issue in how infrastructure could help the scene develop further. Referring to the inter-relatedness of the issues, Mr Alvin Tan shared that The Necessary Stage was fortunate to have its own black box to both work and present, hence venue cost was less pressing an issue. However, the side-effect of this was that the company found it now difficult to change their paradigm of working. This also meant that its working method may not be financially feasible for an external for-hire venue.
3.4	Responding to Ms Yvonne Tham's query about cost being the only issue, Mr Jeremiah Choy stated that even if there were mid-sized theatres for the right scale works, the scene still needed spaces which would be positioned for experimental and work-in-progress shows. He shared that he was fortunate to have The Old Parliament House co-produce the Play Den Productions in 2009 and 2010, whereby he was able to use the Play Den for experimentation while the actors could rehearse in the Blue Room which was quite similar in size to the Play Den.
3.5	Mr Benjamin Ho added that we needed to look into alternative spaces which would be affordable enough for artists to create and experiment. However he also highlighted that the people who managed these spaces were equally important to facilitate the working process for the artists. He cited the example of an existing school policy of closing at 6pm, and the challenges faced by The Necessary Stage in the early days of being at Marine Parade Community Club as the group's working hours often extended beyond 10pm. Mr Alvin Tan agreed that while physical venues could be there, infrastructural support and the suitable type of people to run such spaces were missing. Mr Matt Grey also wondered if we had sufficient and good technicians running these spaces.
3.6	<u><i>What a Mid-Sized Theatre at The Esplanade could do</i></u> Ms Yvonne Tham shared that as a national arts centre, The Esplanade was originally designed to have the full suite of spaces and NAC needed to hear from the artists regarding the role that Esplanade should play in the development of the scene. For example, the type of partnership and programmes that would be useful to local artists in creating their work and how they would like The Esplanade to help them forge international partnerships. Participants responded to this question at various points during the discussion.
3.7	Mr Nelson Chia noted that a centre could commission an artist to create work as an independent (away from the artist's formal affiliation with a company), while Mr Alvin Tan voiced that the scene needed programmers who were excited about local talents and wanted to commission them to make work. He would like the scene to arrive at a

	stage whereby works-in-progress could be ticketed and have audiences following the development of these works, thereby building the branding of these works through allowing audience access to the artistic process. Mr Jeremiah Choy added that we could arrive at a stage whereby enough branding of a work would have been built up so that arts groups could use crowd-funding as a method to raise money for their productions.
4	The Resident Company Programme
4.1	On the idea for a resident company programme, and whether DC could be repurposed to host such a programme, Mr Jeremiah Choy expressed concern that this could translate into fewer available for-hire dates for arts groups. Responding to this, Ms Yvonne Tham shared that the difficulty in booking DC could be due to everybody wanting to rent DC on the same dates. She pointed out that with Victoria Theatre coming up, this might help to alleviate the situation. There could also be other for-hire options coming up in the near future. For example, if artists did not mind the lack of wing space and a shallow stage, Capitol Theatre could be willing to work with arts groups as well for its programming.
4.2	Mr Alvin Tan added that the programmer at such a venue would also need to help market the Resident Company.
4.3	Mr Nelson Chia next shared his concern about the next stage of development for a theatre company after spending a season as a Resident Company. While the company could develop a work during the residency period, it would be difficult to restage the work or bring it anywhere else, and this was the same problem he faced with his commissioned works by The Esplanade. He could not do any restaging unless he could secure the required funding. He was concerned that the Resident Company model might not help to build up companies as it could not be sustained.
4.4	In response to this and the earlier question on the role of Esplanade, Mr Chong Tze Chien suggested that the Resident Company programme could be expanded to include the larger-sized Esplanade Theatre as well. He cited the example of Zuni Icosahedron's venue partnership with Hong Kong Cultural Centre which had enabled the company to grow artistically and organisationally. The idea of working in a technically equipped space was important to allow artists to try out ideas. He further opined that the Resident Company programme need not be restricted to being at mid-sized venues, but could be at venues of various sizes, including large ones.
4.5	Mr Jeremiah Choy added that as an example of ambition / vision, whether there could be a local headliner act for The Esplanade's major platforms, such as Huayi – Chinese Festival of Arts. Ms Jobina Tan responded positively but also highlighted the fact that the cost of commissioning a new work for the big spaces was very high. Hence, a mid-sized theatre would be required so that The Esplanade could commission more Singapore artists as the costs would be more manageable. However, she shared that the Resident Company programme should be viewed as one part of a larger initiative that a producer/presenter should undertake for local artists, rather than as an isolated initiative that needs to be regularly sustained at the venue.

5	Developing a Singapore Repertory and the Role of Producers/Presenters
5.1	Mr Nelson Chia stated that it was important for the community to look at the body of works Singapore artists had created and be informed about the development of the scene. He expressed his concern that some of the younger practitioners and audiences lacked such understanding.
5.2	Ms Elizabeth de Roza concurred with Mr Nelson Chia's point, and asked if there could be a research and documentation centre dedicated to Singapore theatre. She raised the example of how Lasalle managed to house the late William Teo's works, and asked if NAC could provide funding to companies to develop their archival materials and house them somewhere. To this, Ms Yvonne Tham informed that the upcoming centre for text-based works at 42 Waterloo Street would be looking into this area. However, the centre would not be housing a museum, but rather, it would be a point of reference for archival materials and would be using the archive as a living resource for the purpose of re-visiting and restaging Singapore works.
5.3	Mr Chong Tze Chien added that there was the need to develop a Singapore repertory through the restaging of "classics". The lack of a repertory meant a missed opportunity in audience development and growth in appreciating Singapore theatre makers, as there would be no sense of history and development. As such, other than the incubation of new works, there needed to be the "re-visitations" of old (including failed) works that could be supported to be further developed.
5.4	At this point, Ms Jobina Tan stated that this was where the role of the producer and presenter could come in. The Resident Company idea could work if the mid-sized spaces have producers and presenters as they would be able to take on the financial risks in both the incubation of new works and the building up of a Singapore repertory. However, she noted that the producers and presenters would need to work on building trust and credibility with artists and audience for sustainable growth. Concurring with the earlier point that a developing scene required taste-makers, Ms Jobina Tan highlighted that producers and presenters were acting as the mediators between artists and audience to make art happen.
5.5	Mr Jeremiah Choy then commented that the scene did have a certain repertory and theatre companies themselves were producers and presenters. He felt that the issue of building a Singapore repertory could be addressed by having longer runs so that the shows could continuously be worked on and be further polished. However, there was still the need to continue to make new work at a financially feasible venue which need not be equipped with the most advanced facilities.
6	A More Coordinated and Consolidated Theatre Scene
6.1	<u><i>A Coordinated Season?</i></u> Mr Jeremiah Choy also brought up the point that in order to have a vibrant arts scene, the artistic community needed to work together,- this was presently missing, resulting in the lack of a coordinated theatre season and shows competing for the same audience at the same time. Referring to Singapore's thriving MICE industry, he pointed out that there could be a partnership with these event organisers to bring delegates to the theatre but this was not happening as the scene did not have a pre-planned and coordinated theatre schedule, hence making it difficult for the organisers to plan the delegates' itinerary.

6.2	Mr Chong Tze Chien opined that coordinating this would be difficult to implement. Mr Jeremiah Choy responded that a central depository would be needed for all to reference and to make an informed choice when companies planned their respective calendar of events, and that did not necessarily entail lengthy coordination meetings. To this, Mr Chong Tze Chien said that somebody would have to maintain this repository. Mr Alvin Tan added that everyone would have to be committed to this repository or else it would not work.
6.3	<p><u>Consolidating the Scene</u></p> <p>The group felt that there were benefits of having longer running shows but this might be difficult to realise since theatre companies used almost similar pools of actors, and actors themselves usually have other engagements in order to sustain their livelihoods - this made it difficult for them to commit to longer rehearsal and performance periods. This prompted Ms Yvonne Tham to ask whether the scene would benefit from less but longer-running productions.</p>
6.4	Mr Chong Tze Chien suggested that each company should do only one show a year but run it longer. He shared that his overseas artistic contacts were amazed that Singapore artists could do five new shows in a year, whereas they would usually take three years to develop a new piece. Mr Alvin Tan agreed and added that foreign works that had gone through a much longer period of developmental process (as compared to local works that were developed in three to six months) were much more polished, and they competed with local works in the shaping of the tastes of local audiences.
6.5	Mr Jeremiah Choy commented that the idea of one show a year would only work if audiences grew with theatre makers, and Mr Alvin Tan pointed out that there should not be a preference for new works only. As such, there ought to be interesting programmes that cut across generations, complemented with discussions to create seasons that talked about art-making of a certain era, thereby nurturing audience appreciation and understanding for older plays and our past. With an informed audience, their taste would be further cultivated to move away from desiring only new works.
6.6	Mr Nelson Chia agreed that national arts centres' focus on the art-making process would help to put a stamp of endorsement on Singapore works and companies, creating a "brand" that would gain credibility with audiences here and abroad.
6.7	Ms Yvonne Tham asked what would enable the scene to develop at a more reasonable pace, and Mr Chong Tze Chien pointed out the preference for new works was partly contributed by NAC's old funding guidelines which favoured new works over restaging of works. He shared that there were still artists who resisted applying for NAC's grants as they thought they would be forced to create new works. Ms Yvonne Tham noted that NAC would need to improve its communication of funding guidelines, since such considerations were no longer prevailing.

6.8	Mr Chong Tze Chien shared that some works which were not successful in the first staging had attracted negative comments from the media when the intention to restage these works were made known. He cited the example of The Book of Living and Dying- some reviewers did not like the first staging and questioned the intention to restage, only to discover that they liked the restaging. Mr Alvin Tan noted that this was why good critical writing was needed to highlight examples of good Singapore works which benefited from further development beyond the first staging.
7	Centre for Independent Artists
7.1	Ms Yvonne Tham also sought views for the proposed idea of a Centre for Independent Artists, suggesting that the centre would focus on incubation across art forms, and could be headed by an Executive Director or Artistic Director.
7.2	Ms Elizabeth de Roza said that such a centre would be necessary as it would encourage emerging and mid-career artists to create work, and the centre could also help artists by programming work-in-progress showings which would be attended by artists, presenters, and producers.
7.3	Ms Yvonne Tham asked how this centre would be useful for arts companies, whether talent-spotting could be one purpose. Mr Nelson Chia responded that all artists were actually independent artists one way or another, and while it would be usually difficult for companies to come together to collaborate, it would be easier for artists to do so in an independent capacity.
7.4	Stating that artists should not work in silos, Mr Jeremiah Choy felt that the centre would enable artists to come together to talk about each other's work, to have that third eye perspective and for impromptu honest feedback to take place. Ms Yvonne Tham then asked whether it was important for the centre to create opportunities for artists to congregate and establish relationships. Mr Nelson Chia said yes, and added that a centre as a focal point was important to bring actors (not just writers and directors) together as they usually did not work in a specific condition for long periods of time, and it was important for them to focus and continuously practice in order to be good in their craft. Ms Elizabeth de Roza concurred that the idea of training was important and it would be beneficial if this centre could bring together different methods of actor training and enable jamming and cross-pollination of training styles.
7.5	Mr Matt Grey, however, pointed out that even with training being made available, actors themselves must be willing to make time for training. Mr Alvin Tan noted that most actors were product-oriented, and there were not enough opportunities for actors to come together to exchange and talk. Mr Jeremiah Choy added that he missed the days when actors could devote more time to rehearsals, to explore and workshop, unlike the current situation where actors were more time-constrained as they had to take on multiple jobs to sustain their livelihoods.
7.6	Mr Chong Tze Chien commented that the appeal of the La MaMa residency programmes and the Suzuki Company of Toga residency were largely due to fact that artists could take time out to just focus solely on their craft. He then suggested that there could be a programme to support actors having attachments and residencies with local companies. Ms Yvonne Tham highlighted that NAC's Capability Development Grant supported apprenticeship and mentorship with local arts companies, but Mr Chong Tze Chien commented that the use of "apprenticeships" and "mentorship" was misleading as it would seem that the support was only for emerging artists. He proposed that "attachment" would be more suitable, and Ms Yvonne Tham said that NAC could look into this.

8	Developing Producers and Presenters
8.1	Mr Jeremiah Choy raised the need for training producers and presenters, noting that it was a sharp learning curve for him to learn how to budget and market productions when he first started out. He asked if NAC could help to bring producers and presenters together for sharing and learning, and cultivate relationships with overseas markets. Mr Alvin Tan also noted that the Singapore theatre scene was company-led and not producer-led. Ms Yvonne Tham suggested that this thus lent the need for the scene to diversify and allow spaces like the Centre for Independent Artists to be more producer-/presenter-led.
8.2	Ms Jobina Tan stated that The Esplanade would be happy to share its skills, although it would be limited to projects held at The Esplanade. She also shared that The Esplanade usually tried to collaborate with artists in their capacity as a producer or presenter, for them to curate their own festival or have a season at The Esplanade.
8.3	Ms Karen Loh reflected that those in production management roles today could potentially be groomed to become producers as they would have relevant foundational skill-sets.
9	Activating Existing Spaces
9.1	Mr Matt Grey shared that he liked the idea of having arts spaces in shopping malls, where there was the natural catchment of a wider public for the arts. However, he noted the difficulty in staging shows at community centres due to less-than-ideal facilities and technicians' abilities. He asked if it was possible to select a few community centres for further development and to support arts groups who wanted to bring shows to the heartlands.
9.2	Mr Chong Tze Chien did not support the spreading out of venues, qualifying that Singapore was not very big in terms of land size and artists should work at getting people to the theatre. Ms Jobina Tan added that the People's Association, given its role in developing the community centres, could over time become a more viable partner to the artists.
9.3	Ms Yvonne Tham commented that there had to be clarity in terms of the purpose of spaces outside of the city, to avoid a proliferation of spaces that were not well-used. This was especially as significant resources were required to develop, operate and maintain a presenting venue. She acknowledged that community spaces could be suitable as working spaces for artists, or for more informal arts presentations.
10	Closing remarks
10.1	In closing, Ms Yvonne Tham thanked the participants for their views and noted that NAC would further consider how programmed spaces could help catalyse artistic development. This could be a major part of the performing arts plan.
10.2	The meeting ended at 5.30pm.

Recorded by: Karen Loh, Manager/Sector Development
With comments from participants incorporated on 28 October 2013.

**NOTES OF DISCUSSION FOR NAC'S CONSULTATION WITH THE THEATRE SECTOR
ON THE PERFORMING ARTS PLAN – SESSION ON THEATRE FOR CHILDREN**

Held on 23 August 2013, 5.30-7:30pm

Pantry, Blk A Level 1, Goodman Arts Centre

Present:

No.	Name
1.	Ms Isabella Chiam
2.	Mr Jonathan Lum
3.	Ms Serena Ho
4.	Mr Roger Jenkins
5.	Mr Ian Loy
6.	Ms Luanne Poh
7.	Mr Julius Foo

1	Background
1.1	<p>NAC had invited members of the theatre community for an informal dialogue on the challenges and needs in the area of theatre for children, as well as possible developments going forward. This was the second of two dialogues involving dedicated children's theatre companies, or companies with children's theatre wings or programmes, as well as independent practitioners in children's theatre programmes.</p> <p>This consultation was an extension of the earlier dialogue sessions in 2012 and 2013 hosted by then-CEO Mr Benson Puah and sharing on key ideas at NAC Let's Talk session on 24 Jul 2013 with the larger performing arts community. Further to these consultations, NAC had organised a series of art-form specific sessions to go into issues and ideas that were relevant to each art-form. For the theatre sector, a total of 7 sessions were held which involved arts practitioners, arts writers, arts administrators and advocates. The ideas will go to inform the development of the Performing Arts Plan for Singapore.</p>
2	Introduction
2.1	<p>Mr Kenneth Kwok (Director/Arts & Youth, NAC) welcomed everyone and explained that the objective of the session was to gather feedback and ideas on how to grow the children's theatre scene. Ms Grace Ng (Deputy Director/ Sector Development, NAC) added that children's theatre was an area of focus in the overall NAC's Performing Arts Plan and ideas gathered from the session would help inform the Plan. M(AE)/Ms Wu Yahui and M(SD)/Ms Kwong Wai Cheng, then shared on the current NAC schemes and efforts in the area of children's theatre, and highlighted the for main areas for discussion for the session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content development • Capability development • Space • Marketing and publicity

	Mr Kenneth Kwok also clarified that NAC defined children to be from pre-primary to primary school level, under the age of 12.
3	Content
3.1	Mr Jonathan Lum shared his observation that parents were generally less attracted to Asian / local content than to Western stories. Mr Julius Foo then pointed out that parents had stronger western influences and preferred western content as they assumed it would be presented in better English.
3.2	However, Ms Luanne Poh felt that it was more of a marketing issue. It would help if marketing messages could go beyond content and highlight the captivating elements about the show to break pre-conceived notions / prejudices. She also pointed out that children's productions need to be age-appropriate and customised to the child's cognitive development.
3.3	Mr Julius Foo felt that when school texts or known stories were presented, the take-up from schools and parents would be higher, and productions would be able to go beyond a 2-week run to sustain interest. This would help in audience development. He then suggested that arts groups could consider an Asian season of performances that was based on school / literature texts. The season could also promote the literature text. Mr Roger Jenkins supported the use of theatre shows to help promote literature in schools because he felt literature was on the decline and he was disappointed with the choice of the literature texts in the primary schools.
3.4	Ms Isabella Chiam added that if the theatre experience could be expanded beyond the performance alone to allow parents and children to do creative activities together, it would help convince parents of the value of theatre as well. Mr Julius Foo agreed that the target audience for children's theatre was not only the children but also about reaching out and educating the parents.
4	Marketing and Audience Development
4.1	Mr Roger Jenkins questioned the value of assembly programmes. While it was an important source of revenue, the poor conditions (e.g. students not paying attention and teachers not participating) in school halls greatly compromised the quality of the experience. He also pointed out that audience age range could be too wide (e.g. including Primary 1 to Primary 6 students) for the experience to be meaningful. Mr Ian Loy suggested changing the format of the assembly shows by limiting the audience size to 100 students only. However, Ms Serena Ho felt that this could be a major constraint for the schools.
4.2	Ms Serena Ho and Ms Luanne Poh pointed out that the assembly shows were their first experience of theatre, and were so inspired that they wanted to carve a career in this field. Hence, while the quality needed to be improved, assembly shows were still important to plant the seed of interest in theatre in the young. Mr Kenneth Kwok added that NAC would be launching a series of seminars with schools, to guide teachers on the selection and management of assembly programmes.

4.3	Ms Isabella Chiam shared that I Theatre encountered difficulties in organising their children's theatre festival (ACE! Festival) as they were doing it on their own. She felt that it would make sense for the theatre companies to aggregate resources and collaborate on a festival. Ms Luanne Poh agreed that it would be helpful for individual programmes / shows to be part of a larger platform (like a festival), to bring practitioners together and achieve mileage than if they were to do it on their own.
4.4	Mr Roger Jenkins also suggested exchanges and forums by local and foreign children's theatre practitioners, which could involve the public to discuss what they wanted to see and, at the same time, educate the adults.
4.5	On a separate note, Mr Roger Jenkins noticed that while certain shows were marketed as suitable for young audiences; the actual execution and content were not so. He felt that companies needed to be responsible to market their shows appropriately.
5	Prestige and Recognition
5.1	Mr Ian Loy felt that the general perception in the theatre sector was that children's theatre was for beginners and fresh graduates. This had to do with the emphasis the arts education institutions put on big productions. Little mention was given to children's theatre in the curriculum.
5.2	Mr Roger Jenkins pointed out that there was also little recognition for children's theatre in the scene. He felt that a category in the Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards or a separate recognition platform for children's theatre would give the industry more credit. The competition would also help raise standards.
6	Dedicated space(s)
6.1	Mr Roger Jenkins felt that a theatre space for children needed to be child-friendly and unthreatening, and should not limit them to their seats all the time. Instead of a conventional theatre space, he would prefer a more informal space.
6.2	Mr Jonathan Lum hoped that a dedicated venue for children's theatre could help take the pressure off companies, so that they could stage creative works without the worry of venue costs and financial risks.
6.3	Mr Julius Foo shared that his vision for a dedicated venue should go beyond merely watching a show for exposure. The space should play a bigger role in educating and immersing the audience in the arts. These include pre and post-show programmes/activities that would reach out to children, as well as teachers and parents.
7	Capability Development
7.1	Mr Roger Jenkins felt that it was insufficient for practitioners to just have artistic background. He believed having some pedagogical knowledge would be important in the creation and shaping of a work. Ms Serena Ho felt that many children's theatre actors also lacked the ability to connect with their audience, which was important in

	children's theatre. However, she was unsure how this skill could be trained / taught.
7.2	Ms Isabella Chiam shared that what helped her was actually doing the productions and learning from experience. Hence, she proposed some sort of support for companies to encourage them to use new talents, as well as train and mentor the actors. Ms Luanne Poh shared that there was a theatre-in-education module offered by LaSalle in the past, where students devised a show and 'sold' it to the schools. It gave her a good exposure to children's theatre.
7.3	Ms Luanne Poh, Mr Ian Loy and Ms Isabella Chiam were also supportive of residency programmes where actors were attached to a company for a year, while they were being mentored and trained through participating in children's productions. Mr Julius Foo suggested international exchanges where local companies could learn from foreign counterparts and local practitioners could be exposed to good examples of children's theatre.
7.4	Mr Roger Jenkins also proposed for an association of children's theatre practitioners that could look into common challenges faced by practitioners, like marketing and publicity, training and undertake to provide support in these areas, for the whole scene. Ms Grace Ng explained that NAC's existing grant schemes could support such efforts and if there was an organisation that came forward to take up this role, NAC would consider supporting it.
8	Conclusion
8.1	In conclusion, Mr Kenneth Kwok said that the discussions were just a start; NAC would continue to widen and deepen the conversation to include all arts programmes for children in the various vernacular languages, as well as zoom in to targeted areas (e.g. a dedicated space).

Recorded by: Kwong Wai Cheng, Manager / Sector Development
Wu Yahui, Manager / Arts Education

**NOTES OF DISCUSSION FOR NAC'S CONSULTATION WITH THE THEATRE SECTOR
ON THE PERFORMING ARTS PLAN – SESSION ON THEATRE FOR CHILDREN**

Held on 22 August 2013, 5.30-7:30pm

Pantry, Blk A Level 1, Goodman Arts Centre

Present:

No.	Name	Specialisation / Designation
8.	Mr Caleb Lee	Festival Director / I Theatre
9.	Mr Chong Tze Chien	Company Director / The Finger Players
10.	Ms Valerie Chien	Associate Artist / Paper Monkey
11.	Ms Charlotte Nors	Executive Director / Singapore Repertory Theatre
12.	Ms Kuo Jian Hong	Artistic Director / The Theatre Practice
13.	Ms Koh Hui Ling	Associate Artistic Director / Drama Box
14.	Ms Han Xue Mei	Resident Artist / Drama Box
15.	Mr R Chandran	Artistic Director / ACT 3 Theatrics
16.	Ms Carina Hales	Artistic Director / Players Theatre
17.	Mr James Shubert	Artist / Players Theatre
18.	Ms Rilla Melati	Chief Creative Officer / Mini Monsters
19.	Ms Elvira Holmberg	Vice-president /Singapore Drama Educators Association
20.	Ms Juliet Chia	Director, Business Development and Marketing / The Learning Connections
21.	Ms Elaine Ng	Director, Business Operations and Programmes / The Learning Connections
22.	Ms Luanne Poh	Associate Producer/ The Esplanade Co Ltd
23.	Mr Koh Chong Chiah	President / Arts Theatre Singapore

1	Background
1.1	<p>NAC had invited members of the theatre community for an informal dialogue on the challenges and needs in the area of theatre for children, as well as possible developments going forward. This was the first of two dialogues involving dedicated children's theatre companies, or companies with children's theatre wings or programmes, as well as independent practitioners in children's theatre programmes.</p> <p>This consultation was an extension of the earlier dialogue sessions in 2012 and 2013 hosted by then-CEO Mr Benson Pua and sharing on key ideas at NAC Let's Talk session on 24 Jul 2013 with the larger performing arts community. Further to these consultations, NAC had organised a series of art-form specific sessions to go into issues and ideas that were relevant to each art form. For the theatre sector, a total of 7 sessions were held which involved arts practitioners, arts writers, arts administrators and advocates. The ideas will go to inform the development of the Performing Arts Plan for Singapore.</p>
2	Introduction
2.1	Mr Kenneth Kwok (Director/ Arts & Youth, NAC) welcomed everyone and explained that the objective of the session was to gather feedback and ideas on how to grow the children's theatre scene. Ms Grace Ng (Deputy Director/ Sector Development,

	<p>NAC) added that children’s theatre was an area of focus in the overall NAC’s Performing Arts Plan and ideas gathered from the session would help inform the Plan. M(AE)/Ms Wu Yahui and M(SD)/Ms Kwong Wai Cheng, then shared on the current NAC schemes and efforts in the area of children’s theatre, and highlighted the four main areas for discussion for the session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content development • Capability development • Space • Marketing and publicity
3	Quality content
3.1	Mr Chong Tze Chien felt that quality of a piece of work could be gauged by the values that it espoused. He expressed concerns that quality was compromised as schools required shows to espouse educational values, over artistic expression. If this continued to be the case, the standard of children’s theatre would never improve, and would not be able to attract the student audience to the theatre experience. He was also concerned that parents were not discerning about quality, and could not differentiate between entertainment (e.g. mall shows) and quality theatrical pieces.
3.2	Ms Luanne Poh reflected that young children, in their first encounters with the theatrical form, would not have formed a concept of theatre. Art makers would be the ones to shape that experience; children’s theatre needed to be experiential, engaging and magical. The space or content was not as critical as the way the content was presented. She opined that a more complete experience would involve engaging children and adults in artistic activities before and after that show.
3.3	On the choice of content, Mr Caleb Lee observed that children’s theatre content was closely related to market forces and demand, and the Singapore audience preferred, and would pay more, to see western-centric content like traditional fairy tales. Local or Asian content was harder to sell. Ms Charlotte Nors said that companies needed to present a balance of known and unknown works. However, she felt that companies still needed to build audience’s trust through known works first before moving on to more unknown works. Ms Luanne Poh opined that the scene should offer a wide variety of content, in a variety of styles and at diverse venues to cater to the different needs and demands of the audience.
4	Marketing and Audience Development
4.1	Mr R Chandran shared his experience that in the initial audience development phase, companies would need to bring the show to the audience. This could include staging shows in schools, malls and at birthday parties. After establishing their reputation and following, companies could eventually convert some of them to be paying audience in the theatre. Mr James Shubert agreed that mall shows were a good transition for non-theatre goers. Ms Kuo Jian Hong added that the key difference between mall shows and shows in the theatre was that the former intended for audience to purchase merchandise; while the latter aimed to bring the audience back into the theatre.
4.2	Mr Chong Tze Chien pointed out that many arts groups targeted their marketing

	<p>efforts at the converted theatre audience, but less so to the larger community who were not exposed to theatre. He felt that children's theatre was not just meant for children alone, but for the whole family. However, this would be expensive, and parents would usually prefer cheaper alternatives. He suggested that a way of attracting new adult audience was to offer ticket subsidies. The funding could go directly to subsidising ticket prices. However, Ms Charlotte Nors expressed reservations in offering free tickets as she felt that the audience would not value the experience. Mr Caleb Lee added that there was a general sense that audiences assumed that an expensive ticket equated to a good-quality show. Ms Luanne Poh suggested that instead of marketing it as 'free', the shows could be positioned as 'non-ticketed'. Such shows could be curated with the purpose of reaching out to as wide a demographic as possible.</p>
4.3	<p>Ms Juliet Chia and Ms Carina Hales proposed that tickets could be offered free to audiences who could not afford it. However, sponsors were still needed to pay for the tickets. In response, Ms Kuo Jian Hong highlighted that while offering free tickets to disadvantaged groups was a good cause, it needed to be managed sensitively, by setting aside tickets upfront and not offering 'left-over' tickets when they could not be sold.</p>
4.4	<p>Mr Kenneth Kwok added that there was actually a range of funding options for school students to tap on e.g. Tote Board Arts Grant, Opportunity Fund, etc. However, he agreed that more could be done to encourage parents to bring their children to watch shows.</p>
4.5	<p>In the area of marketing, Ms Koh Hui Ling suggested that companies could come together to offer ticket packages for shows from various companies and market them. Ms Kuo Jian Hong added that companies could also do media buys together to market their programmes. However, someone/an organization had to step forward to coordinate this effort.</p>
4.6	<p>Mr R Chandran opined that children's theatre was less recognized in the scene as a serious form because it was often associated with "childish playing". He noted that there was the general lack of coverage by the media. Ms Charlotte Nors also suggested including a children's theatre category in the Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards to raise the prestige of this sector. Ms Luanne Poh felt the scene lacked a festival for young children to raise the visibility of the sector. There were such festivals in the past but those stopped after the corporate sponsors pulled out. Mr Chong Tze Chien opined that a dedicated children's centre would help to raise the visibility and hence the prestige of children's theatre.</p>
5	Dedicated space(s)
5.1	<p>Mr Chong Tze Chien felt that the dedicated centre should have a team to curate free and ticketed programmes to raise the quality of children's theatre for the different age groups.</p>
5.2	<p>Ms Kuo Jian Hong added a concern that a single centralised space, managed by one</p>

	single body will unnecessarily influence the way things were done, hence limiting creativity and diversity. She suggested that there could also be a de-centralised approach where there were spaces for children's theatre all over Singapore.
5.3	Ms Juliet Chia suggested that the centre could operate on a membership model where members could attend all performances and participate in activities based on an annual subscription.
5.4	Ms Carina Hales felt that groups could not programme long running shows to reach out to more people because there was a lack of small venues that groups could rent at a cheap rate. She hoped the centre could help take the pressure off theatre rental costs.
6	Perception of the Children's Theatre Sector
6.1	There were some contention in the group as to whether there was not enough skilled actors for children's theatre or it was more of a case of skilled actors not wanting to do children's theatre because they felt it was 'secondary' and not prestigious. Ms Koh Hui Ling felt that the real difficulty was finding actors who were passionate about children's theatre. Ms Elvira Holmberg then questioned what would motivate actors to do children's theatre. She suggested that companies should create/cultivate compelling reasons for children's theatre, through quality shows and educating the actors, as well as people in the larger community, including parents and teachers. Ms Kuo Jian Hong agreed that while such a mindset change was needed for the greater community, actors also needed to develop a sensitivity and empathy for their young audience.
6.2	Mr Chong Tze Chien opined that it was an issue of artistic upbringing where actors were educated to draw a demarcation between theatre for adults and theatre for children, when there should not be one. This demarcation reflected a bigger mindset problem that the larger theatre scene suffered. Ms Carina Hales added that while some other actors did not look down on children's theatre, they also did not feel that it was a step-up for them in their careers, and would rather go for better paid work. Hence, she suggested offering actors regularity (e.g. by hiring them on a retainer basis) through guaranteeing a fixed number of shows in a year.
7	Working with Schools
7.1	Mr R Chandran felt that school shows were still useful channels to reach out the young audiences despite the many challenges and less-than-ideal conditions. Ms Charlotte Nors also pointed out that while school attendance had grown, more could still be done to engage the decision makers in schools, e.g. principals. Ms Kuo Jian Hong added that support from schools varied widely depending on the teacher's attitude (doing a job vis-à-vis really supporting the arts). Hence educators needed to be educated about the role of the arts.
7.2	Ms Rilla Melati highlighted that schools required to have a large number of students to justify bringing them out for shows (i.e. the show must accommodate the whole level and not just one class). The challenge was even greater for Malay language

	children's theatre as it was harder to gather the critical number of students for school bookings.
7.3	Mr Caleb Lee also shared that demand from schools was largely unreliable as it was based on what the teacher wanted (hence unpredictable) and external events (e.g. haze or H1N1) which could easily result in massive cancellations.
8	Tote Board Arts Grant
8.1	Ms Carina Hales commented that the Tote Board Arts Grant played an important part in generating demand from schools. She queried if the grant could be extended to childcare centers, pre-school and kindergartens.
8.2	Ms Kuo Jian Hong also wondered if there was any real mindset change as a result from the Tote Board subsidy. In the event the grant was discontinued, would schools (or parents) continue to buy tickets to shows? She felt this entailed greater education efforts to effect a mindset change so that the arts could truly become a natural part of our lives.
8.3	Mr Kenneth Kwok assured the group that NAC and Tote Board shared these same concerns and were looking at carrying out impact studies. Currently, the Tote Board grant usage was at a plateau of about 75%. While the figure was considered healthy, schools could further maximize the grant if they planned the usage carefully instead of apportioning the grant on a first-come, first-served basis. NAC planned to organize a seminar series to advise HOD Aesthetics and Coordinators how to better plan their arts programming. However, to extend the grant eligibility downwards for pre-schools would be challenging because of the large number of preschools, all of which were not centrally managed by MOE and represented a great diversity of stakeholders e.g. faith-based institutions, commercial companies, PCFs, etc. However, there had been efforts to extend the grant to specific target groups like special needs schools.
9	Concluding Remarks
9.1	In conclusion, Mr Kenneth Kwok said that the focus group discussions were just a start; NAC would continue to engage more people who played a role in driving the scene in the conversation, e.g. school principals/teachers, parents, media and funding bodies. The conversation would also be widened and deepened to include all arts programmes for children, in the various vernacular languages, ways to develop future audience and practitioners. He welcomed participants to contribute more ideas even after the session.
10	Post-Session comments
10.1	After the discussion, participants contributed more ideas. Ms Charlotte Nors suggested that NAC could consider support for arts group to reach out to low-income children, e.g. in the form of a matching grant.

Recorded by: Kwong Wai Cheng, Manager / Sector Development
Wu Yahui, Manager / Arts Education

APPENDIX VI - CONSULTATIONS WITH THE TRADITIONAL ARTS SECTOR

NOTES OF DISCUSSION FOR NAC'S CONSULTATION SESSION WITH CHINESE MUSIC AND CHINESE OPERA INDUSTRY ON THE NAC PERFORMING ARTS WORKPLAN

– RAISING ARTISTIC STANDARDS AND ADVOCACY

HELD ON 4 OCTOBER 2013, 1600-1800HRS

MEETING ROOM 2, BLK B #03-13, GOODMAN ARTS CENTRE

External Attendees:

No.	Name	Designation/Company
1	Mrs Joanna Wong	Artistic Director / Chinese Theatre Circle
2	Mr Christopher Choo	Independent
3	Mr Tan Ooh Chye	Principal / Chinese Opera Institute
4	Ms Lim Mei Lian	Artistic Director / Tianyun Beijing Opera Society
5	Mr Yeo Siew Wee	Secretary / Singapore Chinese Instrumental Musicians Association
6	Mr Quek Ling Kiong	Resident Conductor / Singapore Chinese Orchestra
7	Ms Chew Chon Yan	Senior Manager / Chinese Opera Institute

1.	Background
1.1	NAC had invited members of the Chinese traditional arts community for a consultation session on the Chinese Music and Chinese Opera scenes.
1.2	This was one of a series of art form dialogues involving arts practitioners, writers, administrators and advocates, as part of the process of developing a plan for Singapore's future performing arts scene.
2.	Introduction
2.1	<p>Ms Elaine Ng (Director/Sector Development, NAC) welcomed the participants and provided a brief background on the NAC Performing Arts Plan, as well as an overview of the Chinese Music and Chinese Opera scenes. She explained that while both were vibrant with many groups and regular performances, the Chinese Opera scene in particular faced the problem of aging audiences and practitioners. On this, Mr Tan Ooh Chye felt that our national bilingual policy had played a key role in the audience decline, as dialect was no longer used in schools and the media. As Chinese opera was largely performed in dialect, the younger generation was therefore not able to understand the language or feel a connection to the form.</p> <p>Following the introduction, Ms Elaine Ng streamlined the conversation into the following 2 key areas: (a) raising artistic standards; and (b) advocacy and promotion.</p>
A	RAISING ARTISTIC STANDARDS
3.	Challenges
3.1	Mr Tan Ooh Chye listed several difficulties with organising Chinese opera training programmes. While the Chinese music scene was doing well because of its larger

	market and the efforts of key persons such as Mr Quek Ling Kiong, the Chinese opera scene was dominated by amateur groups. As the practitioners were mostly part-time and not studying to be professionals, there was a need to accommodate their working or studying schedules. Mrs Wong pointed out that local Chinese Opera students' experience levels were too diverse, making it difficult for instructors to structure their courses and tailor them to student needs.
3.2	At a more fundamental level, Mr Quek Ling Kiong felt that for there to even be market demand for opera and opera training, top-down initiatives and strong signals of support from the government were important. He cited the example of SCO, which had a clear mandate from the government as a national arts company. As a professional body, SCO served as an aspirational point for students. Likewise, a professional body in the opera scene would give practitioners the assurance of career prospects in this field.
4.	Structured Training and the Role of Chinese Opera Institute (COI)
4.1	Mrs Joanna Wong noted that COI's original raison d'être was to be an umbrella body for talent development and training. Mrs Wong added that COI's mandate was <i>not</i> as a performing body - a direction it seemed to have taken in recent years. Mr Tan Ooh Chye assured that COI was coming up with a structured training programme but would first focus on Beijing, Yue and Huangmei Opera. Due to their similarities with Mandarin, these two forms would be better-placed to serve a larger cross-section of practitioners.
4.2	On Ms Elaine Ng's query as to which level the training should be pegged at, Mrs Wong replied that while COI should provide training for skills common across all opera forms, within each skill set it should adopt a tiered approach with different levels for progression. Mr Choo added that this was because some practitioners needed more advanced courses, as they had reached a bottleneck after undergoing extensive basic training.
4.3	Ms Lim Mei Lian agreed that COI would still be the most important body to help train practitioners and raise the standards of the Singapore scene. It should customise programmes specific to local needs, adopt a modular approach to these programmes, and provide some form of certification to ensure credibility. In addition to qualifications, instructors should also have good pedagogical skills, as good performers were not necessarily good teachers. She also maintained that instructors from the right opera genres should be hired in order to prevent 'cross-genre pollution'. Mr Tan Ooh Chye assured that COI was in the process of coming up with a course structure, as well as exploring the possibility of administering tests and issuing a certificate at the end of each course.
5.	Training Gaps and Residencies
5.1	Ms Lim Mei Lian noted that there was inadequate training in opera music. Existing opera musicians were in their 50s and 60s and had few successors. There was also a lack of properly trained headgear and make-up artists. To this, Mrs Joanna Wong mentioned that CTC was conducting opera make-up courses in community centres. As for opera musicians, there was no pipeline of them because Chinese music

	players found it difficult to crossover, i.e. they were not accustomed to constantly-changing tempos in Chinese Opera performance.
5.2	The group agreed that Chinese music was a different genre from Chinese Opera music, and that it would take a long time to train musicians to synchronise with opera actors. Despite recent innovations such as the COI-organised Hokkien Opera show which used an orchestra, the musicians still needed a conductor to follow the action on stage. Ms Lim and Mr Choo noted that more mentorship of the younger generation of Chinese opera musicians was needed. Mr Quek Ling Kiong also suggested greater exchanges between Chinese music and opera groups, for instance by involving students and orchestra conductors on a more regular basis in opera performances. Selected SCO musicians could even work with an opera group for a period of a year or so.
5.3	On possibilities for exchange and short-term training, Ms Elaine Ng asked if it was feasible to send local practitioners to short-term residencies at the Chinese Opera Institute in Beijing, where Ms Lim Mei Lian was studying. Ms Lim replied that while foreign students were admitted into classes as observers, they were often disallowed from participating in actual practice sessions. As such, these programmes were not particularly useful to practitioners seriously looking to improve their craft. It would be more effective to instead bring overseas experts into Singapore to conduct short-term courses.
6.	Role of Educational Institutions
6.1	Chinese Music: Mr Quek Ling Kiong said that while NAFA and SOTA offered courses for Chinese music students, the intake was very low - currently 5 at SOTA and 1 local student at NAFA. He wondered if it was indicative of the perceived poor prospects of entering the industry. In addition, the curriculum focused on western music and did not cover much Chinese music knowledge, history and theory.
6.2	Mr Quek added that institutions such as NAFA, SCO, MOE and NAC should engage in greater dialogue, and put in place a more timely system for informing local students of job opportunities, e.g. SCO's auditions schedule. SCO should also consider internships for NAFA students and hire them as guest musicians. Educational institutions and groups should also make efforts to invite experts – for instance, Taiwan's Chinese music scene had made huge improvements in recent years, because it had invited many experts from China to train its students.
6.3	Chinese Opera: Mr Tan Ooh Chye said that COI experienced difficulties in securing AEP programmes in schools. Ms Chew added that schools were being practical when they did not feature Chinese opera in their CCAs, as Chinese opera was never part of the SYF competition. Schools often prioritised their funds to CCAs that could instead win awards.
6.4	Mr Tan suggested setting up a platform with NAC and MOE to develop structured, quality Chinese opera lessons for schools. To this, Ms Elaine Ng noted that NAC was working with MOE's STAR to develop arts education resource kits for teachers, and that NAC's Arts Education team was also making efforts to find strategic entry points

	into schools. She acknowledged that Chinese opera was a more tricky area because of the many dialects involved.
B	ADVOCACY IN THE TRADITIONAL ARTS
7.	Applied Education in the Traditional Arts
7.1	Mr Christopher Choo pointed out that on top of the understanding of its aesthetics, the importance of the values present in Chinese Opera classics should also be stressed upon. He suggested that Chinese Opera groups could develop relevant Arts Education Programmes (AEP) content that highlighted such moral values (filial piety; patriotism; loyalty etc) and Chinese philosophies for students.
7.2	Mr Quek Ling Kiong agreed with Mr Choo and mentioned that such values were also present in Chinese Music repertoire. He also suggested that this was an area that the Chinese Opera and Chinese Music sectors could collaborate on.
7.3	Mrs Joanna Wong also shared her experience in conducting a recent Parent-Child workshop as part of Esplanade's Moonfest programme. Parents and children were observed to be enjoying the process of learning Chinese Opera together. There were also a couple of participants who expressed interest in learning the art form after the workshop. Thus, Mrs Wong agreed that the first contact students/audiences had with Chinese Opera need not be at a performance but through other related activities.
8.	Cross-Learning Between Chinese Music and Chinese Opera
8.1	The group discussed how the Chinese Opera and Chinese Music sectors could collaborate and leverage on the best of each sector. Mr Quek Ling Kiong commented that the two art forms are closely linked culturally; thus there were many ways in which the two forms could work together. He raised the possibilities of grants and/or programmes that would allow Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO) or Singapore Youth Chinese Orchestra (SYCO) musicians to learn from veteran Chinese Opera musicians.
8.2	Mr Yeo Siew Wee agreed that the Chinese Opera scene could turn to the Chinese Music scene for musicians. However he added that successful collaboration also involve other factors such as friendship and the training and commitment of musicians. This was especially so since Chinese musicians were typically trained to keep to time, whereas the fluidity of Chinese opera performances meant that accompanying opera performers required long hours of rehearsals and practice together to develop on-stage chemistry.
9.	Deepening Audience Engagement Beyond the Stage
9.1	The practitioners also highlighted the need to extend appreciation and education of traditional art forms beyond the stage. Ms Lim Mei Lian shared that her society had received positive responses for conducting analytical and appreciation sharings before/after performances. Thus, she feels that traditional arts group should also venture beyond the stage.
9.2	The practitioners also echoed each other on the need to have more airtime on public radio / television. Mr Tan Ooh Chye shared that there was a 2-hour timeslot featuring

	Chinese Opera programmes/productions on Mediacorp's Channel 8 every Friday. It was a challenge having local Chinese Opera content aired during this timeslot, as groups which wished to do so had to spend a significant sum on providing footage adhering to the broadcaster's specifications.
9.3	NAC highlighted that there were several free online social media platforms that arts groups could explore and use in their promotional and marketing efforts. Instead of spending large sums of money to film for TV productions, groups could also consider uploading short performance clips on sharing sites like YouTube which could reach out to a larger group of people.
9.4	Mrs Joanna Wong also mentioned that the presence of English and Chinese surtitles during shows helped audiences to understand and follow plot developments during Chinese Opera performances. Although there were comments from some quarters that surtitles distracted audiences from what was happening on stage, this effort had definitely helped in bringing more audiences to Chinese Opera performances.
10.	Retaining Participant and Audience Interest
10.1	Mrs Joanna Wong raised the importance of catching on to audiences' and/or participants' interests after their first encounter with Chinese Opera. She cited the example of the Parent-Child workshop she conducted, and asked how organisations could leverage on the vast network/contacts of presenters like Esplanade, to continue engaging these participants/audiences beyond the event per se.
10.2	Mrs Wong suggested that groups' programming should include lead-ups to a series of activities/events that were made known to audiences (i.e. publicising upcoming performances to workshop participants, allowing them to follow-up on what they had learnt and to increase their exposure).
10.3	Ms Lim highlighted the need for the main Chinese Opera groups to come together to consolidate efforts/resources and share marketing channels, so as to maximise audience participation. She shared her thoughts on creating a Chinese Opera ecosystem that would see groups cross-promoting activities and collectively planning more vibrant and evenly-distributed calendar of events.
11.	Reaching out to More Audiences through Platforms
11.1	Mr Quek said that the Chinese Music scene was in a better position for outreach due to its vibrant and diverse scene, with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra as a major source of inspiration and motivation for other Chinese music organisations. There was already an array of platforms and efforts by various organisations that reach out to a diversified audience (examples raised include Esplanade's Beautiful Sundays that feature Chinese Music programming; People's Association (PA)'s PAssion Arts programmes; SCO's Outreach and Educational programmes; Ding Yi Music Company's efforts in raising awareness in Chinese Chamber Music and The Teng Company's accessible programming).
11.2	Mr Quek also shared his personal experience in developing a series of themed concerts for children as part of SCO's programming. He shared how he had attended

	a Theatre masterclass by Phillippe Gaulier to learn acting, in order to better communicate with children. The series of concerts had received good reviews and he had since developed it further, by creating a character which told stories and recounted the history of Singapore. He had also gone on to encourage other SCO musicians to incorporate acting in their upcoming concerts.
11.3	Ms Lim and Mrs Wong both raised the possibility of reviving the Hong Lim Park Chinese Opera series and/or Traditional Theatre Festival. The vibrant Chinese Opera scene in the 1980s and 1990s was a result of the series, as it gave local Chinese Opera groups a platform to showcase their art and was also a motivational goal for local groups to work towards. The performances at Hong Lim Park were free and had attracted and gained significant public following during earlier years. Mr Christopher Choo and Mr Tan Ooh Chye both echoed the desire for this platform to be revived with the support of NAC.
12	Patronage
12.1	All members of the meeting noted that patronage was an important aspect of an organisation's advocacy efforts. Mr Tan Ooh Chye observed that Prime Minister's patronage of SCO had contributed in a big way towards the Orchestra's fundraising and outreach efforts.
13.	Closing Remarks
13.1	Ms Elaine Ng summarised the points discussed and thanked the participants for their contributions and time. There being no other matters, the meeting ended at 6.15pm.

Recorded by: Rachel Lim, Manager/Sector Development
Stanley Ang, Manager/Sector Development