

ANNEX A – FACT SHEET – 20 YEARS OF SINGAPORE WRITERS FESTIVAL

Singapore Writers Festival – SWF 20 Timeline

Background Notes - 1986 – 2016

1986: SWF starts off as Writers' Week

Singapore Writers Festival begins as Writers' Week, a fringe event of the Singapore Festival of Arts

- **No. of days:** Eight days, 21 – 28 June
- **No. of authors:** 71 authors featured; 36 international, and 35 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Timothy Mo (UK), Paul Engle (US), Hualing Nieh Engle (US), Nissim Ezekiel (India), Lee Tzu Pheng (Singapore)
- **Venues:** DBS Auditorium, the Westin Stamford, Shell Theatre, and public libraries
- **Organisers:** The Ministry of Community Development, NUS FASS, Institute of Education
- **Highlights:** Organised three forums namely, The Literature of ASEAN, The Place of Literature in Society, and Contemporary Writing in Singapore; and the first Organising Committee comprises 16 people, including chairman Edwin Thumboo and vice-chairman John Kwan-Terry

1988: Writers' Week expands its reach

The 2nd Writers' Week, a fringe event of the Singapore Festival of Arts, reaches out to schools

- **No. of days:** Seven days, 25 – 31 May
- **No. of authors:** 35 authors featured; 21 international, and 14 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** John Agard (UK), Grace Nichols (UK), Philip Salom (Australia), Catherine Lim (Singapore), Wang Xindi (China)
- **Venues:** Marina Mandarin, National Museum Theatre, public libraries, schools
- **Organisers:** Singapore Writers Week Organising Committee chaired by John Kwan-Terry
- **Highlights:** Meet-the-public sessions consisting of school visits by an international and Singapore-based author, 'Meet & Mingle' cocktail sessions with writers and introduction of bilingual programming

1990: Writers' Week undergoes a change in format

The 3rd Writers' Week, as part of the Singapore Festival of Arts, is spread out across three weeks

- **No. of days:** six days, across 3 weekends from 2 – 24 June
- **No. of authors:** Seven authors featured

- **Authors:** Penelope Lively (UK), W.S. Rendra (Indonesia), Awang Muslim bin Haji Burmat (Brunei), Indra Parthasarathy (India), Pai Hsien Yung (Taiwan), Ya Hsien (Taiwan) and James Gunn (US)
- **Venues:** Victoria Theatre, Umar Palavar Tamil Language Centre, Goethe Institut, NUS FASS, Environment Theatre, Alexandra Community Centre and schools
- **Organisers:** Singapore Writers Week Organising Committee
- **Highlights:** Programmes are presented in all four national languages for first time and each international writer is featured in a forum event

1991: Writers' Week becomes independent

The 4th Writers' Week is presented outside of Festival of the Arts for the first time

- **No. of days:** seven days, 2 – 8 September
- **No. of authors:** 33 authors featured; 20 international, and 13 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Jon Silkin (UK), Li-Young Lee (US), Alamgir Hashmi (Pakistan), Huang Peijia (China), Fidelito Cortes (Philippines), Philip Jeyaretnam (Singapore), Isa Kamari (Singapore)
- **Venues:** NUS FASS, World Trade Centre, National Museum Theatre, schools
- **Organisers:** Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA)
- **Highlights:** Increase in multi-lingual programmes with one forum for each of the mother tongue languages

1993: Writers' Week explores new lands

The 5th Writers Week features writers from new countries

- **No. of days:** six days, 31 August – 6 September
- **No. of authors:** 41 authors featured; 26 international, and 15 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Lance Henson (US), Kofi Awoonor (Ghana), Ashokamitran (India), K. Sivathamby (Sri Lanka), Josef Skvorecky (Czech Republic), M.G. Vassanji (Canada), S.Y. Tiang (Taiwan), Kee Thuan Chye (Malaysia), Goh Sin Tub (Singapore), Wong Meng Voon (Singapore)
- **Venues:** World Trade Centre, DBS Auditorium, PUB Auditorium, National Museum Theatre, NUS FASS, NIE, public libraries and schools
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council and Centre for the Arts
- **Highlights:** Simultaneous readings occurring at different venues for the first time and two forums organised, namely, Women Writing Back and The Writer, Freedom and Politics

1995: Writers' Week goes on stage

The 6th Writers Week presents literature on stage for the first time and celebrates local writing talents

- **No. of days:** six days, 29 August – 3 September

- **No. of authors:** 63 authors featured; 19 international, and 44 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Robert Drewe (Australia), Frank Chin (US), Robert Woof (UK), Bai Hua (China), A. A. Navis (Indonesia), Robert Yeo (Singapore), Gopal Baratham (Singapore)
- **Venues:** Intercontinental Hotel, The Substation, NIE, Shell Theatre, Olio Dome II, Victoria Theatre, National Museum Theatre, NUS, Singapore Conference Hall, public libraries, schools
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council
- **Highlights:** Introduction of different programme categories: Main, Fringe and Special; new programmes, Breakfast with Writers and Writers' Workshops for the public, Golden Point Awards prize ceremony included as closing event for the Week

1997: Writers' Week grows bigger

The 7th Writers Week is touted as the "biggest ever", with 92 programmes in its line-up across all four national languages

- **No. of days:** seven days, 3 – 9 September
- **No. of authors:** 42 authors featured; 14 international, and 28 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Lolo Houbein (Australia), Bharati Mukherjee (US), Fred Wah (Canada), Alfred Yuson (Philippines), Li Ang (Taiwan), Eleanor Wong (Singapore), Chin Woon Ping (Singapore), Catherine Lim (Singapore)
- **Venues:** Allson Hotel, Chijmes, DBS Auditorium, NUS, Drama Centre, Jubilee Hall, NIE, Singapore Art Museum, The Substation, Westin Stamford, Plaza Hotel, Jurong East Community Library
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council
- **Highlights:** introduction of children's workshops, book launches and late-night reading sessions (starting at 10pm)

1999: Writers' Week renamed to Singapore Writers' Festival

The 8th Writers' Week gets a revamp; is officially now known as the Singapore Writers' Festival

- **No. of days:** seven days, 2 – 8 September
- **No. of authors:** 25 authors featured; 17 international, and 8 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Witi Ihimaera (New Zealand), Larry Beinhart (US), Emma Tom (Australia), Jorge Accame (Argentina), Peter Nazareth (US), Jiao Tong (Taiwan), Zhao Lihong (China), Espo (Australia), Shahnun Ahmad (Malaysia), Alfian Sa'at (Singapore), Suchen Christine Lim (Singapore)
- **Venues:** Singapore Art Museum, Chijmes, Hotel Rendezvous, Raffles Hotel, Borders, NUS, SPH News Centre Auditorium, Vista Culture Square, NIE, NLB, Drama Centre
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council

- **Highlights:** First use of a key visual for the Festival and slogan, “EAT WRITE!”, organised Celebrity Readings and the Forum: Street Slang, Sitcoms and Supermodels: Popular Pursuits of Literature (on Singlish vs. English)

2001: A spiced up SWF

The Singapore Writers’ Festival, as the 9th iteration of the former Writers’ Week, announces its first theme

- **No. of days:** six days, 30 August – 4 September
- **Theme:** Spice Up Your Life!
- **Audience Count:** 2,481
- **No. of authors:** 28 authors featured; 13 international, and 15 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Antoni Liberia (Poland), Arnost Lustig (Czech Republic), Stephen Dobyns (US), David Mitchell (UK), Yu Kwang-chung (Thailand), Yan Geling (China), Tan Hwee Hwee (Singapore)
- **Venues:** ACTION Theatre, Fullerton Hotel, Hotel Rendezvous, Books Kinokuniya Orchard, Lido, NLB, NIE, NUS, Singapore Art Museum, National Museum of Singapore, SPH News Centre Auditorium, Vista Cultural Centre, public libraries
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council
- **Highlights:** Ghost-themed tour, Ghosts, Ghoulies And Things That Go Bump In The Night, first cyber-writing contest; Opening forum: Pillow Talk: Writing Eroticism

2003: SWF goes online

The 10th Singapore Writers’ Festival gains an online presence with the creation of the Festival website

- **No. of days:** seven days, 21 – 27 August
- **Theme:** Literal Magnetism
- **Audience Count:** 3,144
- **No. of authors:** 30 authors featured; 16 international, and 14 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Bernadine Evaristo (UK), Dilip Kumar (India), Dominique Sigaud (France), Gail Jones (Australia), Hong Ying (China/UK), Jiao Tong (Taiwan), Piotr Sommer (Poland), Ronny Someck (Israel), Su Tong (China), Merlinda Bobis (Australia), Sivakami (India)
- **Venues:** Kinokuniya Orchard, NLB, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Swissotel Merchant Court Hotel, Zouk, public libraries
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council
- **Highlights:** Poetry Slam competition hosted by poetry slam movement founder, Marc Smith, SMS Haiku Hi Cool! competition

2005: SWF turns up the heat

The 11th Singapore Writers Festival expands in scope and explores new genres in its programming

- **No. of days:** 10 days, 26 August – 4 September
- **Theme:** Text In The City
- **Audience Count:** 6,891
- **No. of authors:** 69 authors featured; 40 international, and 29 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Goenawan Mohamad (Indonesia), Nury Vittachi (HK), Wei Hui (China), Yu Hua (China), Bruce Sterling (US), Ho Che Anderson (Canada), Colleen Doran (US), Kylie Kwong (Australia), Rattawut Lapcharoensap (Thailand), Ayu Utami (Indonesia), Mr Brown (Singapore), Xixue (Singapore), Cory Doctorow (Canada), Alexander McCall Smith (UK), Ho Che Anderson (Canada), Colleen Doran (US), Gerrie Lim (Singapore)
- **Venues:** NLB (Drama Centre, Launch Pad, Panel Room, Imagination, Possibility, Black Box, The Pod, Central Lending Library), Library@Esplanade, Pan Pacific Singapore, Club Rouge (Alley Bar), Les Amis (The Canteen), My Secret Garden, Poppi
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council (and Phish – event company)
- **Highlights:** Panels and programmes exploring different forms and genres of writing. E.g. blogging, food writing, graffiti writing among other more traditional forms of the written word, along with interactive sessions such as live cooking demos

2007: Singapore Writers Festival has a new home at The Arts House

The 12th Singapore Writers Festival marks the first instance of NAC partnering with an external organisation (TAH) to organise a major national festival

- **No. of days:** nine days, 1 – 9 December
- **Theme:** Crossings
- **Audience Count:** 7,795
- **Literary Pioneer:** Arthur Yap (and Goh Poh Seng)
- **No. of authors:** 132 authors featured; 50 international and 82 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Bei Dao (China), Kunal Basu (UK), Kurt Busiek (US), Gail Simone (US), Mark Waid (US), Tash Aw (Malaysia), June Chang (US), Cyril Wong (Singapore), Madeleine Thein (Canada)
- **Venue:** The Arts House
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council and The Arts House
- **Highlights:** introduction of Literary Pioneer series, festival vision and mission established, programming focus on graphic novels, strong Asian focus in programmes, marks Goh Poh Seng's return to Singapore in over 20 years, first time publishing symposium, 'Business of Books', is presented within the festival, first presentation of literary tour, introduction of lead-up (pre-festival) programmes (MTAs, music and poetry performances), visual arts exhibitions

2009: Big name authors appear at SWF

The 13th Singapore Writers' Festival presents Neil Gaiman among other renowned authors in its line-up

- **No. of days:** nine days, 24 October – 1 November
- **Theme:** UNdercovers
- **Audience Count:** 9,209
- **Literary Pioneer:** Edwin Thumboo
- **Festival Bookstore:** BooksActually
- **No. of authors:** 136 authors featured; 57 international, and 79 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Neil Gaiman (US), Amanda Palmer (US), Mark Waid (US), Taichi Yamada (Japan), Yan Lianke (China), Qiu Xiaolong (China/US), Giddens (Taiwan), John Boyne (Ireland), Lat (Malaysia), Naldo Rei (East Timor), John Ajvde Lindqvist (Sweden)
- **Venues:** The Arts House
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council and The Arts House
- **Highlights:** Longest book-signing session in SWF history – five hours for Neil Gaiman, introduction of Country Focus (Australia and Malaysia), and Little Lit!, ramping up of pre-festival programmes (school and prison outreach, film screenings, PPF@ Raffles City)

2011: Singapore Writers Festival goes annual, first ticketed edition with wider range of programmes

The 14th Singapore Writers Festival moves to the Bras Basah - Bugis district and premieres a new look and new festival format

- **No. of days:** nine days, 22 – 30 October
- **Theme:** Transaction
- **Audience Count:** 13,500
- **Literary Pioneer:** Kuo Pao Kun
- **Festival Bookstore:** Select Books
- **No. of authors:** 130 international and Singapore-based featured
- **Authors include:** Steven Levitt (US), Bi Feiyu (China), Michael Chabon (US), Lee Shinho (Korea/Singapore), Andrew Motion (UK), Joe Halderman (US), Andrei Kurkov (Russia), Vikas Swarup (India), F. Sionil Jose (Philippines), Ho Minfong (US/Singapore)
- **Venues:** Singapore Management University, National Museum, Singapore Art Museum, National Library Board, School of the Arts, The Arts House
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council
- **Highlights:** Appointment of first Festival Director, introduction of Festival Pass, SWF Lecture series, first official SWF Closing Debate, launch of Words Go Round, UTTER, Musee D'Orsay readings, programmes held in two main festival tents (Festival and Transaction Pavilion)
- **Commissions:** first commissioned piece (poem by Lee Tzu Pheng) for SWF programme booklet, PasSAGES Unwound by Yong Shu Hoong, Write Camp and Microfiction Writing Contest by Dave Chua

2012: New writers make their debut at SWF

The 15th Singapore Writers Festival showcases the literary scene's bumper crop of emerging talents

- **No. of days:** 10 days, 2 – 11 November
- **Theme:** Origins
- **Audience Count:** 16,200
- **Literary Pioneer:** S.N. Masuri
- **Festival Bookstore:** Books Kinokuniya
- **Country Focus:** Middle East
- **No. of authors:** 192 authors featured; 51 international and 141 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Michael Cunningham (US), Mick Foley (US), Pico Iyer (UK), Marina Mahatir (Malaysia), Huang Chunming (Taiwan), Shin Kyung-sook (Korea), Jeet Thayil (India)
- **Venues:** Singapore Management University, National Museum Singapore, Singapore Art Museum, School Of The Arts, Switch, National Library Board, The Arts House, The Peranakan Museum
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council
- **Highlights:** Re-introduction of fringe events, branded as 'SWF Fringe', curated by The Arts House, first official e-bookstore: ilovebooks.com, Peranakan focus in programming
- **Commissions:** Comic strip by Troy Chin for SWF programme booklet, Snake (NAC commissioned artwork @SAM), The Chair by Desmond Sim

2013: Crowds gather for SWF

The 16th Singapore Writers Festival sees a surge in public interest and attendance at many programmes

- **No. of days:** 10 days, 1 – 10 November
- **Theme:** Utopia/Dystopia
- **Audience Count:** 19,257
- **Literary Pioneer:** G Sarangapany
- **Festival Bookstore:** Popular Holdings
- **Country Focus:** Nordic focus
- **No. of authors:** 183 authors featured; 67 international and 116 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Carol Ann Duffy (UK), AC Grayling (UK), Gao Xingjian (France), Jung Chang (China-UK), Kosal Khiev (US-Cambodia), Fatima Bhutto (Pakistan), Tracy and Laura Hickman (US), Christian Jungersen (Norway), Sjon (Iceland), Ma Jian (China), Mohsin Hamid (Pakistan-UK), Lucy Hawking (UK), Peter James (UK)
- **Venues:** Singapore Management University, National Museum Singapore, Singapore Art Museum, School of the Arts, National Library Board, The Arts House, Switch, Molly Roffrey's Irish Pub
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council

- **Highlights:** Brave New Animal Farm (SWF lecture by two Singaporean writers, Gwee Li Sui and Adrian Tan),
- **Commissions:** Song by Jack and Rai for SWF programme booklet, Ti-Oh-Oh Dialect Nursery Rhymes, Poetry of Song

2014: SWF holds its final edition at SMU

The 17th Singapore Writers Festival marks its final and most successful edition at SMU

- **No. of days:** 10 days, 31 October - 9 November
- **Theme:** The Prospect of Beauty
- **Audience Count:** 19,534
- **Literary Pioneer:** Gopal Baratham
- **Festival Bookstore:** Popular Holdings
- **Country Focus:** South America
- **No. of authors:** 205 authors featured; 71 international, and 134 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Naomi Wolf (US), Paul Theroux (US), Raymond E. Feist (US), Karen Joy Fowler (US), Robert Pinsky (US), Jang Jin Sung (DPRK – ROK), Julian Gough (Ireland), Paul Muldoon (Ireland), Jonathan Lethem (US), Geoff Dyer (UK)
- **Venues:** Singapore Management University, National Museum Singapore, Singapore Art Museum, School of the Arts, National Library Board, The Arts House, Centre 42, Molly Roffrey's Irish Pub, SAM@8Q
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council
- **Highlights:** Last year at SMU
- **Commissions:** Eye/Feel/Write – visual arts/poetry by Desmond Kon, Body X

2015: SWF returns to the Civic District with a new Festival Director

The 18th Singapore Writers Festival sees an expansion in its multi-disciplinary programmes and a new festival director leading the team

- **No. of days:** 10 days, 30 October – 8 November
- **Theme:** Island of Dreams
- **Audience Count:** 19,700
- **Literary Pioneers:** Chinese Modernist Writers (Toh Lam Huat, Ng Wai Choy, Tong Noong Chin, Chia Joo Ming, Low Pooi Fong, Quah Sy Ren, Chua Chim Kang)
- **Festival Bookstore:** The Select Centre, Closetful of Books
- **Country Focus:** Indonesia
- **No. of authors:** 324 authors featured; 82 international, and 242 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Deborah Levy (UK), Susan Orleans (US), Michael Sandel (US), Christian Bok (Canada), Chip Tsao (Hong Kong), Xu Zhiyuan (China), Goenawan Mohamad (Indonesia), Heather MacGregor (UK), Hollie Fullbrook (New Zealand), Jean-Marc Rochette (France), Na Muthukumar (India), Jeyamohan (India), SP Somtow (Thailand), Sophie Hannah (UK), Rachel Hartman (US)

- **Venues:** The Arts House, Victoria Theatre, Asian Civilisations Museum, National Gallery Singapore, Esplanade Theatres, Timbre Music Academy, Suntec Singapore Convention and Exhibition Centre, University Cultural Centre, National Library Board, Indian Heritage Centre
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council
- **Highlights:** Introduction of five new programme tracks (SWF Stage, SWF Beyond, SWF³, SWF POP, SWF Class); first SWF overnight programme, What I Love About You Is Your Attitude Problem; Michael Sandel's lecture is the best attended ticketed event in SWF history with over 1,300 attendees; first music collaboration with Esplanade, Dimensions and Demons; first double-bill music performance in SWF, Island of Dreams; first dedicated SWF³ bookstore

2016: SWF adopts first non-English theme with 'Sayang'

The 19th Singapore Writers Festival adopts a non-English theme for the first time in its history

- **No. of days:** 10 days, 4 – 13 November
- **Theme:** Sayang
- **Audience Count:** 20,332
- **Literary Pioneer:** Kumpulan Orang Bertujuh Temasek (Maarof Salleh, Suratman Markasan, Mohamed Yusoff Abdul Rahman, Ab Hamid Bin Besih, Sumadi Sarakawi, Eunus Asah)
- **Festival Bookstore:** The Select Centre, Woods in the Books (SWF³)
- **Country Focus:** Japan
- **No. of authors:** 312 authors featured; 79 international, and 233 Singapore-based
- **Authors include:** Marjorie Perloff (US), Evan Puschak (US), Lionel Shriver (US), Gail Carriger (US), Hanya Yanagihara (US), Gosho Aoyama (Japan), Taiyo Fujii (Japan), Atia Abawi (US/Jerusalem), Golda Mowe (Malaysia), Eka Kurniawan (Indonesia), Joanne Harris (UK), Shobasakthi (Sri Lanka- France)
- **Venues:** The Arts House, Asian Civilisations Museum, National Gallery Singapore, Empress Lawn, Victoria Theatre & Victoria Concert Hall, School of the Arts, Esplanade, Indian Heritage Centre
- **Organisers:** National Arts Council
- **Highlights:** Introduction of SWF Classroom series; inclusive programming (sign-language interpretation); first SWF-themed lecture by Farish Noor; Malay conference in conjunction with the Literary Pioneer Series (in collaboration with Berita Harian)
- **Commissions:** Siti Khalijah: An Actress Prepares, Between The Lines: Rant and Rave II, Malam Lawak Sastera (co-presentation with Berita Harian), largest audience reach thus far in SWF history with over 20,000 attendees