



press release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Huayi 2010 brings to audiences SCENES by Drama Box

*The festival commission celebrates over 80 years of
Singapore's Chinese Language Theatre*

SINGAPORE, 16 November 2009 – Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Drama Box (Singapore) trace the development of the local Chinese language theatre scene with a presentation of *SCENES: Singapore's Chinese Language Theatre* in Esplanade's eighth edition of *Huayi – Chinese Festival of Arts*, which will take place from 19 – 28 February 2010. This groundbreaking festival commission by Esplanade will celebrate the triumphs of the Singapore Chinese language theatre scene while also providing important documentation and a reflection on its development, going as far back as the 1920s.

Held at Esplanade from 30 January – 28 February 2010, *SCENES: Singapore's Chinese Language Theatre* will feature five major components: *The Performances*, *The Exhibition*, *Fresh Takes*, *The Dramatised Readings* and *The Symposium*. Each component will examine the different elements that have created, shaped, defined and changed Singapore's Chinese Language Theatre scene. *SCENES* is a project commissioned by Esplanade and co-produced together with Drama Box, and directed by Drama Box's Artistic Director Kok Heng Leun and established theatre academic and critic, Quah Sy Ren.

Said Ms Mimi Yee, Producer, The Esplanade Co. Ltd: "We're always looking for opportunities to encourage the creation of impactful works by local arts groups which we can present during our festivals and programme series. Esplanade is pleased to commission Drama Box to co-produce *SCENES* during *Huayi 2010*. This meaningful project will bring our audiences on a journey that uncovers the history of Singapore's Chinese language theatre.

Our artists have done much to shape Chinese language theatre in Singapore and we would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge their contributions and share it with our audiences.”

Commented Mr Kok Heng Leun on this collaboration: “In the process of preparing for this project, Drama Box has learnt so much and feels greatly in debt to the good work and contributions by the theatre practitioners, and also the challenges they have overcome. *SCENES* is a tribute to these distinguished theatre practitioners and at the same time, a valuable lesson and celebration for artists of our generation. *SCENES* is Drama Box’s way of celebrating our 20 years of existence. The work of Drama Box is built on the achievements of our preceding generation of artists. *SCENES* is a most fitting opportunity for Drama Box to reflect on the rich history of Chinese language theatre, to which we owe much of our development as theatre-makers.”

SCENES: The Performances showcases four seminal Chinese language theatre works reinterpreted by today’s theatre directors from across cultures. Li Xie, winner of the National Arts Council Young Artist Award (2005), will adapt the late Kuo Pao Kun’s classic *The Coffin is Too Big for the Hole*, with the unconventional approach of staging the performance in a funeral setting to allow audiences to be a part of the production while bringing out the nuances of the original script. Natalie Henedige, Artistic Director of local English theatre group Cake Theatrical Productions makes her first foray into Chinese theatre with *Invisibility/Breathing*, a theatrical response to Quah Sy Ren’s *Invisibility* (1996), examining the hope and futility that people experience in a restless world. Actor and Director Peter Sau reinterprets *K*, written by Goh Boon Teck in 1996, inspired by works of Franz Kafka. Tang Shu Wing, the award-winning director from Hong Kong will helm *The Next Generations*, originally written by Lim Soon Lan in 1992 under then The Practice Theatre Ensemble’s (later renamed The Theatre Practice) scriptwriting programme.

SCENES: The Exhibition is an in-depth and thought-provoking recollection of the history and development of Singapore’s Chinese language theatre scene. Curated by Quah Sy Ren and designed by Singapore’s leading architect, Tan Kay Ngee and his team, this exhibition at Esplanade’s Jendela will be a tactile experience, bringing audiences through the historical moments and the scenes of the past, with an installation of materials, space, lights, sounds and texts. The exhibition team will also call upon theatre practitioners, supporters and audiences of Singapore’s Chinese language theatre to donate any interesting, rare or memorable artefacts that they may have. (Please refer to Annex A for details)

SCENES: Fresh Takes highlights the Chinese language theatre productions created and staged by local students, paying homage to schools – an important nurturing ground for Chinese theatre. *SCENES: The Dramatised Readings* features excerpts from seminal plays, from Singapore's pre-war to modern-day history, put together to reflect the development of local Chinese language theatre over the years. Bringing the different components to a thought-provoking close is *SCENES: The Symposium* which brings together critics and theatre practitioners from Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong as well as audiences in an energetic discussion about Singapore's Chinese language theatre.

Huayi – Chinese Festival of Arts 2010 is made possible with the generous support from Festival Supporting Sponsors, Gold Roast and Hong Leong Foundation, as well as Studio Programme Supporters, Keppel Land and Polar Water.

Tickets for *SCENES: The Performances*, *SCENES: The Symposium* and other performances in *Huayi* will be available from 1 December 2009 through the Esplanade's Box Office (Tel: +65 6828 8377), the SISTIC Hotline (Tel: +65 6348 5555) and outlets, and Esplanade's website at www.esplanade.com. (Please refer to Annex B for full festival line-up and details)

About Esplanade – Theatres on The Bay (www.esplanade.com)

Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay is one of the world's busiest arts centres, officially opened on 12 October 2002. This architectural icon with its distinctive twin shells is sited within Singapore's civic district, just by Marina Bay at the mouth of the Singapore River.

Esplanade aims to be a performing arts centre for everyone, and its programmes cater to its diverse audiences. Its programme line-up spans all genres to encompass music, dance, theatre and visual arts, with a special focus on Asian culture.

Esplanade houses world-class performance spaces, supported by a comprehensive range of professional support facilities and services. Its two main venues are the 1,600-seat Concert Hall, with acoustics by the late Russell Johnson of ARTEC Consultants, and a theatre with a capacity of 2,000 adapted from the traditional European opera houses in horseshoe form.

In the past year, Esplanade welcomed over seven million visitors and hosted over 2,400 performances.

About Drama Box (www.dramabox.org)

Drama Box is a non-profit contemporary Mandarin theatre company with charity status. Formed in 1990, it has since gained a respectable reputation for its acute sensitivity and perception in heightening social awareness and civic responsibility. Our productions remain fun and entertaining, yet thought provoking and reflective.

In creating a theatre that is essentially about life, Drama Box's **mission is to be a contemporary Mandarin theatre company that liberates life!**

Drama Box celebrates its 20th year anniversary next year, and it hopes to continue creating theatrical experiences that mirror our social fabric, while engaging its audience with theatre that blurs the boundaries between audience and performer, as well as developing in its audience an appreciation of theatre as an effective and affective language of engagement.

Helmed by Artistic Director Kok Heng Leun, the company's artistic profile includes Koh Hui Ling as Artistic Director of NeNeMas (education arm of Drama Box) and Li Xie, Lee Shyh Jih, Rei Poh, Koh Wan Ching, Patricia Toh and Ng How Wee as Associate Artists.

Drama Box aims to engage people from all walks of life, on and off stage, locally and internationally, with its varied programmes, namely, Main Season productions, NeNeMas (our education arm), Community Performance tours, ARTivate (our youth wing), the Blanc Space training series and International Outreach.

Our recent productions include *Trick or Threat!* (Austria, World Forum Theatre Festival 2009), *Project Mending Sky: YOU* (Toa Payoh and Choa Chu Kang, 2009), *Blanc Space: New Play Season* (The Arts House, 2009), *Drift* (Macao Arts Festival 2009, Singapore Arts Festival 2008 and Singapore Season in China 2007), *IgnorLAND of its Desires* (Geylang, 2009), *Dua Dai Ji* (The Arts House Chamber, 2009), *David the BEST!* (Drama Centre Theatre, 2008), *Project Mending Sky: ME* (Toa Payoh, 2008), *House of Sins* (Jubilee Hall, 2008), and *angelism* (in association with panggung ARTS, OCBC Singapore Theatre Festival 2008).

~ END ~

Jointly issued by The Esplanade Co Ltd and Drama Box

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Annex A

SCENES: The Exhibition Call for donation or loan of artefacts

To add to the diversity and range of the exhibits, the exhibition team would like to appeal to theatre supporters and the public to contribute any interesting, rare, or memorable artefacts relating to Singapore's Chinese language theatre, which traces its earliest origins back to 1920s.

Examples of collectibles that the team is looking for:

- Photographs
- Periodicals
- Programme books
- Manuscripts
- Drawings
- Posters
- Badges
- Stationery

The list is non-exhaustive, and the team welcomes any item of interest.

Those who are keen to donate or loan artefacts can contact Drama Box at:

Contact Person: Kate Wang Fang (Ms)
Tel: 6324 5434
Email: kate.artivate@gmail.com

Deadline: 11 December 2009

Annex B

HUAYI – CHINESE FESTIVAL OF ARTS 2010

Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay celebrates the Lunar New Year through the arts with its eighth run of *Huayi – Chinese Festival of Arts* from 19 – 28 February 2010. The 10-day festival will feature a wide range of quality traditional and contemporary works – comprising free and ticketed performances and other activities – by outstanding Chinese artists.

SCENES – SINGAPORE CHINESE LANGUAGE THEATRE

SCENES: The Performances

Invisibility/Breathing

by Cake Theatrical Productions (Singapore)

The man is restless. One minute he is in a barren wasteland, the next he is in a public toilet in the city, the next he's sitting on a rock with a book, the next he's dragging body bags across endless dust. The man is restless. He wants to disappear. There is also a fisherman and a woman of great disrepute. They live and interact with the man. They know not why he's come nor where he's going. They don't care. They are tired and weary. Stretched thin, almost disappearing. The man, the fisherman and the woman of great disrepute, they are altogether strange, altogether sad. Hopefully they'll disappear. But it's never so easy.

Invisibility/Breathing is a theatrical response to Quah Sy Ren's *Invisibility* (1996), examining the hope and futility of restless people in a restless world.

Directed by Natalie Henedige.

(90mins, no intermission. Performed in Mandarin with English surtitles)

19 Feb 2010, Fri, 8pm

20 Feb 2010, Sat, 2pm

Esplanade Theatre Studio

A *Huayi 2010* festival commission, co-produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Drama Box.

SCENES: The Performances

K

by Peter Sau (Singapore)

An elegy of dehumanisation. A game of torment that never ends.

In a period of constant change, seven Singaporeans transform into strange beings with **keratin kernels**, abruptly altering all their relationships with **kith** and **kin**.

Inspired by Czech writer Franz **Kafka's** bizarre short stories about transformation and alienation – *The Metamorphosis*, *A Hunger Artist* and *A Report to an Academy* – **K** was originally written by Goh Boon Teck in 1996. This interpretation, adapted and directed by Peter Sau, delves into the psyches of the seven trapped in a **Kafkaesque** reality.

Directed by Peter Sau.

(90mins, no intermission. Performed in Mandarin with English surtitles)

20 Feb 2010, Sat, 8.30pm

21 Feb 2010, Sun, 2pm
Esplanade Theatre Studio

A *Huayi 2010* festival commission, co-produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Drama Box.

SCENES: The Performances
The Coffin is Too Big for the Hole
by Li Xie (Singapore)

Beyond life and death, the most absurd funeral feud between the powerful and the powerless begins.

A person dies; a funeral ensues; kinfolk amass.

A coffin for the dead; a hole for the coffin; a set of rules for the living.

What happens when the coffin is too big for the hole?

Who will budge in this tug-of-war between human compassion and the system?

Based on the original play written in 1985 by Singapore Cultural Medallion winner, Kuo Pao Kun.
Directed and adapted by Li Xie.

Advisory: In relevance to the script, audiences will be placed in a funeral wake-like setting.

(90mins, no intermission. In Mandarin with English surtitles)

23 & 24 Feb 2010, Tue & Wed, 8pm
Esplanade Theatre Studio

A *Huayi 2010* festival commission, co-produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Drama Box.

SCENES: The Performances
The Next Generations
by Drama Box (Singapore)

The Next Generations is about the unfulfilled sentiments of three women from two generations who are trapped by the fact that there is only one male from the younger generation. It explores the status of the traditional versus the contemporary female in a male-oriented society.

The only male – the grandson – is an Aids-stricken homosexual, and his homosexuality terminates the family tree. It is a grave issue concerning blood ties and carrying on the family name. Against the Lim family's idea of collective interest, can females be ignored as human beings?

Original play by Lim Soon Lan in 1992, written under then The Practice Theatre Ensemble's (later renamed The Theatre Practice) scriptwriting programme.

Directed by Tang Shu Wing (Hong Kong).

Advisory: This production may contain mature themes.

(90mins, no intermission. Performed in Mandarin with English surtitles)

27 Feb 2010, Sat, 8pm
28 Feb 2010, Sun, 3pm & 8pm

Esplanade Theatre Studio

A *Huayi 2010* festival commission, co-produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Drama Box.

SCENES: The Symposium

by Drama Box (Singapore)

Listen in on a vibrant discussion between critics and theatre practitioners from Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong about Singapore's Chinese language theatre.

This symposium is a thought-provoking end to the two-week *SCENES* programme, and is made up of three parts.

The first features local Chinese language playwrights sharing with us their personal experiences as playwrights.

The second features critics and academics – including Yu Shan Lu (critic and academic, Taiwan), Andy Ng (actor and critic, Hong Kong), Robin Loon (playwright and academic, Singapore) and Quah Sy Ren (playwright, academic and critic, Singapore) -- discussing Singapore's Chinese language theatre from regional and cross-cultural perspectives.

The third engages the invited speakers, all the directors involved in *SCENES*, and you, the audience, in a discussion on *SCENES*.

28 Feb 2010, Sun, 10am to 6pm
Esplanade Recital Studio

A *Huayi 2010* festival commission, co-produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Drama Box.

SCENES: The Exhibition

Experience the world of Singapore's Chinese language theatre from the early 1920s to the present with this exhibition that takes you into scenes of the past with a tactile blend of material, space, light, sound and text.

Curated by Quah Sy Ren and designed by Singapore's leading architect Tan Kay Ngee and his team, *SCENES: The Exhibition* provides a thought-provoking overview on the history and development of our national Chinese language theatre amidst the emergence of a national consciousness and other socio-political-economic changes.

2 Feb, Tue – 28 Feb 2010, Sun
11am – 8.30pm, Mon – Fri
10am – 8.30pm, Sat & Sun
Esplanade Jendela (*Visual Arts Space*)

A *Huayi 2010* festival commission, co-produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Drama Box.

SCENES: The Dramatised Readings

Get a taste of plays written from the pre-war era to the present time.

Featuring read excerpts from seminal local Chinese language plays from the decades, *The Dramatised Readings*, curated by Nelson Chia and Koh Wan Ching, give a sense of how Singapore's Chinese language theatre has developed over the years. Each dramatised reading will be followed by a discussion that will enable all to consider the rich history of our cultural landscape with fresh eyes.

Performed in Mandarin.

30 Jan 2010, Sat & 6 Feb 2010, Sat

3pm – 4 30pm, 5pm – 6 30pm

library@esplanade

A *Huayi 2010* festival commission, co-produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Drama Box.

SCENES: Fresh Takes

Fresh Takes is a showcase of Chinese language theatre productions put up by Singapore schools, which have been an important nurturing ground for dramatic talent since the emergence of modern Chinese language theatre in Singapore in the early 20th Century.

Over the decades, many gifted and passionate students, with the guidance of their teachers, have created Chinese language theatre productions, giving us some of the most interesting work in the scene.

Curated by Peter Sau and Kok Heng Leun, this programme pays homage to this important incubator of theatrical art, showcasing different works created by young talents.

Performed in Mandarin.

20 & 21 Feb 2010, Sat & Sun, 3pm, 4pm & 5pm

Esplanade Concourse

A *Huayi 2010* festival commission, co-produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Drama Box.

OTHER FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS (TICKETED PROGRAMMES)

Man and Woman, War and Peace

by Edward Lam Dance Theatre (Hong Kong / Taiwan)

It is war between the sexes. Who will succumb first to love in this battle? Who will be more brutal to achieve victory at all costs?

The practice of love becomes a battlefield in this modern urban tale about the perennial love/hate relationship between the sexes.

Directed by Hong Kong's eminent director Edward Lam, featuring Taiwanese idol Ariel Lin, multi-faceted Taiwanese actor David Wang, and renowned Hong Kong music producer Denise Ho.

(150mins, including 20min intermission. In Mandarin with English surtitles)

19 Feb 2010, Fri, 8pm

20 Feb 2010, Sat, 2.30pm & 8pm

Esplanade Theatre

Taipei Philharmonic Chamber Choir
(Taiwan)

Poetic images of pastoral life in classic Chinese and Taiwanese folk songs are brought to life with power and poignancy in the sensitive arrangements and lush vocal harmonies of the Taipei Philharmonic Chamber Choir.

Helmed by internationally renowned music director and conductor and cultural icon Dirk Duhei for over 25 years, the choir has grown over the decades into one of Taiwan's most prestigious choruses. With a repertoire of Chinese choral music and Taiwanese aboriginal folk songs, the choir has performed on many of the world's stages as well as the cultural centres of small Taiwanese villages to acclaim and much appreciation.

(105mins, including 20min intermission)

21 Feb 2010, Sun, 5pm
Esplanade Concert Hall

The Boy Who Sees with Stones

by sonicbrat, amberhaze, lingwei, bird & lei (Singapore / Taiwan)

What will a boy see if he lives in a world of stone cold darkness?

With eyes made of stones, he sees what he wants to see as he imagines a world through his mind's eyes.

The Boy Who Sees With Stones is a "collective musing" project that uses live music and sound, multi-media art and animation to unearth and draw out worlds of imagination lost in the process of growing up.

Advisory: Recommended for 16 years and above. Audiences are required to lie down to watch the performance. Please dress appropriately.

(60mins, no intermission)

24 & 25 Feb 2010, Wed & Thu
7.30pm & 9.30pm
Esplanade Recital Studio

Co-produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and sonicbrat.

Peach Blossom Fan • 1699

by Jiangsu Province Kunqu Opera (China)

A fan – given as a token of love by a poet to his fiancée, a beautiful courtesan – is splattered with her blood when she resists being forced to marry another man.

Set in the tumultuous era of the Southern Ming Dynasty, Chinese opera masterpiece *Peach Blossom Fan*, written by Confucius' descendent and dramatist Kong Shangren, is a poignant love epic set against the rise and fall of a dynasty.

Don't miss one of the most heartrending works of Chinese opera ever written, brought to life in Kun opera – an art form recognised by UNESCO as a world cultural heritage treasure – and refreshed for a new generation of audiences with beautiful embroidered costumes, historical artefacts and vivid sets.

Featuring Kun opera masters and young, up-and-coming performers, directed by renowned theatre director Tian Qinxin, with collective efforts of theatrical experts and scholars from China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan.

(205mins, including 20min intermission. With English and Chinese surtitles)

26 & 27 Feb 2010, Fri & Sat, 8pm
Esplanade Theatre

in::music – The Carrchy
(China)

Electro-pop duo The Carrchy makes the kind of music that lulls you into whimsical dreamlands as much as it propels you to bounce to the beat.

Featuring lilting vocals and sensitive lyrics by waif-like singer-songwriter Keli and light, ambient synth tracks by producer Fly, Qingdao-born The Carrchy is only four years old but already making waves in the Chinese music scene where its music has been described as a breath of fresh air, and its debut album *Sunshine Over the City* (2007) has begun topping Chinese music charts.

(60mins, no intermission. Performed In Mandarin)

26 Feb 2010, Fri, 7.30pm
Esplanade Recital Studio

Dream of the Red Chamber (Yue Opera in Concert)
by Singapore Chinese Orchestra (Singapore / China)

Come revisit a beautiful classic anew. Hear some of the most lyrical and popular arias from the Yue opera *Dream of the Red Chamber* rearranged by Xu Jian Qiang and performed by Shanghai's renowned "Prince of Yue Opera" Zhao Zhi Gang and accomplished opera artists Fang Ya Fen and Sun Yong Qing, accompanied by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra led by maestro Tsung Yeh.

(95mins, including 20min intermission. With English and Chinese surtitles)

27 Feb 2010, Sat, 7.30pm
Esplanade Concert Hall

Co-produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay and Singapore Chinese Orchestra

in::music – Peggy Hsu
(Taiwan)

Her lovely little ballads about balloons, finding Neverland, snow in Germany and imaginary friends may have a touch of childlike whimsy. But listen closely and you'll find in Taiwanese singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist/producer Peggy Hsu's songs a blossoming of mature beauty.

Singing with clear, high, girlish vocals, while playing on piano/keyboards, and sometimes backed by guitar, flute and drums, Peggy delivers beautifully-crafted songs in a range of styles – from the trippy folksiness of *Pink Dress* to the breezy, jazz-inspired *Snow in Germany* to the ethereal piano ballad *Fairy Dust*.

Since she exploded on the Mandarin music scene in 2001 with her self-written-and-produced debut album, *Balloon*, written when she was only 19, on her piano, Peggy has reaped “Best Songwriter”, “Best Newcomer”, “Top Lyricist” and other awards from the Taiwanese, Chinese, Singaporean and Hong Kong music industries, released two more hit albums, *Peggy’s Wish Box* (2007) and *Fine* (2009), and also become a sought-after songwriter and producer for other artists such as Evonne Hsu, Tizzy Bac and Joi Chua.

This will be Peggy’s first concert in Singapore in eight years. Fall under her spell as she performs, with a full band, songs about life, love and magical dreams.

(60mins, no intermission. Performed In Mandarin)

27 Feb 2010, Sat, 7.30pm
Esplanade Recital Studio

All information correct as of 16 November 2009. For media enquiries, please contact Juana Tan at 6828 8316 or email tjuana@esplanade.com.