



NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL  
SINGAPORE

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

*For Immediate Release*

### ***Centre 42 officially opens with inaugural assembly of aspiring playwrights***

*Minister Lawrence Wong launches the official opening of the centre*

**Singapore, 7 July 2014** – The National Arts Council (NAC) is pleased to announce the official opening of Centre 42, Singapore’s first centre dedicated to the documentation, promotion and creation of creative talents and works for Singapore theatre. Developed in collaboration with NAC, the centre commences its operations officially today with the announcement of its first batch of playwrights for its Boiler Room programme, and a suite of exciting public programmes and industry partnerships. Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, Mr Lawrence Wong, is the Guest-of-Honour for the opening ceremony on 7 July.

2 Says Ms Kathy Lai, NAC’s Chief Executive Officer, “The future of Singapore’s theatre scene depends on our ability to create quality original texts that can be developed into the next landmark production. This is crucial to the growth of the scene, which is consistent with feedback we received from theatre professionals over the past few years. Hence, NAC collaborated with this team on Centre 42, a unique and dedicated centre that looks into the research, documentation and development of such creative talent and works. We hope this new centre and its targeted suite of programmes will not only grow the capabilities of our practitioners, but to also build a stronger appreciation for local theatre amongst all Singaporeans.”

3 Centre 42 has selected 3 playwrights for its inaugural run of the **Boiler Room** programme, following an open call for script in April this year. This is the centre’s main platform to develop new works. A total of 28 applications were received, with more than half of those applications from aspiring playwrights. The selection was made by the Centre 42 team and industry heavyweights such as theatre veteran, Dr KK Seet and Nine Years Theatre’s Nelson Chia. Selected scripts are put through an incubation process of about 7 months, comprising research, construction and writing, and another 3 months of test-reads and trial presentations. The final list of selected playwrights and their bios are included in Annex A.

4 Says Dr Robin Loon, full time senior lecturer at the National University of Singapore and Centre 42’s Chief Consultant overseeing documentation, discourse, and dramaturgical matters, “The Boiler Room is a writing incubation platform that has no purpose other than to produce writing – it is not geared towards production but it is focused on craft, research and imagination. I feel this is a critical factor that should underline content creation.”



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### **Initiatives to engage public and involve industry**

5 In addition to the Boiler Room programme, Centre 42 has introduced initiatives that provide other forms of support to artists, to facilitate content creation. For example, the **Basement Workshop** and **Guest Room** are initiatives designed to provide independent artists with space to work or conduct sessions and readings with test-audiences. The first Basement Workshop project will be Lim Yu-Beng's *2 Houses*, which is a work commissioned by the 2014 Georgetown Festival to be presented in Penang in August 2014.

6 Centre 42 has also rolled out an innovative range of public outreach programmes. For example, the centre's **Vault** programme will document, and feature contemporary responses to, a range of past Singaporean works, such as canonical Singapore classics, lesser known pieces, adaptations, cross-cultural and cross-genres works. Its first Vault session will take place in September 2014, showcasing two works by well known Singaporean playwrights, Lim Chor Pee and Goh Poh Seng. In addition, the centre has selected its first batch of **Citizens' Reviews**, Centre 42's broad-based critical writing programme to teach participants how to document their opinions, thoughts and pen their perspectives on the performances or productions they have watched. These programmes aim to help raise public awareness and enhance their participation in Singapore theatre.

7 To further support the industry, the centre actively seeks collaboration and partnership opportunities with practitioners in the arts industry. One of its first partnerships is with The Finger Players' *Watch This Space (Directors' Cycle)*, an ongoing developmental platform to groom playwrights and directors. Centre 42 has also established a synergistic partnership with Select Books to create a resource platform for the centre. Select Books can showcase its performing arts-related publications through book sales and public programmes.

8 Details of Centre 42's full range of programmes can be found in [Annex B](#).

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## **NOTES TO EDITOR**

### **About Centre 42**

Centre 42 is a non-profit organization committed to the documentation, promotion and creation of texts and writings for the Singapore stage. The centre is a research and developmental initiative that aims to support the Singapore theatre industry by creating original writing for interested theatre companies and arts organisations for production development, while accumulating a functional archive documenting the histories and processes of Singapore theatre. For more information on Centre 42's programmes and initiatives, please visit [www.centre42.sg](http://www.centre42.sg). Centre 42 is developed in collaboration with the National Arts Council.

### **About the National Arts Council**

NAC was set up to spearhead the development of the arts in Singapore while advancing the country's aspiration to be a distinctive global city for the arts. NAC's mission is to nurture the arts and make Singapore's rich and diverse culture an integral part of people's lives. Anchored on the twin strategies of excellence and engagement in the arts, NAC aims to build a vibrant arts sector by creating a conducive environment where the arts is accessible to all, and artistic talents have the necessary resources and capabilities to excel and achieve long-term sustainability. For more information on NAC's programmes and initiatives, please visit [www.nac.gov.sg](http://www.nac.gov.sg).

## **ANNEX A: THE BOILER ROOM (CYCLE 2014) PLAYWRIGHTS**

The following three playwrights were selected through the Open Call process for the inaugural run of the Boiler Room (Cycle 2014):

### **Chan Yee Ann Daniel**

**Age: 18**

**Occupation: waiting for National Service**

Daniel has been hooked onto the theatre scene ever since he saw the musical, *Wicked*, 3 years ago. His second attempt at playwriting (we do not talk about the first attempt) was at TheatreWorks 24-Hour Play writing competition in 2013, in which he won a Merit in the Youth Category. He has been involved with the various arts forms for as long as he can remember, and he views himself to be a fiercely driven individual, his volition being his greatest asset. He left school to pursue his interest in writing, and fervently hopes to one day live off his passion as a published poet and playwright. Daniel is honoured to have been selected as a Boiler Room playwright at Centre 42. He currently also has the privilege to co-write for youth theatre collective, Bound Theatre. After his stint with national service, he might consider pursuing a Diploma in Technical & Production Management, whilst taking up writing ventures. He is the luckiest for the immense support, inspiration and encouragement he constantly receives from his family and friends. There is no line in *Wicked*, the musical that he does not know.

### **Synopsis of his idea for the Boiler Room: *Inside The Box***

The theory of Schrödinger's Cat presents that the particles in matter exist differently before they're observed, and after they are observed. Before observation, matter exists in all of its states. A cat inside a box with a ticking bomb, is both dead and alive, until one checks up on the cat. With that theory in mind, *Inside The Box* attempts to explore the themes of frayed possibility, predestination, and the question: Is there a point in anything, if fate has already been set?

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### **Suzanne Choo**

**Age: 40**

**Occupation: teaching at NIE**

Suzanne Choo teaches literature at the National Institute of Education. She completed her PhD in English education at Columbia University in New York. Her book "Reading the world, the globe, and the cosmos: Approaches to teaching literature for the twenty-first century" was published in 2013. Aside from writing academic articles, she has an interest in scriptwriting and has been writing plays and musicals for schools for over ten years. In 2008, she was commissioned to write a play titled "Implosion" which was performed over three nights at the Drama Centre. Another play, "smoke," was a top-ten play performed at the Esplanade during the inaugural Short & Sweet Festival and won the People's Choice Award. She hopes to continue writing plays that would de-familiarize the ordinary and provoke philosophical thought on issues related to aesthetics, ethics and social justice in Singapore society.

### **Synopsis of her idea for the Boiler Room: *Open Spaces* (working title)**

The play is an exploration of the power of the literary imagination and its contribution to the development of civic space in Singapore. It shifts between the present in which metaphor, irony, and word play are no longer understood or valued as a result of society's preference for the pragmatic, the logical, and the literal. This is juxtaposed with late nineteenth century Singapore which saw the birth of the literary periodical as a platform through which locals could engage with social and political issues of their time. Set in the midst of a vibrant cosmopolitan world where contestations of power by colonialists, Chinese locals, Straits Chinese and other groups occurred, engagements with the literary played a vital role in developing dialogic and hospitable public discourse. This historical aspect of Singapore is layered with such philosophical questions as – does truth reside in the literal or does the empirical provide only half-truths that are surfaced as reality is disrupted by the fantastical? Does freedom lie in a world where concrete change occurs or in the realm of metaphor and allegory where dispositions of openness and ambivalence are cultivated? Audiences will embark on a journey to explore literature's role in the past and its possibilities for Singapore's future in a play of words, time, and imagination.

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#### **Bryan Tan**

**Age: 40**

**Occupation: Legal Counsel**

Bryan Tan is a playwright and theatre director. He graduated from the National University of Singapore with a Bachelor of Laws (Honours) in 1999, and is presently the regional legal counsel of a multinational company.

In 1996, he was awarded the First Prize in the Hewlett-Packard / Action Theatre 10-Minute Play Contest for *Lizard In The Loo*. In 1998, he received a Merit Prize in TheatreWorks' 24-Hour Playwriting Competition for *Snakeskin*. In the same competition, he received the Second Prize in 2010 for *There Will Now Be A 15-Minute Interval*, and the First Prize in 2013 for *Strike*.

In 2004, Teater Ekamatra presented *Blissed*, and *Broomstick* as part of *Istana 2000*. In 2007, TheatreWorks presented *The Last Theatre State* as part of *120*. Play Den Productions presented *The Devil's Encore* in 2009, and *Someday, Samsara* in 2010. Most recently, Short One Player Theatre (Taiwan) presented *WiFi Lovers* in 2013.

He is a member of The Blue Statesmen, an independent collective of theatre artists. For their inaugural production, he conceived and directed *BluePrince*, which was presented by the collective and The Substation as part of SeptFest 2012 and the Kuo Pao Kun Festival 2012. His other plays include *Heavy Heart*, *Travelling Light*, *Shopping For Baby* and *Nerve Endings*, *X-Country* and *Offering*.

## **Synopsis of his idea for the Boiler Room: *Paper Tigers***

*“All reactionaries are paper tigers. In appearance, the reactionaries are terrifying, but in reality, they are not so powerful. From a long-term point of view, it is not the reactionaries but the people who are powerful.”*

– Mao Zedong

**Paper Tigers** examines the issue: can theatre change society? In that regard, can theatre be an instrument of cultural transformation, in view of its ability to articulate the concerns of a community, convey different positions and perspectives, as well as provoke reflection and debate? Or is theatre nothing more than a form of middle-class (and possibly middle-brow) entertainment, an opiate for the moneyed masses?

This work is set in Singapore during the years of 1990 to 2002, and premised on a fictional theatre company. The audience will be taken behind the scenes, to contemplate the inner workings of the company, and the local theatre scene in general. They will witness, in the rehearsal spaces and dressing rooms, both on- and off-stage, the artists’ dreams and anxieties, their ideals and struggles, in that era of often experimental and politically-charged theatre.

**Paper Tigers** presents a meditation on the complex and often contentious relationship between art, society and politics, set during a significant period of theatre history in Singapore.

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### **Boiler Room (Cycle 2014) Quick Facts:**

- 28 applications were received during the 2-month Open Call period (7 April to 7 June 2014)
- Youngest applicant: 18 years old; and oldest applicant: 74 years old
- More than half of these applicants have not had any previous works staged
- 10 applicants were shortlisted by a panel comprising of the Centre’s resident director Casey Lim, resident dramaturg Dr Robin Loon, and theatre veteran Dr KK Seet.
- The final 3 playwrights were selected after an interview on 28 June 2014 with the panel comprising of the Centre’s resident director Casey Lim, resident dramaturg Dr Robin Loon, and Nine Years Theatre’s Artistic Director, Nelson Chia.

## ANNEX B: CENTRE 42 PROGRAMMES



Centre 42's programmes are designed to achieve these three key objectives: **documentation, creation and promotion**. They are catered for writers, as well as for audiences who are interested in the process of new-text creation and curious about the rich heritage of local theatre and writing.

### **Boiler Room**

As the name suggests, the Boiler Room programme is the core where new works and artists are put through a year-long robust incubation and creation process for the development of the ideas and texts. The Open Call for the inaugural Boiler Room (Cycle 2014) opened from 7 April to 7 June 2014.

### **Living Room**

The Living Room is a series of lectures, talks and workshops covering a wide range of topics related to writing, text-based works, local theatre, art-making and many more. The series will cater to a wide range of art-makers and art-lovers.

### **The Vault**

The Vault safe-keeps Singapore works dating back to our early theatre years. This platform does not merely document the past but manifests as contemporary responses to these works presented at Centre 42 premises. The Centre invites artists and practitioners to respond critically and personally to canonical Singapore classics, lesser known pieces and rarities, reworks and adaptations, and cross-cultural and cross-genres works.

### **The Repository**

The Repository is an archival of all things related to Singapore theatre. This is an on-going research and documentation process accumulating information, visual and audio artefacts dating back to the 1960s. The Repository is currently under construction and will be ready for public use in 2015.

### **Citizens' Reviews**

Citizens' Reviews is a critical writing platform about public opinion on theatre events in Singapore by members of the public. These reviews will receive editorial support from the Centre 42 team, and showcased online.

### **The Basement Workshop**

The Basement Workshop aims to support Singapore-based independent artists by providing a working incubation environment in which to create text-based works. Artists can look forward to space support for their developmental processes. They will get extensive use of facilities at heavily subsidised rentals.

### **The Guest Room**

The Guest Room is specifically created for independent playwrights and directors with the aim of assessing/evaluating/showcasing drafts of new or reimagined works in an advanced rehearsal context. Centre 42 recognises the value of putting texts to the floor and here is where the Guest Room programme can help. Artists will be given 4 days of free usage of the Centre's facilities and a small production stipend. The only stipulation is that the fourth day of the free usage must be utilised for a public reading, presented to producers, presenters and/or members of the public.