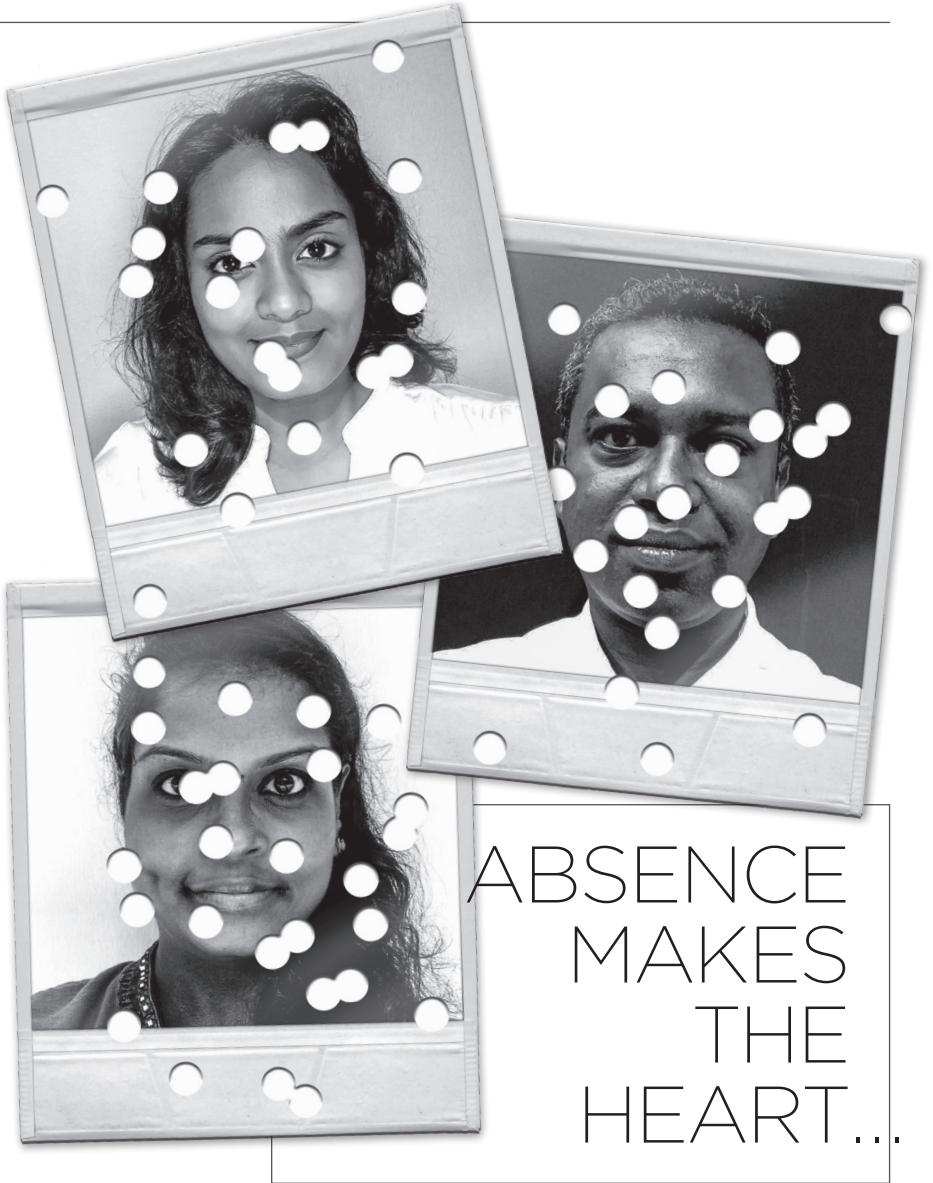


Centre 42 presents
THE VAULT



28 & 29 OCT 2017

CENTRE 42 BLACK BOX

In April 2016, I organised a roundtable to discuss the issue of 'Cultural Diversity in Theatre'. One of the issues surfaced was that it seemed increasingly difficult for actors of a minority background to land roles in plays. Casting calls — not just for theatre, but for films, television and commercials — seemed to be one of the few places where one could justify a hiring practice based on race. And invariably, it was either 'Chinese preferred' or 'Pan-Asian preferred'.

In May 2017, a controversy erupted when a freelance actor, Shrey Bhagrava, was asked to deliver his line with the direction 'can you be more Indian'? To many, this was the result of prolonged invisibility and under-representation of Indians in the media, such that what was expected of 'Indian-ness' was a superficial caricature.

Absence Makes The Heart... is an attempt to engage with issues of representation, especially of the Indian community, in Singapore English-language theatre. The solutions are all in plain sight: to cast one's net widely, to write more roles specifically for Indian actors, to cast Indian actors in roles where the ethnicity is not essential to the character. What needs to be challenged is this notion that only works that feature characters from the majority will sell. What needs to be challenged is this very idea of 'selling' a work. This excerpt of an interview with T. Sasitharan explains it well:

Absence makes the heart desperate. There is a kind of diminishment in the way we are thinking about ourselves, our place in Singapore. I am not just talking about the Indians, I am talking about all of us working in theatre. Because we are forced to look at the bottom line because of the reality of the market and we become much more selfish. We become much more self-serving, rather than servings the needs of the arts form, serving the needs of the craft.

ALFIAN SA'AT

ASWANI ASWATH | Writer

Aswani Aswath is a freelance writer who believes that stories provide a voice for the powerless and platforms inviting discussion and change. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) from the National University of Singapore, Aswani was a Writer-in-Residence for Buds Theatre Company. Her works have been staged in schools, Singapore Youth Festival competitions and community projects that were commissioned by the National Library Board and EmancipAsia. Aswani also writes for Tamil theatre and her recent scripts for Ravindran Drama Group include *Kadal + Karai* (for Pathay Nimidam) and *Pazhuppu* (for the Asian Youth Theatre Festival).



ALFIAN SA'AT | Dramaturg

Alfian Sa'at is a Resident Playwright with W!LD RICE. His published works include three collections of poetry, *One Fierce Hour*, *A History of Amnesia* and *The Invisible Manuscript*, a collection of short stories, *Corridor*, a collection of flash fiction, *Malay Sketches*, two collections of plays as well as the published play *Cooling Off Day*. Alfian has been nominated ten times for Best Original Script at the Life! Theatre Awards, eventually winning in 2005 for *Landmarks*, in 2010 for *Nadirah*, in 2013 for *Kakak Kau Punya Laki* (Your Sister's Husband) and in 2016 for *Hotel* (with Marcia Vanderstraaten).



KALAISELVI GRACE | Performer

Kalaiselvi Grace graduated from Intercultural Theatre Institute (ITI) in 2014. She is the Artistic Director of Ver Theatre and involves herself in acting, creating, directing and writing in different combinations for stage. Some of her works include *Mother I (2)*, *Stories and Songs from the Bow* for Esplanade's Feed Your Imaginations series, *Mother I: Amma Naan: Ibu Aku (1)* and *Meera's Adventure* series using puppets created from sarees. She also acts as Lathika in MediaCorp's TV drama, *Tanglin*. She hopes to create intercultural works and provide a platform for voices from minority and suppressed communities.



REBEKAH SANGEETHA DORAI | Performer

Rebekah Sangeetha Dorai is an actor, singer and voiceover artist. Rebekah has worked with W!LD RICE, The Necessary Stage, CAKE Theatrical Productions, Buds Theatre Company, as well as with Musical Theatre Live!. She has also written and composed songs for theatre productions, including Wajdi Maowad's *Scorched*, and *RAM* for the 2015 Asia Pacific Bureau Festival. She feels incredibly blessed to be able to work in theatre and desires to make this a lifelong career.



SIVAKUMAR PALAKRISHNAN | Performer

Sivakumar Palakrishnan is an actor who has worked in television, film and theatre. Some of his theatrical credits include roles in *The Kalinga Trilogy* (Mirror Theatre) and *We Are Like This Only!* (HuM Theatre). He has been nominated four times at the Pradhana Vizha, Vasantham Channel's Television awards, and has won it for his role in *Veethi Varai*. He is a cast member of Season 3 of *Tanglin*, Channel 5's long-running television series. Siva is most famous for his role in K Rajagopal's *A Yellow Bird*, which premiered at the International Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival in 2016.



Alfian discusses his team's process in creating this edition of the Vault, as well as their findings and hopes for a more diverse local theatre landscape.

Tell us about your research process.

Each actor had to read a series of plays from particular decades in search of the elusive Indian actor. I then asked them to suggest some excerpts that we could tackle in the production. They also interviewed Indian personalities and artists who have been quite prominent in the theatre scene, such as playwright Haresh Sharma, practitioner and educator T. Sasitharan, and actor and singer Jacintha Abisheganaden.

What did you learn from your research and from speaking with these practitioners?

That the pioneering plays were actually quite diverse in terms of minority representation. And that if we want to write Indian characters into our plays, we wouldn't be introducing a new thing – we would actually be reconnecting with our own historical tradition.

A key part of your Vault presentation is the “PKD test”, where the actors rate a series of play excerpts to indicate the active presence of Indian characters. Why did you decide to include this?

Because I want some kind of commentary on how the actors assess these roles. I want the audience to also get some kind of insight about what roles are considered nuanced and complex, and what are considered stock, and learn something from it.

What do you think Singapore's theatre community can do to bring more diversity to the stage?

I hope more playwrights will write about minority characters, and not do it in a tokenistic way. And there are ways to do it, even if they're not Indian – one way is to workshop and devise with actors. Another way is to do research – talk to people, and let them read and fact check the script. I also hope directors will take more risk in casting, especially for characters where their ethnicity is not foregrounded.



ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART... : THE EXHIBITION

28 OCT - 3 NOV | 11AM TO 6PM DAILY
CENTRE 42 FRONT COURTYARD

Absence Makes the Heart... : The Exhibition is an attempt to portray an alternate universe where some of Singapore English-language theatre's most iconic characters are played by actors of Indian ethnicity. These images aim to jar and disrupt, and perhaps draw attention to the shortage of substantial Indian roles in local English-language theatre.

THE PKD TEST

In *Absence Makes the Heart...*, the following plays are evaluated based on their representation of Indians using the Palakrishnan-Kalaiselvi-Dorai (PKD) Test. For a play to pass the PKD test:

- (a) it must have at least one Indian character;
- (b) the Indian character must not be used as a token or to fill up a quota; and
- (c) it must not perpetuate stereotypes.

For you, do these plays pass the PKD test?

(pass fail)

- MIMI FAN (1962) by Lim Chor Pee
- A WHITE ROSE AT MIDNIGHT (1964) by Lim Chor Pee
- ARE YOU THERE, SINGAPORE? (1974) by Robert Yeo
- ONE YEAR BACK HOME (1980) by Robert Yeo
- ARMY DAZE (1987) by Michael Chiang
- BEAUTY WORLD (1988) by Michael Chiang
- ROUND AND ROUND THE DINING TABLE (1988) by Ovidia Yu
- ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER (1992) by Robin Loon
- BUANG SUAY (2000) by Elangovan
- FLUSH (2002) by Elangovan
- TOP OF THE WORLD (1995) by Haresh Sharma
- BALEK KAMPONG (2011) by Haresh Sharma
- THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE SHOLAY (2011) by Shiv Tandan
- YOU ARE HERE (2015) by Pooja Nansi

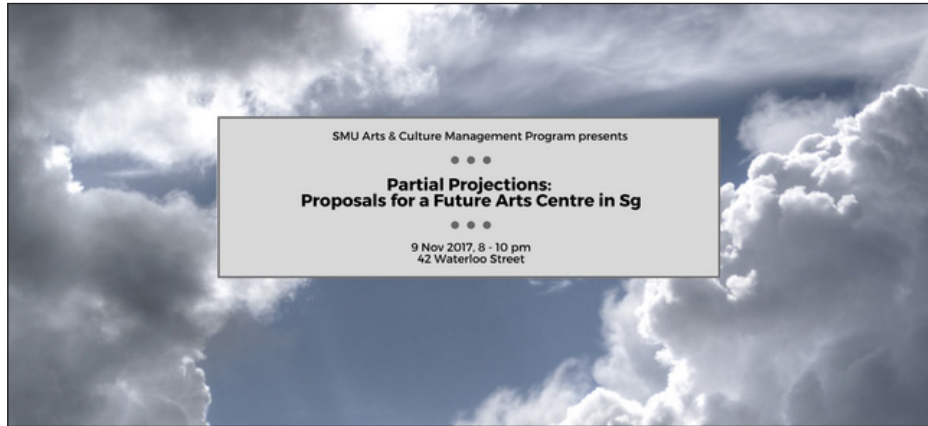
For more information about these plays, head to bit.ly/VAAbsence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The artists and Centre 42 would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the following individuals and groups for helping to make *Absence Makes the Heart...* — both presentation and exhibition — possible.

(In alphabetical order)

CHECKPOINT THEATRE
ELANGO VAN
HARESH SHARMA
IVAN HENG
JACINTHA ABISHEGANADEN
K. RAJAGOPAL
MICHAEL CHIANG
OVIDIA YU
POOJA NANSI
R. CHANDRAN
RANI MOORTHY
ROBERT YEO
ROBIN LOON
SHIV TANDAN
SINGAPORE REPERTORY THEATRE
T. SASITHARAN
TEATER EKAMATRA
THE ESTATE OF LIM CHOR PEE
THE NECESSARY STAGE
THE THEATRE PRACTICE
THEATREWORKS
W!LD RICE



**PARTIAL PROJECTIONS:
 PROPOSALS FOR A FUTURE ARTS CENTRE IN SG**
 9 NOV | 8PM
 CENTRE 42 BLACK BOX

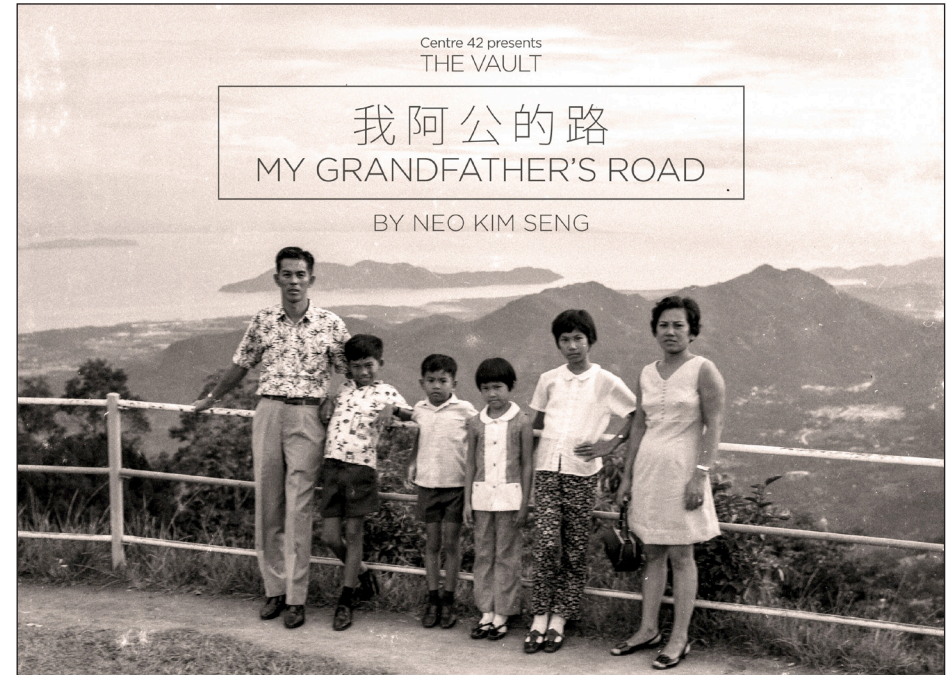
by The Arts and Culture Management Program, SMU
 co-hosted by Centre 42

Partial Projections is a modest showcase of four proposals for a future arts centre by advanced arts management students from the Singapore Management University (SMU).

Through a pitching session and outdoor exhibition, students will share their conceptual and strategic plans for a future arts centre in Singapore. They will present their vision, operative model and SWOT analysis of their respective proposals, which range from an online resource platform to a repurposed space for independent music.

Doors will open at 6.30pm for the outdoor exhibition, live music, and refreshments in the front courtyard. The presentation will begin at 8pm in the Black Box.

More information and registration at partialprojections.eventbrite.sg.



THE VAULT: MY GRANDFATHER'S ROAD
 23 & 24 NOV, 8PM | 25 NOV, 3PM & 8PM
 CENTRE 42 BLACK BOX

Independent producer and practitioner Neo Kim Seng revisits his 2015 work *My Grandfather's Road*, which was presented in Cake Theatrical Production's *Running with Strippers*. *My Grandfather's Road* is based on Kim Seng's memories of growing up on Neo Pee Teck Lane, the road named after his grandfather. In this edition of The Vault, Kim Seng explores the regional differences and adaptations of Cantonese. The work, a monologue, will be performed in Singaporean Cantonese by Gary Tang, and in Malaysian Cantonese by Tan Cher Kian.

Look out for more information and registration details at:
centre42.sg
facebook.com/centre42

Or join our mailing list at centre42.sg/maillinglist.

GIVE WHAT YOU CAN!

Centre 42 is a non-profit theatre development space. At Centre 42, we believe in:

- Advancing and expanding existing knowledge and understanding of the Singapore theatre scene.
- Providing independent artists with access to a conducive space to create new works, and resources to document their theatre-making processes.
- Educating audiences about the history of Singapore theatre in order to support the creation of new work in this ecosystem.

Since we opened our doors three years ago, we have grown to become a home for many independent artists and collectives, supported the development of new works – big and small – that were staged, and made accessible a digital archive of past theatre ephemera.



BEEN HOME TO

157

ARTISTS &
COLLECTIVES



SUPPORTED

48

NEW WORKS



ARCHIVED OVER

1,900

THEATRE ARTEFACTS
DATING BACK TO 1966

Only with continuous support from individuals, alongside government funding, can we carry on the work that we do and sustain an ecosystem for development of quality local works.

Donate via our fundraising platform at giving.sg/centre42 today.



THE VAULT

THE VAULT revisits and remembers Singapore works dating back to our early theatre years, refreshes them through the responses of artists and collaborators, and retells them in a contemporary manner.

PRESENTED BY



CENTRE 42