

Centre 42 presents
THE VAULT



DANCING THE GOOD, THE BAD
AND THE UGLY

24 FEBRUARY 2017 | 8PM | CENTRE 42 BLACK BOX

“ I chose to respond to Elangovan’s three banned plays — *Talaq*, *Smegma* and *Stoma* — because these plays contain many thorny and unresolved social issues. The plays are fast, furious, unapologetic, and apparently proved too much for some sections of local society. Their banning serves as a rather violent gesture to thwart engagement on the topics and ideas highlighted by the plays. Most of these topics are still very relevant to local society today.

Elangovan’s style was direct and, a lot of times, vulgar. But just because the plays were not served to us sugar-coated does not mean that they have no relevance or that we should avoid engaging with them.

During my residency, the scope of my research quickly became very broad. It soon became apparent that this residency will be the starting point of a rather long thread of artistic exploration. Tonight’s performance serves as an initial gesture to put elements of these banned plays back into the public performance space where they should have been.

Thanks: Centre 42, Alisa Ang, The Stage Connectionz, the CRR team.”

LEE MUN WAI is an independent dance artist in Singapore. He was a founding member of prominent dance company The Human Expression Dance Company (T.H.E), and performed with and choreographed for the company from 2008 to 2015. More recently, as an independent artist, he was a collaborator in the performance art work *I am LGB* at the Singapore International Festival of Arts 2016. Mun Wai is a 2014 recipient of National Arts Council’s Young Artist Award.

ABOUT THE TEXTS

ELANGO VAN has worn many hats in his varied career. He is best known as a playwright and poet who writes in both English and Tamil. His work often explores social injustices, and he was awarded the SEA Write Award in Bangkok, Thailand in 1997 for his bilingual literary contributions in Singapore. Elangovan is also the artistic director of Agni Kootthu [Theatre of Fire], and has been a literary editor, journalist, teacher, arts administrator and associate at the Centre for the Arts at the National University of Singapore.

Talaq – which means “divorce” – is a one-woman play about Nisha, a Muslim girl from India who suffers physical, sexual and emotional abuse at the hands of her much older Singaporean husband. Her cries for help, however, are drowned out by her husband’s family and relatives, and those within the community.

The piece was first staged in Tamil in 1998 and 1999, starring Nargis Banu, on whom the play was based. However, it was met with intense protests by religious groups when Agni Kootthu [Theatre of Fire] – a company headed by Elangovan and his wife S Thenmoli – attempted to stage it in English in 2000. *Talaq*’s public entertainment licence was ultimately denied.

Smegma comprises a series of ten short plays, each examining the many faces of power and exposing a different aspect of exploitation within society. Its title refers to the cheese-like secretions found in genitals, and some of the colourful characters in the play include a

ABOUT THE TEXTS

pregnant suicide bomber, a transsexual waiting for God at a train station, and an imprisoned ex-politician.

The play was due to make its debut performance by Agni Kootthu in 2006 and was initially granted a public entertainment licence. However, the Media Development Authority (MDA) decided to withdraw the licence the day before the show. According to MDA’s press release, it was because “the play portrays Muslims in a negative light”.

Stoma – which refers to a natural opening in the body – is about a disgraced former priest who was defrocked over alleged sex abuse. Over seven scenes, he undergoes a surreal, graphic process of confession to seek redemption.

Agni Kootthu was set to stage *Stoma* in 2013, but it was denied a public entertainment licence the week before its opening. MDA’s reason was that it contained “sexually explicit, blasphemous and offensive references and language”.

Read about each play in more detail at:
bit.ly/c42elangovanplays

In 2014, Math Paper Press published *Talaq*, *Smegma* and *Stoma* in a collection titled *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. The book is available for purchase tonight at the front-of-house, or online at booksactuallyshop.com (Price: S\$22.00)

Mun Wai began research and development for *The Vault* at Centre 42 half a year ago. In his own words, he shares some of the milestones throughout the process.

AUG -
NOV
2016

“This period was about opening up different research tracks from reading the three different plays. Very quickly, topics/themes such as censorship, women’s rights, social taboos and the limits of tolerance in a society became apparent.”

13
DEC
2016

“It was very challenging translating the socially inclined topics into dance. A workshop was held as part of the Choreographic Research Residency at Dance Nucleus. The workshop was very valuable in pointing out the weaknesses of my process to date.”

JAN -
FEB
2017

“In coming up with a response, I was trying to find a way to insert elements of the banned plays back into the public performance space. In crafting a response, I started focusing on the energy in the text. This energy could be translated into movement in the body. I was also looking for strategies to re-insert the text into the performance space. I found myself trying to access the different roles in these plays, trying to feed off the sensations whilst assuming those roles to drive my movement.”

24
FEB
2017

The Vault: Dancing the Good, the Bad and the Ugly is presented at Centre 42.

Centre 42 a non-profit arts organisation with charity status that is committed to the creation, documentation and promotion of text-based works for the Singapore stage. The Centre incubates original writing for production development, provides space for artists and new work creation, and is developing a functional archive documenting the histories and processes of Singapore theatre.

Upcoming at Centre 42:

19 MAR **The Vault: Becoming Mother**

30 MAR **In the Living Room with Juliana Lim**

5 APR **In the Living Room: Fundamentally Happy**

5 & 6 MAY **The Vault: Dialects & Dialectics**

For more information, stay tuned to [centre42.sg](mailto:info@centre42.sg)

Any comments or feedback on tonight’s Vault presentation? Please send it to info@centre42.sg

Exploring dance and text.

A year ago, three independent dance-makers were invited to respond to local play-texts, resulting in three very unique interpretations and presentations. Their research process, investigations and explorations varied with their practice, background and approach to the use of text in their work.

The first was *Distilling the Dance* by interdisciplinary dance artist Kiran Kumar, presented in July 2016 in response to spell#7's 2004 audio-tour *Desire Paths*.

Tonight's presentation *Dancing the Good, the Bad and the Ugly* by contemporary dancer Lee Mun Wai is the second of the series, focusing on Elangovan's plays.

Dance practitioners and researchers Dr. Nidya Shanthini Manokara and Jocelyn Chng round off this dance-focused series on 19 March 2017 with *Becoming Mother*, featuring the findings from their explorations of creation and creativity in the works of local playwrights Verena Tay, Ovidia Yu and Chong Tze Chien.



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

