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Presents**

**Feed Your  
Imagination**

# DON'T KNOW, DON'T CARE

by

**The Necessary Stage** (Singapore)

Presented by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay

**28 Jun – 1 Jul 2022, Tue – Fri**  
**Esplanade Theatre Studio**

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

The process of *Don't Know, Don't Care* was not much different from other works. Research involved reading articles and watching videos on hospice care, and interviewing nurses and other caregivers who had a lot of touching and poignant stories to share from their own experiences.

I came up with the title to highlight a general attitude that Singaporeans sometimes have – we don't want to know, and we don't really care. Such an attitude often rings true when we are faced with obstacles or situations that affect us adversely.

When there is illness in a family, everyone can be on edge. I wanted to show that communication is key when a family is undergoing such a crisis. Older people can learn from the young, as much as the young learns from the old.

**Haresh Sharma**

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**Playwright:** Haresh Sharma

**Director:** Alvin Tan

**Cast:** Julius Foo, Karen Tan and Ryan Ang

**Facilitators:** Ghazali Muzakir and Masturah Oli

**Production Stage Manager:** Marilyn Chew

**Assistant Stage Manager:** Anne Lee

**Project Manager:** Natasha Fathin

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*Don't Know, Don't Care* was originally commissioned by HCA Hospice Care Association, and presented by The Necessary Stage at various schools from 2012 to 2014.



# SYNOPSIS

*Don't Know, Don't Care* is an **interactive theatrical experience** that looks at a family trying to deal with terminal illness within the household.

Wrapped up in their own lives, the family members 'don't want to know', and prefer to leave the caregiving of a family member to strangers. Soon, they realise they have to know, and in turn, discover the importance of being there for each other.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

What is an interactive theatrical experience? What can you expect? As an audience member, you *can* and *should* get involved.

An **anti-play** will first be performed.

A few scenes will be selected for audience participation, which members of the audience may change towards a different **resolution**.

A facilitator will discuss the conflicts in these scenes to encourage the audience (*that's you!*) to offer possible alternatives.

An audience member will get to **intervene** by replacing a character in the scene and taking it to a brand new conclusion, working through the conflict identified and hopefully resolving it.



### WHAT'S THAT WORD?

#### **Anti-play:**

A play with a negative or unsatisfactory ending for the characters.

#### **Resolution:**

The action of solving a problem.

#### **Intervene:**

When an audience member actively participates and comes on stage to offer solutions or alternatives to the character's reactions.



## ACTIVITY 1: BEFORE THE SHOW

**Think about these questions and how it relates to your life.**

1. What is your parents' primary concern for you (e.g. academic achievement, health, service to the community)?  
Do they disallow you from doing something so that you can focus on what they consider as being more important?  
Do they have a reason for focussing on this aspect of your life?

2. How would you describe your parents' relationships with your grandparents?

3. Do your parents take care of your grandparents? If yes, what are some of their responsibilities?  
Do you actively take on some of these responsibilities too? If not, why?

4. What is your relationship with your grandparents like? Do you think there are some things that hinder you from having a closer relationship with them?



## ACTIVITY 2: WHO SAID WHAT

In *Don't Know, Don't Care*, the characters were confronted with an unfamiliar situation when a family member returned home from the hospital, ill and dying.

	a. Who said the following lines?	b. What do the lines reveal about what the character was thinking or feeling?	c. What do you think the character was struggling with at that moment?
1. Why don't we just get a maid?			
2. Mummy told me not to interfere. So I would open the door, let the nurse in and just go to my room. My gonggong needed more help. He needed more care.  Something I couldn't provide.			
3. This is not your problem. You have more important things to focus on.			
4. I know I am not well. I know I am sick. I spend so long at the hospital. In and out, in and out. I go for this test, that test. But when the doctor wants to talk to me, you say no. Talk to you. When I ask you what's wrong, you say nothing. Don't worry. Just rest. Watch TV. Have another pillow.			
5. I just need some co-operation. Is that too much to ask? I still have to work. I have to deal with my clients. I have to be the wife. I have to be the mother. I have to be the daughter. I have to be the nurse. I have to be smart. I have to operate equipment.			
6. Then tell me the truth. If I'm going to die, just tell me.			
7. Because in this family we don't talk about death and illness. We just deal with it.			



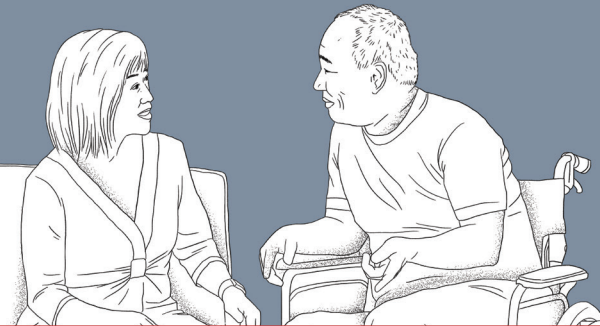
## ACTIVITY 3: STRUGGLING WITH CONFLICT

Recall the events in the anti-play.

1. What conflicts surfaced between the pair?
2. How did the conflicts affect their relationship?
3. What is lacking in their relationship that led to the conflicts?



a. Mother & Son



b. Daughter & Father



c. Grandson & Grandfather

Photo Credit: André Chong



## ACTIVITY 4: RESOLVING CONFLICT

Identify two conflicts that were not addressed or resolved during the show.

Put yourself in the shoes of one of the characters in each conflict. How would you deal with the situation differently? What would you say or do?

Conflict	Resolution
1.	As ..... I would ..... ..... .....
2.	As ..... I would ..... ..... .....





## ACTIVITY 5: REFLECTION

Think about these questions and how it relates to your life.

1. Do you identify with any of the characters in *Don't Know, Don't Care*? Who? Why?

2. In the play, Ryan (son) mentioned that what his grandfather needs is 'family care' rather than 'medical care'. What do you think are some needs the elderly have that people often overlook?

3. How can you foster empathy for your family members? What can you do to encourage and develop more empathy at home?

4. "In school, we have civics class, moral ed... sometimes there's a community programme where we go to a Home and clean the floor or paint the walls. But deep down... we've lost our natural instinct to care. To really care for one another. No, it's not funny. It's sad." – Ryan, *Don't Know, Don't Care*

i. Do you agree with Ryan that we have 'lost our instinct to care'?

ii. How do you think young people can be more involved in the care of the elderly beyond community involvement programmes organised by schools?



## DID YOU KNOW?

• The Necessary Stage (TNS), the theatre company responsible for *Don't Know, Don't Care*, has been around since 1987. However, the journey is not without its ups and downs. Read more about TNS' journey.



<https://bit.ly/2YbkqZP>

• Singapore celebrates the arts and the contributions of its artists and arts practitioners with the Cultural Medallion award. These two awards are considered the highest honour an arts practitioner in Singapore can receive. Both Haresh Sharma, the playwright of *Don't Know, Don't Care*, and Alvin Tan, the artistic director of The Necessary Stage, are Cultural Medallion recipients.

Read on to find out more about Haresh Sharma and Alvin Tan.

## Hear from the Playwright



### Haresh Sharma

Resident Playwright of TNS  
Born in 1965, Singapore  
- 1997 Young Artist Award recipient  
- 2015 Cultural Medallion recipient

*"I always feel that the most important thing is that you get an opportunity to stage your play. If nobody wants to do it, do it yourself."*

– Haresh Sharma

#### How did you get your start in theatre?

I started writing plays by accident. In 1987, when I was a first year undergraduate at the National University of Singapore studying English Language and Literature, I met Alvin Tan who had just started a drama group comprising other arts undergraduates – TNS. I signed up and got involved in all aspects of theatre-making – acting, backstage work, selling tickets around campus and most fun of all, watching rehearsals and acting improvisations.

In 1988, without fanfare, I wrote three short plays. I entered them in a competition and won a prize. Alvin then told me to write a play for TNS. An important ethos of the group back then, and which has lasted till today, was the focus on research and process. Because none of us were trained in theatre (there wasn't a theatre studies programme at the University back then), we decided to work together and be a collective resource for each project.

For example, we would share stories about our backgrounds, our different cultural sensibilities and so on. We would also create a lot of improvisations, what we called 'devising'. Devising meant everyone had a say, everyone could contribute in some form or other, through improvisations or research or feedback.

#### Was being in theatre something you had always wanted to do growing up?

I had always wanted to be a writer. I just didn't know what kind of writer. When I wrote my first play, I knew.

#### How would you describe your journey in the arts so far?

There will always be difficulties. Sometimes our plays hit a raw nerve and that make people uncomfortable. However, as we create theatre, we try to engage with our audience, our sponsors and the 'authorities'. Over these years, there have been high and low moments.

#### What are you proudest of as a theatre practitioner in Singapore?

That we are able to work full-time, as artists and arts managers, and that we are able to sustain a professional theatre company which consistently produces original work.

#### What does being a Cultural Medallion recipient mean to you and others around you?

It's a very proud achievement.

#### What would you say to those who want to pursue the arts as a career?

They should go for it. Get as much experience as possible, even when they are in school. Get involved in all aspects of their discipline, whether onstage or backstage. Apply for internships, apprenticeships and mentorship programmes. Get together with their friends and organise arts events for their families, for the public. Just find opportunities to hone their craft and get experience.

## Hear from the Artistic Director



### Alvin Tan

Theatre Director, Founder and Artistic Director of TNS  
Born in 1963, Singapore  
- 1998 Young Artist Award recipient  
- 2014 Cultural Medallion recipient

***"The advice I would give young artists is that, to follow your instinct and to follow your instinct long enough so that it will bear fruit after you've given it its due process."***  
- Alvin Tan

#### How did you get your start in theatre?

I got started in 1987 when a friend convinced me to take part in a University campus Drama Festival and we won the Outstanding Production Award. Back then, I was loving my English Literature and Sociology majors. The National University of Singapore (NUS) Arts and Social Sciences did not offer Theatre Studies then. Both these subjects fuelled my early interests in the theatre and I started TNS with a vision to explore Singaporean languages, identities, images, and cultural histories which soon developed into a multicultural approach to creating new works. So all in all, I have been involved in theatre for 31 years.

However, if you wish to consider my love for Literature as part of my arts development, then it started when I was 13 years old in 1976. That would then be a total of 42 years.

When I was in my second year at NUS in 1987, we staged many plays at Lecture Theatre 13 which had a stage, and when we graduated, we continued staging works at the DBS Lunchtime and Shell Lunchtime Performance (at the Shell Theatre). These venues

helped us transition TNS from a campus-based theatre group to a full-fledged professional theatre company.

#### Was being in theatre something you had always wanted to do growing up?

I was exploring being a teacher. When I left NUS, I took a gap year and did relief teaching for a year before I joined the Institute of Education to secure my Diploma in Education. I was teaching the Gifted Programme at Raffles Institution but left to join TNS as its Artistic Director, directing new Singaporean plays full-time.

When I was young, I had wanted to be a film director or a teacher. It was only at NUS that I started exploring theatre and fell in love with the form. I tried acting and writing but realised that I love directing most, especially new works. I love developing new plays and collaborating with other theatre practitioners/artists. Since then, there was no turning back.

#### How would you describe your journey in the arts so far?

In 1994, we were framed as Marxists for our forum theatre work, and Professor Tommy Koh, the then Chairman of National Arts Council (NAC) wrote a letter to the Forum Page defending us and saving us from folding up. Our journey has been chequered with challenges with censors and sometimes, the authorities, because some of our socially-engaged works have been pushing the envelope.

We often negotiate with the powers, working towards a nation that can be comfortable including dissenting voices in our development and progress; that people who are critical do not translate to them not caring for the country. On the contrary, most do care, and that is why they have chosen to speak out.

So far my journey has been both meaningful and fruitful. We have seen how much the arts has grown in Singapore. Although it has not been smooth sailing, it has been supported well during its nascent stages. Now, I would say more money should be invested in the arts as it is growing and would need more substantial support.

#### What are you proudest of as a theatre practitioner in Singapore?

I would say the diversity that is intrinsic to our cultural history and our social make-up. Unlike the other Asian

countries, we do not have a mother culture. We are made up of migrants who came here a long time ago. Through inter-marriages and intercultural interactions, there are lots of cross-cultural fusion in our food, languages, and cultural sensibilities from which emerge unique cultural manifestations. As a theatre practitioner, there is so much of richness we can explore and mine for our work. It enriches our processes, our exchanges and informs our innovations, artistic or otherwise. That is what I am proudest of living and practising in Singapore. It is something I don't find elsewhere in the world, at least not what I can call ours.

#### What does being a Cultural Medallion recipient mean to you and others around you?

It is a good start to recognising the value and contribution of the artist in building social cohesion. People can witness how much the country respects and values its artists. Cultural Medallion recipients must continue to carry the torch and be the example of citizens who work to push the envelope. Exploration and innovation must continue and continue with confidence with more support from the State since the artist has been recognised and selected for his or her talent.

#### What would you say to those who want to pursue the arts as a career and why should the arts be a part of everyone's lives?

Be ready to pay the price tag of your idealism. If you want to go into the arts, make your defence. No one can do it except yourself. Ask yourself how much you want to do this and find out if you have the stamina to see it through. How much do you love the arts or what are you doing to fight against the odds and jump the hurdles to get to your goals? How do you negotiate between what others expect of you and what you want to pursue?

The arts is always important to any human being. It is good for us to develop self-awareness, be critical-minded and constantly ask questions. Arts help us to not become complacent. It keeps us alert and creates opportunities to engage and bridge. Even if you do not end up as an artist or an arts practitioner, the arts will always be important to you living your lives as full human beings.



## SCAN & READ



**The Straits Times:  
Going all out to help  
young caregivers**

<https://bit.ly/2XilooG>



**Support for caregivers  
from TOUCH  
Community Services**

[www.caregivers.org.sg](http://www.caregivers.org.sg)



**The nursing home  
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