



**Esplanade
Presents**

The Studios



ACTING MAD

By The Necessary Stage

An Esplanade Commission



Photo Credit: Tuckys Photography

About Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay

Esplanade is Singapore's national performing arts centre. It hosts a year-round line-up of about 3,500 live performances and activities presented by Esplanade, its partners and hirers. Esplanade also brings the arts virtually to audiences in Singapore and beyond, through its diverse range of digital programmes on *Esplanade Offstage*, an all-access backstage pass to the performing arts and guide to Singapore and Asian arts and culture, with videos, podcasts, articles, quizzes and resources.

As an arts centre for everyone, Esplanade also creates opportunities for seniors, youth, children and underserved communities to experience the arts. More than 70% of the shows that take place each year at the centre are free for all to enjoy.

The centre works in close partnership with local, regional and international artists to develop artistic capabilities and content, push artistic boundaries and engage audiences. Esplanade supports the creation of artistic content by commissioning and producing new Singapore and Asian work for the international stage. It also develops technical capabilities for the industry nationally.

Turning 20 in 2022, Esplanade marks the occasion with a year-long celebration themed *20 and Beyond: Keeping the Lights On*. In addition to the presentations of its year-long festivals, programme series, and special initiatives and events, there will also be a season of new works by Singapore and Asian artists specially commissioned for the arts centre's 20th anniversary and official opening of its newest venue, Singtel Waterfront Theatre.

Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay is operated by The Esplanade Co Ltd (TECL), which is a not-for-profit organisation, a registered Charity and an Institution of a Public Character. The Charity Council awarded TECL the Charity Governance Award – Special Commendation for Clarity of Strategy in 2016, and the Charity Transparency Award for four consecutive years since 2016. Esplanade is Singapore's first Dementia-Friendly Arts Venue and a certified Dementia Go-To Point, as well as a Guide-dog Friendly centre.

TECL receives funding support from Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and its Community Programmes are supported by Tote Board Family, comprising Tote Board, Singapore Pools and Singapore Turf Club.

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Programmer's Message

Over the last 19 years, Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay's *The Studios* has been a space for inspiration, innovation and imagination. We have presented an eclectic collection of more than 160 productions that have asked artists and audiences to reconsider possibilities in contemporary theatre and performance.

This is the final year of *The Studios* in the format we are familiar with. The opening of Esplanade's new Singtel Waterfront Theatre later this year has given this platform the opportunity and space to evolve from 2023 onwards, and we look forward to sharing more about a new iteration of *The Studios* in time. What will continue is our commitment to enabling and collaborating with performance and theatre-makers to create new work and revisit past creations for today.

In this final season of this iteration, *The Studios* is very much influenced by the circumstances of the recent past. What have we learnt in the last two years operating under pandemic conditions? How have we paused to take stock of our *modus operandi*? And what is our place in this strange “new” world that feels so familiar?

In mulling over these questions, we found our biological nervous system to be a fitting metaphor for society. Much like the way our nervous systems make sense of environmental externalities and transmit information back and forth, enabling each organ to perform their physical, mental and emotional functions, society is a network of inextricably linked individuals and groups who must work together to respond to the norms and pressures that govern our lives. These attempts to make connections and commune with one another determine our individual and collective successes. Inevitably, however, system overloads occur. We then find ourselves reaching for temporary coping mechanisms instead of solutions that require constant, concerted effort: care for oneself and more importantly, care for each other.

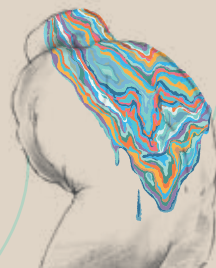
This concept of *collective care* proposes that the well-being of an individual or community is the shared responsibility of all who belong to it. Theatre can be construed as an act of collective care as we come together and share a couple of hours, or even a moment of epiphany. It certainly is an entry point for conversations surrounding themes such as family, love, mental health, grief, ageing, self- and collective care; even healing. The commissioned productions and supporting programmes of this season all illustrate this in their own unique ways. For this, *The Studios* team is ever grateful to have collaborators and compatriots in Edith Podesta and her team, The Necessary Stage, Teater Ekamatra and Checkpoint Theatre, as well as Alecia Neo and Natalia Tan.

Some of you may already unconsciously practise collective care, but in this season, we invite everyone to be intentional in this exploration of ways in which we may better care for ourselves and others. It is our hope that these programmes help you perceive refreshing new ways of living and relating.

Take care, and thank you for being with us.

Vanessa Loh

Programmer, The Esplanade Co Ltd



Synopsis

"This is not so much a play about actors with mental health issues and an audience that is watching them, but one that unites everyone in the theatre over that feeling of a world chewing you up and spitting you out. We are the source of each other's comfort."

—Bakchormeeboy.com

Mental illness does not discriminate. Although there is more access to information, many still suffer silently or face stigma when they come out with their illness. What is this experience like for actors in Singapore? Are they expected to just deal with their mental health issues because they are seen as 'tortured artists' and 'so full of drama'?

As part of The Necessary Stage's exploratory platform, The Orange Production in 2019, the company first presented the work-in-progress showing of *Acting Mad*, a verbatim play based on interviews with 20 actors who have experienced or are going through mental health issues.

This iteration, commissioned by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay for *The Studios 2022*, incorporates new interview texts and testimonies, as well as actors' responses to the pandemic and its impact on them.

Can sharing our stories, and creating theatre, be a form of solace and support?

(1hr 30mins, no intermission)

Advisory 16:

Mature themes and coarse language. Recommended for 16 years and above.

Director's Message

It's not an exaggeration to say that 'mental health', 'wellness' and 'self-care' are today's buzzwords. We are told to have 'me' time and 'work-life balance'. In fact, it's fashionable once again to prioritise care.

This is a far cry from the past when our value was measured by how much time we spend at work and how much we accomplish. After all, not long ago, one of our mascots was Teamy the Productivity Bee. The young were not spared this ethos either. We were judged not just on how well we did in our exams, but also what schools we went to and even what subjects we took.

Can an overnight change of focus lead to a whole paradigm shift? That depends. How much do we truly value the well-being of individuals and communities? Or are these just more buzzwords which we are paying lip service to?

Do students feel safe and supported in their school environment? Do they have opportunities to share how they feel? Are school leaders willing to talk about mental health issues with their students? Or do they prefer to sweep these matters under the carpet?

What about the public at large? Can we, as a society, re-evaluate the meaning of success? Are we only successful if we work in certain industries, or achieve a certain level of income, or own expensive property, or have a nuclear family?

What happens when we are part of a single-parent family or don't earn a high salary? What happens if we are disabled? Are we seen as failures, useless to society? Should we stop having aspirations, passions and life goals?

It's time to re-focus our values as a society, starting with our mental health and well-being. Prioritise mental health education and honest conversations—in our schools, our communities and even our families. When we learn, when we are empowered, we become each other's allies and support structures. We can affect change and remove, once and for all, the negativity surrounding mental illness.

The process of working on *Acting Mad*, from 2019 until now, has been life-changing. We interviewed 20 actors, who shared their stories so generously. They trusted us with their pain and their joy, their frustrations and their hopes. It has been an honour and a huge responsibility to re-tell their stories in this production.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the production for their hard work and commitment to the play and its issues. My sincere thanks to Esplanade for putting together a season that is relevant and timely. My deepest gratitude to the 20 actors who were interviewed, and whose words created this play.

In my play *Off Centre*, the protagonist Vinod is going through a downward spiral because of his illness. He tells his friend Saloma: “Ever since I was born I was destined to be the best. And I was. In school, at home... I was the best, the most competitive... And now this has happened. And I don't want to be part of the rat race anymore. But I don't know how. Because I'm still a rat. What do you do with a mentally ill rat?”

SALOMA: Vinod, we cannot run, we can walk. You... you don't want to walk also!

VINOD: I don't know how to walk! I've only been taught how to run.

It is my hope that we stop living life as a race. May we walk alongside each other, even if we have to learn how to walk, even if we have to help each other up when we fall. This is our journey together. There is no finishing line.

Haresh Sharma

Writer and Director

THE COMPASSIONATE STAGE

Unpacking mental health through theatre

By Clarissa Oon

I was 18 when a friend from my theatre studies class told me how a play he had just watched, on battling mental illness and all the prejudices surrounding it, was the “best piece of theatre he had seen”. Looking back on that remark from the distance of middle age, I understand it, not literally—how could we have seen enough then to really know what “best” means—but that he had experienced something life-changing and transformative.

Fourteen years later, I saw that very play, *Off Centre* by Singapore’s The Necessary Stage, and felt its power. From fieldwork with mental health patients and professionals and through improvised dialogue created by playwright Haresh Sharma, director Alvin Tan and the cast, it drew you into the interior lives of its fictional characters and refused to allow you to look away. Protagonists Vinod and Saloma, who grapple with schizophrenia and depression, form a bond that is tender and affecting in a very innocent, ‘90s way—he makes late-night song dedications to her on the radio using fake names known only to them—even as they are shut out by a world that continues to measure individuals through their productivity and achievements. The winding journey of the play’s reception only deepened its impact, from having its funding in 1993 withdrawn by commissioning body the Ministry of Health for not dialling down on what their spokesperson called a “prejudiced view of mental disorder”, to becoming the first Singaporean play in 2007 to be selected by the Ministry of Education as a GCE ‘O’ and ‘N’ Level literature text.

As a tentpole work from a company known for devising socially-conscious theatre through research and improvisation, *Off Centre* felt to me, as someone who has written about theatre for over two decades, as the definitive Singapore work on mental illness. So it surprised me, when I went to The Necessary Stage’s online archives and watched a video-on-demand recording of the 2019 work-in-progress showing of *Acting Mad*, that a relatively recent work going over similar terrain could be as harrowing and revealing of gaps in how we understand and care for those with precarious mental states.

A new and updated iteration of *Acting Mad* will be staged from 25-28 August, commissioned for Esplanade’s *The Studios* 2022. In terms of form, it is different from *Off Centre* in that it’s a verbatim play incorporating text from interviews with 20 unidentified Singapore actors who have wrestled with mental health issues. It reflects on one particular industry—theatre—and its characters and situations are composites of what actual people have gone through. The perspective of what it is like to live with and care for someone with mental illness figures more strongly than in *Off Centre*. Yet both plays are contiguous in the huge gulf between those whose mental well-being is fraying and the people around them, and the crippling sense of isolation and even abuse they face.

It got me asking: Why? Why aren’t more people better sensitised towards mental health issues, given its greater visibility with the pandemic, representation in popular culture through movies such as *Silver Linings Playbook* and TV series like HBO’s *Sharp Objects*, and more open discussion of it in public fora such as workplaces, schools and the media? Perhaps such awareness is only skin deep, making us feel progressive but not actually coming to terms with how these conditions play out in real life. What has and hasn’t changed in 30 years, which *Acting Mad* lays bare?

Mainstream yet no less misunderstood

I talk to Haresh, who is both writer and director for *Acting Mad*, about how the vocabulary around the subject may have gotten more refined—we now have words in common currency like “triggers”, “panic attacks”, “self harm” and “suicidal ideation” to describe specific aspects of that vast and debilitating condition that is mental illness. When *Off Centre* was created in 1993, there were the medical words like “schizophrenia”, the derogatory slang like “xiao”, “cuckoo” and “crazy”, and hardly anything in between.

One side effect of contemporary “wokeness”, however, is that it alienates those who only see the words as just that, or “a generational thing”. Haresh recalls how one of his interviewees for *Acting Mad* mentioned they had gone to see a doctor and “discovered they had generalised anxiety disorder. And when I talked to some people about it, they just scoffed at it. They said, ‘like that everything also anxiety one, I also don’t want to work (because of) anxiety’.”

It is difficult to grasp the self-flagellating complexity of mental illness. Haresh points out that “it’s not one thing but many things”, and that it remains extremely difficult for an actor or anyone with mental health conditions to talk about what they are going through. Another person “might just think, you look fine, why can’t you just come to rehearsal? Whereas the complexity is that sometimes people can’t even get out of bed, or sometimes the negative voice is so strong and they beat themselves up over it, to the point of not being able to do anything”.

There are various ways to approach verbatim theatre, a form which Haresh as resident playwright of The Necessary Stage has explored selectively since the late 1990s. His approach is to balance fidelity to the interview transcripts with the freedom to edit and restructure. For *Acting Mad*, he says, “what’s interesting is that you’re asking 20 different people more or less similar questions. And after a while, you see overlaps. Those points of views that are overlapping are the ones that will get into the script more than other points because that means those are the more serious kind of issues”.

For the play’s latest iteration, Haresh spoke to seven of the original 20 interviewees again to get their perspectives on the last two years, when Covid-19 put a pause on live performances and had a major impact on mental well-being for so many, not just those in theatre. Statistics like these, widely reported in the media, are sobering: a 2021 survey of 1,000 Singaporeans by a marketing communications agency found that nearly four in 10 had considered suicide at some point, with 13 per cent thinking about it at least once a week.

The fact that mental health as a topic has gone mainstream does not make it easier to understand, says Haresh, who has worked closely with social workers and counsellors for the various restagings of *Off Centre* (the most recent was in 2019) and now *Acting Mad*. He explains: “To me, it feels as if it has become more confusing in the sense that a distinction needs to be made between people who have mental health issues and others who are going through stuff. Some people maybe got laid off, some may have to transition jobs. Some people will be dealing with the stress of Covid, and need support for that. But it’s not the same as people who are clinically depressed or who have to take medication, and those people also need help. We cannot just paint them with the same colour.”

Making common spaces safer and more inclusive

When we think about the fact that suicide was only decriminalised in Singapore in 2019, it's all the more important to have safe spaces to talk openly yet constructively about such a fraught and difficult topic as mental health. Social media, which was not available to the Vinods and Salomas in the world of *Off Centre*, has certainly amplified their voices but is far from a safe space, as at least one scene in *Acting Mad* makes clear.

In an email interview with me, mental health advocate Porsche Poh, counsellor and executive director of the charity Silver Ribbon (Singapore), highlights a recent viral video where a woman sporting a skincare face mask was filmed outside an MRT station in a confrontation with two livestreamers. Even though some commenters pointed out the insensitivity of uploading a video of someone who clearly had mental health issues, it spawned parodies such as a TikTok user adopting the original audio of the woman's voice to promote his products. Says Porsche: "A few people including me spoke up, and a number of his followers commented that his clip was funny and accused us of being sensitive. My message to this user was – 'Be kind. You wouldn't have done this if she is your loved one.'" Social media has already come under fire in other areas, with platforms having to tighten their algorithms to protect the young from content glamourising self-harm and suicide. What about guidelines to protect the interest of persons with mental health conditions by preventing anyone from recording and sharing videos of their behaviour, says Porsche.

As an environment which is more controlled and intimate but also participatory, live theatre has been undergoing its own soul-searching about how to make a safe space safer, and to cater to the needs of vulnerable audience members. For the upcoming run of *Acting Mad*, The Necessary Stage, Esplanade and Silver Ribbon are working together to have trained first responders on standby to help audience members who need support processing the work's difficult issues before, during and after the play at the Esplanade Theatre Studio. A calming space will be set up just outside the venue for these individuals to decompress.

The production will also use open captioning, where the text of dialogue and spoken sounds are projected in a way that is integrated with the set design, to give a fuller experience to audiences who are deaf or hard of hearing. This is part of a move towards greater accessibility in theatre in Singapore and elsewhere. An earlier production in *The Studios 2022* season, *Inconsequential Goddess*, had sign language interpretation but Haresh says this was logistically difficult to do for *Acting Mad*, as the text is spoken by four different actors compared to only one for writer-performer Edith Podesta's *Inconsequential Goddess*.

Edith is also the choreographer for *Acting Mad*. To break the talkiness of the earlier version, the new iteration has a segment where the text is projected rather than spoken, while the actors perform a series of movements, as a kind of gestural vocabulary evoking what everyday life and its sensations might be like for those with mental health issues. In a rehearsal at The Necessary Stage's premises at Paya Lebar, an industrial-style space the size of a black box theatre, I watch actors Ghafir Akbar, Karen Tan, Masturah Oli and Tan Guo Lian Sutton as they study a video of the different gestures, numbered and filmed by Edith from each of their improvisations. These form the basis of the choreography, to be committed to muscle memory. The mood is focused and respectful; as Karen explains to the other actors the nuances of some the gestures she devised—one where her body dissolves into spasms, or another where it looks like she is tying a plastic bag around her neck and tightening it like a noose—there are no wisecracks, no clowning around, only questions and observations.

Haresh says that as a director, he does his best to create a rehearsal space that is sensitive to the needs of its members as well as the topic at hand. For *Acting Mad*, this ranged from telling the actors to be careful about the kinds of jokes they made, to creating an environment where they looked out for one another. “Previously, in rehearsals, we would be very product-oriented, we would get upset when people are late.” In recent years, he has devoted more attention to creating an environment where people feel good working with one another. Actress Masturah, whom everyone calls Mas, adds that because the production has potentially distressing content on sexual abuse, suicide and self-harm, the actors make sure that when they stop rehearsals for lunch, or after wrapping up at the end of each day, they take themselves out of their roles and check in on each other’s feelings.

‘Where else can we talk about it?’

To me, if *Off Centre* was a commentary on how Singapore society treats those on the margins, *Acting Mad* is more of a self-reflexive work about how theatre is the one place where people have the license to admit their vulnerability, but is also a space that can be very judgemental. This stress of putting yourself out there all the time, relatable to those in other professions, affects those who wrestle with their mental health.

The theatre space remains critical at a time where it is still hard to have an in-depth conversation on mental health, one which doesn’t sugarcoat its impact on individuals and those around them. Says Haresh: “You know, an advertisement on TV is not going to do it. A Zoom with your MP is not going to do it.” And even though schools were shaken by an incident in July 2021 when a River Valley High School student with mental health issues allegedly killed another student, Haresh says “a lot of schools, I find out, are not willing to talk in a deeper way about issues like this because they don’t want to their students to be adversely affected”.

Over the years, the playwright has given many talks on *Off Centre* in schools. A teacher friend of his wanted to take students to watch *Acting Mad*. “But the higher-ups said no, because they don’t want the students to be triggered. So their understanding is, you watch a play about mental illness, you will be triggered and that’s going to be bad for you.”

“Whereas our understanding is, you watch a play, we will take care of you even if you are triggered, but at least you can get a chance to talk about it, and find out more about it.”

Masturah, who has been in both the 2019 and 2022 productions of *Acting Mad*, says the experience has made her look at her peers in the theatre community with more compassion and gratitude. She teaches drama in schools and is co-artistic director of Buds Theatre Company, a youth drama group.

Over Zoom, she tells me: “Because I’m young and sort of fresh—I graduated not too long ago—in the beginning I was like, ooh actors, I can’t wait to work with them. But then these are all real people; as you understand the sort of things they’ve been through, it changed my perception for the better.”

During the play’s first iteration, a theatre practitioner she didn’t know personally came up to her after the performance, gave her a big hug and whispered softly into her ear, “That was me. That was my story.” Masturah had portrayed something she went through—they went out for dinner afterwards “and she just told me everything”.

Ultimately, what is put under the spotlight is our own capacity to care for others. The actress says: “There is a line in the play about how people can be so toxic. It spreads fast, the industry is so small. So I think one thing I've learned is to be genuinely interested in finding out about another person because everybody has issues—if only we all can just be a listening ear and be more empathetic.”

This essay was originally published on Esplanade Offstage (<http://esplanade.com/offstage>), a growing repository of videos, stories, podcasts and resources about the performing arts and culture in Singapore and Asia.

Haresh Sharma

Writer and Director

Haresh has been the Resident Playwright of The Necessary Stage since 1990. He was awarded the Cultural Medallion in 2015. To date, he has written more than 120 plays which have been staged in over 20 cities. His play, *Off Centre*, was selected by the Ministry of Education as a Literature text for GCE N- and O-Levels.

Haresh has 13 publications of his plays, including *Trilogy*, *Shorts 1*, *Shorts 2*, *Don't Forget to Remember Me* and *Abuse Suxxx!!!* and Other Plays. His works have been translated into Malay, Mandarin, Greek and Italian. He was awarded Best Original Script for *Fundamentally Happy*, *Good People* and *Gemuk Girls* at the 2007, 2008 and 2009 The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards respectively. Most recently in 2021, Haresh published *Reading the Room: A Playwright's Devising Journey*, which details his devising process developed over his career at TNS. Haresh also had the honour of having a selection of his works featured at the first playwright-centred season of *The Studios* by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay in 2017.

He has participated in several writers' festivals including the inaugural Singapore Literature Festival in New York (2014), New Delhi World Book Fair (2015), Ubud Writers and Readers Festival (2015), Hong Kong Literary Festival (2015) and Neilson Hays Bangkok Literature Festival (2019).

Haresh is the first non-American to be awarded the prestigious Goldberg Master Playwright by New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in 2011. In 2014, he was conferred the Southeast Asian Writers (or S.E.A. Write) Award (Singapore), which recognises and honours literary excellence in the ASEAN region.

Deonn Yang

Assistant Director

Deonn is a freelance actor and drama instructor, born and raised in Singapore. She graduated from LASALLE College of Arts in 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts (First Class Hons) in Acting. As an actor, Deonn has been a part of Esplanade's *PLAYtime!* (2017 and 2021), Esplanade's *Huayi – Chinese Festival of Arts* (2020), M1 Singapore Fringe Festivals (2017 and 2018) and Singapore International Festival of Arts (2015). Her notable theatre credits include *Straight Acting* with Wild Rice, and *Tanah•Air 水•土* with Drama Box.

Deonn has been coaching at two pre-tertiary institutions since 2017 and has directed several full-length productions as well as original productions with them. As a theatre-maker, Deonn has worked with The Necessary Stage and Haresh Sharma on several occasions, with the first being TNS' inaugural The Orange Production in 2017 when Haresh directed Nabilah Said's *Drip*. Since then, she has been trying to sneak in any opportunity she can to learn from Haresh. She is therefore very excited to work with Haresh again and hopes to keep learning and improving as a director and theatre-maker.

Deonn is a core member of Playwrights' Commune, where she has been working on honing her craft as a playwright. She is interested in people and their stories, and always having a good laugh.

Ghafir Akbar

Actor

Ghafir is a Malaysian actor, last seen in the virtual international collaboration of *Who's There?* (The Transit Ensemble/New Ohio Theater, New York). Selected Singapore credits include *Feed Your Imagination: Off Centre*, *Civilised* and *Those Who Can't, Teach* (The Necessary Stage); *HOTEL*, *Merdeka*, *Another Country*, *Public Enemy* (Wild Rice); *Rubber Girl on the Loose*, *Being Haresh Sharma*, *Temple* and *Medea* (Cake Theatrical Productions); *Lifespan of a Fact*, *Guards at the Taj* and *Disgraced* (Singapore Repertory Theatre); *Lord of the Flies* (Blank Space Theatre); *The Good, The Bad, and the Sholay* (Checkpoint Theatre). Malaysian credits include *Raj and the End of Tragedy* (Cake Theatrical/Instant Café), *The Morning After*, *Gold Rain* and *Hailstones*, *White Rabbit Red Rabbit*, *The Baltimore Waltz* and *Gross Indecency* (Instant Café); *Nama Kamu Atas Perahu* (Manifesto Poetico); *7-10* (Five Arts Centre); and *Hamlet* (Actors Studio).

He is the co-author and director of the recent US-Malaysia collaboration, *How To Be Alone* (DPAC). Other directing credits: *Armour & Skin 2019* (Hands Percussion/Gamelan Yuganada/George Town Festival); the award-winning *The Language Archive* (PH7 Productions); *Ombak!* and *Bites of Delights* (Rhythm in Bronze); *Cinta Sang Arnab* (Kakiseni Arts Festival); and *This is Our Youth* (York Arena Theatre). He was the Associate Director for Enfiniti Productions' blockbuster musical: *OlaBola The Musical* at Istana Budaya in 2018.

Ghafir received his Master of Fine Arts in Acting from the Asolo Conservatory (Florida State University) and a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Performance from Western Michigan University.

Karen Tan

Actor

Acting Mad is Karen's 14th production with The Necessary Stage.

Masturah Oli

Actor

Masturah Oli is an actor, host, educator and theatre-maker. She graduated with BA (Hons) in Theatre Arts from Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, validated by the University of Essex (East 15 Acting School). She was awarded Best Graduate and represented her cohort as Valedictorian. Masturah was also a recipient of the MENDAKI Special Achievement Award for Excellence (SAAE), Anugerah MENDAKI Award (2017) and the SINDA Excellence Award (2017).

Some of her roles in theatre include: *Opposition* (The Necessary Stage & Drama Box, 2022), *Can Change* (The Necessary Stage, 2021), *Unsolicited Advice* From my Ex (Bored Whale Theatre, 2021), *Anak Melayu* (Teater Kami, 2019), *Rubber Girl on the Loose* (Cake Theatre, 2019), *Step Outta Line* (M1 Fringe Festival, 2018), *Breathless: The Mixtape* (Buds Theatre, 2017) and *Pursuant: The Musical* (Singapore Lyric Opera, 2013).

Masturah was recently appointed as Artistic Director of Buds Theatre Company, a fringe theatre company that she has been a part of since 2011. She is currently the Festival Director of The Asian Youth Theatre Festival, the largest festival of its kind across Asia. She believes in using theatre to bridge cultures and is constantly building new working relationships across the world.

Tan Guo Lian Sutton

Actor

Tan Guo Lian Sutton is a graduate of the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Acting, and Master in Arts Pedagogy and Practice programmes at LASALLE College of the Arts. As a trained martial artist, he constantly seeks to merge his talents to tell stories in varied and engaging ways. Lian is a core-member of theatre collective, Dark Matter Theatrics and founder of Nusantara Theatrical Combat. Selected theatre credits include *Temple*, and *Electra* directed by Natalie Hennemig, *2 Houses* by Lim Yu-Beng, *Tanah•Air* 水土. directed by Kok Heng Leun, and *Can Change* directed by Alvin Tan.

Edith Podesta

Choreographer

Edith Podesta is a theatre-maker, actor, and choreographer. She studied Acting and Movement Studies at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), and holds a Master of Arts Fine Arts from LASALLE College of the Arts. Edith is currently Associate Artistic Director of Young & Wild—a division of Wild Rice.

Her previous choreographic work includes: *The Immortal Sole* commissioned by the M1 Singapore Fringe Festival, *Indices Of Vanishment* for RAW Moves, *Dog Woman; Sleeping On Her Owner's Coat* for LASALLE College of the Arts; *Jazz In The Domain* (Preservation Hall Jazz Band) at the Sydney Festival; *MTV Australian Music Awards* (Chingy, Simple Plan and Grinspoon); *Dardanus and The Fairy Queen* for Pinchgut Opera Company; *Three Furies* directed by Jim Sharman for the Sydney Festival; and *Così Fan Tutte*, directed by Patrick Nolan for the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

Edith has also worked as a movement consultant on the following theatrical productions; HIT Productions National Tour of *President Wilson In Paris*; *To The Green Fields Beyond* for the Tamarama Rock Surfers; *Le Mariage Forcé* and *Fragments Six Vignettes Absurdes* for Bread and Butter Theatre; *Animal Farm* for Aha! Productions; and *Troy's House* for La Mama at the Carlton Courthouse, directed by Tommy Murphy. Edith has also collaborated as a writer for *Inadvertently Housed Together* for Re:Dance Theatre, and *Look Up 2.0* by Ricky Hu for NUS Arts Festival.

Her diverse artistic background also includes the co-founding of A Group Of People, whose production of *A Cage Goes In Search Of A Bird* won Production of the Year at The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards in 2010. In 2017 she was awarded Best Original Script and Production of the Year for her production *Bitch: The Origin Of The Female Species*, commissioned by the M1 Singapore Fringe Festival, and in 2019 her production of *Leda and The Rage*, commissioned and produced by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay for *The Studios*, was awarded Production of the Year at The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards.

Ryan Ang

Assistant Choreographer

Ryan is a freelance actor and musical theatre performer who was formerly part of the SAF Music and Drama Company. He is also a professional dancer, choreographer and instructor. He graduated from Wild Rice's Young & Wild acting programme in 2020.

Theatre credits include: *Don't Know Don't Care* (The Necessary Stage), *The Amazing Celestial Race*, *Momotaro & The Magnificent Peach*, *Candide*, *La Cage Aux Folles* (Wild Rice), *The Feelings Farm* (Esplanade), *The Gingerbreadman* (SRT), *Liao Zhai Rocks!* (The Theatre Practice), *Dim Sum Dollies* (Dream Academy).

IG:@ryanangzh

Te Hao Boon

Sound Designer

Te Hao Boon is an interdisciplinary artist and performer. They graduated with a Diploma in Theatre (English Drama) from Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA).

Past sound designer credits include: *The Vault: The Interchange* (For Your Consideration), *Hands Up* and *Colours* (Split Theatre).

As a sound artist, they have performed for festivals in Singapore such as Garden Beats Festival, and International Jazz Day by We Love Jazz SG. Their multidisciplinary approach to arts has also earned them invitations to perform in art galleries, opening for international acts such as Kiyasu Orchestra from Japan, and being invited to perform in international events such as Amsterdam's CyberSOTU, Jogja Noise Bombing in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and Site-Specific by Moutou 无头体 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Vincent Lim

Set Designer

Vincent is the principal of Visual Text Architects (VTxT), an architectural practice with projects situated in Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Shanghai, Beijing, Kuala Lumpur and Bali. In 2010, he was selected as an up-and-coming architect for URA's 20 Under 45 Exhibition. Vincent has contributed extensively to design publications since 1991, is the author of a book on Terminal 3 Changi Airport, was editor of two issues of *The Singapore Architect* and has also held an adjunct editor position with the Centre for Liveable Cities. He has also taught at the National University of Singapore in both part-time and adjunct positions. Vincent Lim has been a set designer since 2000 and was nominated for Best Set Design for The Necessary Stage's *Good People* in 2008's The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards.

Yo Shao Ann

Lighting Designer

Shao Ann received a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre from the University of California, San Diego. He was a recipient of the National Arts Council Young Artist Award for technical theatre in 2006. He is currently a senior lecturer with the School of Technology for the Arts at Republic Polytechnic.

TNS Credits:

The Year of No Return, May 2021
(Singapore International Festival of Arts 2021)

Off Centre, Feb 2019

Sanctuary, Nov 2017

Those Who Can't, Teach, Mar 2017

Mobile 2: Flat Cities, Aug 2013

Sing Song, Sep 2004

Such Sweet Sorrow, Mar 2004

Oh Man!, Nov 2003

Fires within Fires, Mar 2003

WWW, Dec 2002

Close – in my face, Sep 2002

godeatgod, Aug 2002

Brian Gothong Tan

Multimedia Consultant

Brian Gothong Tan is one of the leading creatives in Singapore and is best known for his cutting-edge and highly engaging works in theatre, film and installation art. He graduated from California Institute of the Arts in 2005 under the Shell-NAC Scholarship. His works have been featured in numerous productions which have toured successfully in many countries like Italy, USA, Korea and the United Kingdom. His notable projects include *Tropical Traumas* (Singapore International Festival of Arts 2016), the Singapore Bicentennial Experience, *Lost Cinema 20/20* (2021, Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay) and *Havoc Girls* and *Kamikaze Boys* (2021, M1 Singapore Fringe Festival and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts). He was conferred the Young Artist Award in 2012, and more recently, the Singapore Youth Award in 2015. He is currently the artistic director for T:>Atelier under T:>Works.

M. Nurfadhli Jasni

Multimedia Designer

M. Nurfadhli Jasni is a video multimedia designer and set designer who has graduated with a Diploma in Theatre Production from LASALLE College of the Arts. He has been working in performance, entertainment and digital content creation since 2016. He has been mentored by award-winning designers like Brian Gothong Tan and Petrina Dawn Tan and has worked with T:>Works, Checkpoint Theatre, Gateway Theatre, Bhumi Collective and various musical and theatre productions at LASALLE.

Sindhura Kalidas

Dramaturg

Sindhura Kalidas is a graduate of the National University of Singapore (NUS) Theatre Studies programme. Over the years, she has diversified her largely performance-based portfolio to include writing, facilitating, directing, and dramaturgy through her training and work with companies such as Teater Ekamatra, The Necessary Stage (TNS), and The Finger Players (TFP).

She was the first recipient of TFP's year-long fellowship programme for mid-career practitioners to deepen their understanding of puppetry. During her time at TFP, she was the dramaturg for *Jun and the Octopus*, a show that uses puppetry to broach the difficult subject of child sexual abuse, which was presented as part of the *Feed Your Imagination* (F.Y.I.) series by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.

Sindhura's recent performance credits include TFP's *Little Mournings* (2021), Singapore Repertory Theatre's *The Coronalogues* (2020), TNS's *Off Centre* (2019) and Ellison Tan's *We Were So Hopeful Then* (2019), a play produced under TNS's developmental platform, The Orange Production. She is thrilled to be working with TNS again, this time as a dramaturg, to explore verbatim theatre's potential to present the lived experiences of those within our industry who suffer from mental illness/mental health issues.

Sindhura is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Postgraduate Scholarship and is currently pursuing an MA in Dramaturgy and Writing for Performance at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Rosie McGowan

Support Facilitator

Rosie comes from an extensive history of using drama and theatre to explore potentially difficult and sensitive themes and issues. She has a Master's in Applied Theatre and a Master's in Counselling and often combines her knowledge of these two fields throughout her practice.

As a freelance applied theatre practitioner, facilitator and educator, Rosie has taught drama in numerous schools in Singapore, both in-curriculum and CCA. She runs workshops and projects exploring themes such as self-care, sexual assault trauma, self-harm, communication, leadership and understanding and supporting mental health. She has also designed and run projects in two Singapore halfway houses: the Community Rehabilitation Centre and The Turning Point.

As a counsellor, Rosie specialises in addiction and trauma—working with various addictions, as well as family members of addicts and trauma survivors. She uses a mixture of cognitive and experiential methods throughout her practice. As well as seeing clients individually, Rosie also runs group therapy sessions.

As a theatre practitioner, Rosie has acted in *The Crucible* (Toy Factory Productions); *Mind Map of Love*, sold-out runs of *The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband* and *Ragnarok* (Skinned Knee Productions); and dramaturg on Edith Podesta's commissioned production, *Leda and The Rage* (Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay).

She was the President of the Singapore Drama Educators Association from 2019-March 2022.

More information is available at www.rosiemcg.com.

The Necessary Stage

Established in 1987, The Necessary Stage (TNS) is a non-profit theatre company with charity status. Our mission is to create challenging, indigenous and innovative theatre that touches the heart and mind. TNS has the honour of being the only arts company in Singapore helmed by two Cultural Medallion recipients: Artistic Director and Founder Alvin Tan and Resident Playwright Haresh Sharma. The company is also the organiser and curator of the annual M1 Singapore Fringe Festival.

TNS is supported by the National Arts Council under the Major Company Scheme for the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2023.

For more information, visit **necessary.org** and **tnsarchives.com**.

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LinkedIn at **linkedin.com/company/the-necessary-stage**

Production Credits

Written and Directed by	Haresh Sharma
Texts by	Haresh Sharma, Harris Albar and Maryam Noorhimli
Performed by	Ghafir Akbar, Karen Tan, Masturah Oli and Tan Guo Lian Sutton
Choreographer	Edith Podesta
Assistant Choreographer	Ryan Ang
Assistant Director	Deonn Yang
Dramaturg	Sindhura Kalidas
Support Facilitator	Rosie McGowan
Set Designer	Vincent Lim
Lighting Designer	Yo Shao Ann
Multimedia Designer	M. Nurfadhli Jasni
Multimedia Consultant	Brian Gothong Tan
Sound Designer	Te Hao Boon
Project Manager	Nicole Lim
Production Manager	Celestine Wong
Stage Manager	Tennie Su
Assistant Stage Manager	Natalie Wong
Costume Coordinator	Lim Zhiying

Acknowledgements

Acting Mad is based on interviews with 20 actors in Singapore. Characters presented within the play are composites of experiences shared during these interviews, and efforts have been made to ensure the characters therein are not representative of any one person.

Thank you for sharing your stories:

Bridget Fernandez
Cally Yeong
Cheryl Lee
Cheryl Tan Yun Xin
Farez Najid
Henrik Cheng
Jaisilan Sathiasilan
Joey Teo
Jolene Wong
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Nadya Zaheer
Rebecca Dass
Renee Chua
Ruby Jayaseelan
Shao Qi
Shrey
Te Hao Boon

as well as those who have chosen to remain anonymous.

Special thanks to the following individuals:

Harris Albar and Maryam Noorhimli for contributing to the work's texts,

Guest Speakers:

Ruben Heng
Sharda Harrison
Shaza Ishak

as well as

Silver Ribbon Singapore for providing a stellar team of first responders for the production.

Calming Space and Resource Links

Content Advisory

Please note that *Acting Mad* covers several topics that may be distressing to certain audience members. This includes references to mental illness/mental health issues as well as depictions and discussions of suicide/suicidal ideation, self-harm, and eating disorders. The performance also makes references to sexual assault.

Calming Space

If you are experiencing feelings of anxiety or distress before, during, or after the show, we have prepared a calming space located at the foyer of the Esplanade Theatre Studio for you to decompress. Trained first responders from Silver Ribbon Singapore will also be present at the calming space to provide assistance and support if necessary.

Helplines & Resource Links

If you would like to reach out to someone -

Organisation	Contact	Details	Operational Hours
Samaritans of Singapore (SOS)	Phone: 1-767 Website: www.sos.org.sg Email: pat@sos.org.sg SOS Care-text: m.me/SamaritansOfSingapore	SOS provides a 24-hour Hotline to provide a safe space when life gets to you. You can choose to remain anonymous.	24-hours
Silver Ribbon (Singapore)	Phone: 6386 1928 Website: www.silverribbonsingapore.com Email: info@silverribbonsingapore.com	Silver Ribbon aims to combat mental health stigma, encourage early help, and facilitate integration of people with mental illness within the society through innovative means of promoting mental health literacy.	9am – 5pm, Weekdays only (excluding public holidays)
Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE)	Women's Helpline: 1800-777-5555 General Enquiries: 6779 7137 Website: www.aware.org.sg Email: aware@aware.org.sg	AWARE aims to remove all gender-based barriers so as to allow individuals in Singapore to develop their potential to the fullest and realise their personal visions and hopes. We do this in three ways: Research and advocacy Education and training Support services	10am – 6pm, Weekdays only

Sexual Assault Care Centre (SACC) at AWARE	Phone: 6779 0282 Website: www.aware.org.sg Email: sacc@aware.org.sg	The Sexual Assault Care Centre (SACC) at AWARE provides free services to survivors of all genders who have experienced sexual assault, helping them deal with their experiences and make decisions about their next steps.	10am – 6pm, Weekdays only
Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH)	Phone: 1800-283-7019 Website: www.samhealth.org.sg	SAMH provides counselling services, or assistance if you require support or information on mental health issues.	9am – 1pm, 2pm – 6pm, Weekdays only
Oogachaga Counselling Services	Phone (WhatsApp, text only): 8592 0609 Website: www.oogachaga.com Email: CARE@oogachaga.com	Oogachaga is a community-based, non-profit, professional organisation working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals, couples and families in Singapore since 1999.	7pm – 10pm, Tuesdays to Thursdays and 2pm – 5pm, Saturdays
Fei Yue's Online Counselling Service (eC2)	Quick chat: go.fyos.org/quickchat Website: www.ec2.sg	Fei Yue provides an online counselling service for youths aged between 12 – 25.	10am – 12pm and 2pm - 5pm, Monday, Thursday and Friday (excluding public holidays)
Care Corner	Phone: 1800-353-5800 Website: www.carecorner.org.sg	Care Corner provides counselling in Mandarin for individuals and families.	10am – 10pm, daily
Belle, Beyond the Label Helpbot	Website: www.go.gov.sg/belle-helpbot	Beyond the Label is a movement to address stigma faced by persons with mental health conditions in society.	24-hours
National Care Hotline	Phone: 1800-202-6868	The National Care Hotline offers psychological support amidst COVID-19 pandemic.	The National Care Hotline offers psychological support amidst COVID-19 pandemic.

Care Giver Alliance Limited	<p>Phone IMH CSC helpline: 63882686 / 63888631</p> <p>West Cluster: 97207590 & 97707996</p> <p>Central Cluster: 97298628 & 98267115</p> <p>East Cluster: 97369170</p> <p>Website: www.cal.org.sg/c2c</p>	<p>Caregivers Alliance Limited (CAL) is a non-profit organisation in Singapore dedicated to meeting the needs of caregivers of persons with mental health issues through education, support networks, crisis support, tailored services and self-care enablement.</p> <p>9am – 5pm, Weekdays only (excluding public holidays)</p>
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Limitless.SG	<p>Website: www.limitless.sg/get-help</p>	<p>Limitless.sg is a non-profit organisation founded with the desire to see every youth given the opportunity to live out their potential by ending powerlessness in youths caused by poverty, mental illness, and social inequality.</p>
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Resources

Organisation	Contact	Details
National Council of Social Services	<p>Website: www.ncss.gov.sg/docs/default-source/ncss-publications-doc/pdfdocument/directory-on-mental-health-services-pdf.pdf</p>	<p>The National Council of Social Services (NCSS) is the umbrella body for over 500 member social services agencies in Singapore and aims to provide leadership and direction in social services, enhance the capabilities of social service agencies, and to provide strategic partnerships for social services.</p>
Beyond the Label	<p>Website: www.ncss.gov.sg/our-initiatives/beyond-the-label/about-the-campaign</p>	<p>Beyond the Label is a movement to address the stigma faced by persons with mental health conditions in society. The campaign aims to encourage the public to go beyond the label of a mental health diagnosis, to view and regard persons with mental health conditions for who they are.</p>
Mindline	<p>Website: www.mindline.sg/home</p>	<p>mindline.sg is a digital stress management platform that aims to empower and equip individuals with tools, knowledge and pathways to self-care and seek out professional help when needed.</p>

Esplanade gives our heartfelt thanks
to our Esplanade partner, arts benefactor, donors and sponsors for believing in our vision to be a performing arts centre for everyone. They made all these possible!^



1,276

activities took place at Esplanade.

Ticketed



412

Non-Ticketed



864

223,399



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Ticketed

18,081

Non-Ticketed

205,318

We believe that everyone should be able to experience the joy of the arts, including children, youth, seniors, migrant workers and individuals with special needs. Our community engagement activities bring the arts to those in need.



185
Activities

4,357
Participants

*Figures for Esplanade's activities from Apr 2020 to Mar 2021.

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With Gratitude

Esplanade–Theatres on the Bay is a charity, a not-for-profit organisation and Singapore’s national performing arts centre. We seek to entertain, engage, educate and inspire through the arts.

In 2022, we mark our 20th anniversary of being an arts centre for everyone. We thank everyone who has been a part of our journey. You have helped us bring joy, inspiration and positive impact to Singaporeans from all walks of life.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes especially to our Donors and Sponsors, for their steadfast belief in our mission and for generously supporting us.

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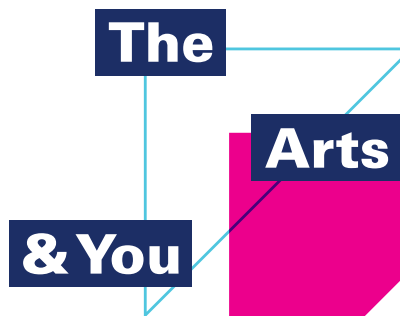
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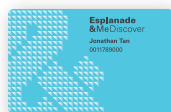
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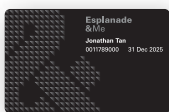
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Talk

In Their Own Words: Writing Verbatim Plays

by Haresh Sharma

27 Aug 2022, Sat, 12pm
library@esplanade
(1hr)

Free



Panel Discussion

Performing Grief

by Mohd Fared Jainal, Chong Tze Chien,
and Jolene Chiang

10 Sep 2022, Sat, 3pm
library@esplanade
(1hr)

Free



Photography by Jael Lin © Celline Pictures, courtesy of Checkpoint Theatre

Chat with the Artists

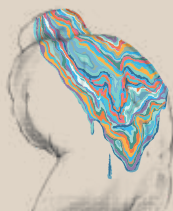
In Conversation: And So The Conversations Continue...

by Checkpoint Theatre

24 Sep 2022, Sat, 3pm
library@esplanade
(1hr 30mins)

Free

28 Jul
-
24 Sep
2022



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The Studios 2022 and the
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