



NAC cuts funding for Wild Rice

But local theatre company will still receive \$170,000 in Government funding

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by **Teo Xuanwei**

SINGAPORE - Local theatre company Wild Rice has had its annual grant from the National Arts Council cut by \$20,000.

This was confirmed to MediaCorp by the council, which is a statutory board of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts (Mica).

Artistic director Ivan Heng claims that the cut - which still leaves the theatre company with \$170,000 in Government funding - was because Wild Rice had staged productions which ran contrary to mainstream societal values and which were critical of the Government.

NAC arts development director Elaine Ng said the council's guidelines state clearly that "we will not fund projects which are incompatible with the core values promoted by the Government and society or disparage the Government".

"We also consider the quality of work and significance of the activities undertaken by the companies in our assessment," she told MediaCorp, and added that NAC has had dialogue sessions with Wild Rice on funding matters over the past few years.

Ms Ng said that certain criteria had to be fulfilled before NAC hands out grants to arts groups, to ensure "public funds are used prudently and that its use fulfills the objectives of artistic and professional excellence, audience engagement, organisational excellence and international reach".

Mr Heng said he was "deeply disappointed" with NAC's decision which leaves Wild Rice with its lowest funding in the last five years.

"It seems to reflect a misunderstanding of the role of theatre in a progressive and civil society," he told MediaCorp. "We'll continue to make theatre that our audiences have come to expect, not least with their support and our remarkably diverse range of sponsors from the private sector."

Ms Ng said the NAC respects Wild Rice's decision regarding its artistic direction and content, and will continue to grant funding for projects which are in line with NAC's guidelines and policies.

When Wild Rice staged their version of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance Of Being Earnest* in April last year, the Media Development Authority had given the show a "16 years and above" advisory because of its all-male cast.

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