



# MAN SINGAPORE THEATRE FESTIVAL 2011

3 – 21 August 2011

Drama Centre, National Library Building

Press Release

25<sup>th</sup> July 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## ELECTION FAVORITES SET TO SPEAK AT THE ART AND LIFE SESSIONS

25th July 2011 – Prominent figures from this year's General Elections, Nicole Seah, Vincent Wijesingha and Tan Chuan-Jin will come together to debate in a series of forums organized as part of the Man Singapore Theatre Festival 2011.

WILD RICE today announced the panelists participating in The Art and Life Sessions – a series of forums where prominent public personalities are set to discuss issues inspired by the plays in the Festival. Past sessions have included spirited exchanges with academics, politicians, civil society activists and various other social commentators.

Ivan Heng, Artistic Director of the Man Singapore Theatre Festival said, "We have a very challenging and provocative line up of plays tackling pertinent subjects that we don't talk openly enough about. The Art and Life Sessions are geared up to enrich and extend the public's experience of these plays. Given the currency of the topics and the line-up of panelists, you can expect these sessions to be very exciting indeed."

For this year's Art and Life Sessions, WILD RICE presents three forums - On Race, On Politics, On Morality – featuring the most forward thinking minds of "the concerned citizenry."

Nicole Seah, Vincent Wijesingha and Tan Chuan-Jin will join ex-Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP), Siew Kum Hong and social commentator, Alex Au in a discussion surveying the new political landscape, shaped by the outcome of the recent watershed elections.

NMP, Viswaroopan Sadasivan and academic, Matilda Sharmala, along with theatre practitioners, Zizi Azah, Chong Tze Chien and Alfian Sa'at are going to delve into the "Hard Truths" of race relations in Singapore.

Rounding up the series, T. Sasitharan, Joel Tan, Glen Goei and Nurhashida Bte Mahadi will question the paradox of universal core values and the idea of morality in Singapore.

The Art and Life Sessions are set to make some waves this year with high profile panelists and highly charged topics for debate. We look forward to welcoming you to the Art on stage, and thereafter to be inspired to discuss Life as we experience it.

*"Statistics compact the inaugural **Singapore Theatre Festival** to three weeks, nine plays and 11,500 sold tickets. But the expanded version is more interesting: as many as 200 people showing up for the various forums held to discuss topics raised by the plays; the issues being debated island-wide; and the demonstration that the arts are an integral part of an urban society, not to be relegated to suburbia."*

Parvathi Nayar - The Business Times



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## FAST FACTS

**Title** : The Art and Life Sessions

**Venue** : Drama Centre Foyer

**Date** : 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2011

6<sup>th</sup> August 2011

**On Race – Can We Handle the Hard Truths?**

13<sup>th</sup> August 2011

**On Politics – A Brave New World?**

20<sup>th</sup> August 2011

**On Morality – The Good, The Bad, and The Referees**

**Time** : 5.30pm to 7pm



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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **ABOUT THE ART AND LIFE SESSIONS**

What is it in real LIFE that inspires the ART on stage?  
How does ART relate to, engage with, and resonate with LIFE?

The Art and Life Sessions is a series of free lively forums about the urgent issues of the day. Engage with some of the most forward thinking minds of “the concerned citizenry” - personalities, artists, activists and academics - to exchange views and opinions about the pressing issues of our times.

Dates:

6 Aug ART: Charged / LIFE: On Race — Can We Handle the Hard Truths?

13 Aug ART: Cooling Off Day / LIFE: On Politics — A Brave New World?

20 Aug ART: Family Outing / LIFE: On Morality — The Good, The Bad, and The Referees

Time: 5.30 - 7pm

Venue: Drama Centre Foyer



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**SATURDAY, 6 AUGUST 2011**

**ART: CHARGED**

**LIFE: ON RACE - CAN WE HANDLE THE HARD TRUTHS?**

## **SYNOPSIS**

IT'S BEEN FORTY-FIVE YEARS SINCE THE PLEDGE WAS WRITTEN, AND SINCE WE DECLARED THAT WE WOULD BE ONE UNITED PEOPLE. BUT WHY IS RACE STILL SUCH A SENSITIVE TOPIC? WILL THERE ALWAYS BE 'PRIMORDIAL SENTIMENTS' AND 'TRIBAL ALLEGIANCES' THAT ARE RESISTANT TO NATION-BUILDING? IS RACIAL HARMONY FORGED THROUGH GESTURES OF APPEASEMENT, RATHER THAN A GENUINE UNDERSTANDING AMONG DIFFERENT RACES? AND IS THE SPECTRE OF RACIAL RIOTS STILL LURKING AROUND THE CORNER, UNDER OUR SKIN?

## **PANELIST**

VISWAROOPAN SADASIVAN

- OCCUPATION: NOMINATED MP

MATILDA GABRIELPILLAI ROSE SHARMALA

- OCCUPATION: FREELANCE ACADEMIC

ZIZI AZAH BTE ABDUL MAJID

- OCCUPATION: ARTISTIC DIRECTOR (TEATER EKAMATRA)

CHONG TZE CHIEN

- OCCUPATION: PLAYWRIGHT, COMPANY DIRECTOR (FINGER PLAYERS)

ALFIAN BIN SA'AT

- OCCUPATION: PLAYWRIGHT



**SATURDAY, 13 AUGUST 2011**

**ART: COOLING OFF DAY**

**LIFE: ON POLITICS - A BRAVE NEW WORLD?**

**SYNOPSIS**

THE 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS WAS WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED TO BE A WATERSHED IN THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL LIFE. CHARGED NATIONAL ISSUES TOOK CENTRE STAGE, INCLUDING CALLS FOR GREATER TRANSPARENCY AND A MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY. WHAT HAD CHANGED? WHAT KINDS OF THRESHOLDS HAVE WE CROSSED? ALMOST 100 DAYS (98 COOLING OFF DAYS, TO BE EXACT) SINCE THE ELECTIONS, WHERE ARE WE NOW? HAVE WE FORGED AHEAD? OR HAVE WE JUST RETURNED TO BUSINESS AS USUAL?

**PANELIST**

SIEW KUM HONG (XIAO JINHONG)

- OCCUPATION: LAWYER

WIJEYSINGHA VINCENT RENE

- OCCUPATION: SOCIAL WORKER

SEAH XUE LING, NICOLE REBECCA

- OCCUPATION: ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE

TAN CHUAN-JIN

- OCCUPATION: MINISTER OF STATE (MANPOWER & DEVELOPMENT)

AU WAI PANG, ALEX

- OCCUPATION: RETIRED



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**SATURDAY, 20 AUGUST 2011**

**ART: FAMILY OUTING & NADIRAH**

**LIFE: ON MORALITY - THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE REFEREES**

## **SYNOPSIS**

WHAT ARE OUR 'CORE VALUES'? WHO DECIDES WHAT THEY ARE? HOW ARE THEY AFFECTED BY VARIOUS HISTORICAL TRENDS, SUCH AS VICTORIAN MORALITY IN OUR LEGAL CODES, 'ASIAN VALUES' AS A RESPONSE TO 'WESTERNISATION' AND RECENT MOVEMENTS SUCH AS RELIGIOUS REVIVALISM? WHAT IS SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE IN TODAY'S SINGAPORE? ARE WE STILL THE CONSERVATIVE SOCIETY THE POWERS THAT BE SEEM TO SUGGEST? AND IS GLOBALIZATION CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GAME?

## **PANELIST**

THIRUNALAN SASITHARAN

- OCCUPATION: DIRECTOR (TTRP)

JOEL TAN WUN CHUAN

- OCCUPATION: UNDERGRADUATE

GOEI BENG YEW GLEN

- OCCUPATION: ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR (WILD RICE)

NURHASHIDA BTE MAHADI

- OCCUPATION: THEATRE PRACTITIONER

VIJAY CHANDRAN

- OCCUPATION: CHAIRMAN, FILMS CONSULTATIVE PANEL (MEDIA DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY)

## APPENDIX 2

### BIOGRAPHIES

#### **VISWAROOPAN SADASIVAN – NOMINATED MP**

Viswaroopan ("Viswa") Sadasivan (born 1959 in Singapore) is a Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) in the Parliament of Singapore.

Viswa was appointed as a Nominated Member of Parliament in July 2009. The following month, he used his maiden speech in Parliament to table a motion calling for the House to reaffirm its commitment to the principles enshrined in the Singapore National Pledge (which refers to Singaporeans as "one united people, regardless of race, language or religion"), and questioned whether the government was sending out mixed signals by emphasising racial categorisations, for example by promoting ethnic-based self-help groups. His speech attracted considerable media attention and drew responses from a number of Member of Parliament from Singapore's governing People's Action Party (PAP), including Minister Mentor, Lee Kuan Yew.

#### **MATILDA GABRIELPILLAI ROSE SHARMALA**

Dr. Matilda Gabrielpillai is a freelance academic. She teaches and researches postcolonial and women's writings, and is interested in discourses of race, gender, sexuality and nationalism in the Singapore context. She was previously a lecturer with the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University and a journalist. She co-edited the book *Race and Multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore* (Routledge, 2009).

#### **ZIZI AZAH ABDUL MAJID – DIRECTOR (CHARGED & NADIRAH)**

Zizi Azah is the Artistic Director of Teater Ekamatra. A graduate of the National University of Singapore in Philosophy and Sociology, Zizi Azah is effectively bilingual in English and Malay and is both playwright and theatre director. She has helmed numerous theatre productions performed in English, Malay and Peranakan.

A leading figure in a new generation of theatre professionals, her plays have been nominated for Best Script, Best Actress and Best Sound Design awards at numerous Singapore Life! Theatre Awards. Aside from her work as a theatre artist, Zizi also lectures at the Lasalle College of The Arts. She is published author of *Fatimah* and *Her Magic Socks*, a children's book illustrated by her husband, Izmir Ickbal.

As an artist, she is interested in creating work that is emotionally resonant, she is in constant search for the universal truth. Her plays are known for being both imaginative and unexpected, with settings that are often non-naturalistic and border more along the styles of magical-realism and absurdism. Her plays frequently deal with social-political issues - issues she has written about include the plight of lower middle-class Singaporeans; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; gender inequality as well as consumerism and the rat race.



**CHONG TZE CHIEN – PLAYWRIGHT (*CHARGED*)**

Chong Tze Chien is an award-winning and published playwright/director in Singapore. Some of the awards he has won include the Singapore Dramatist Award, The Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards: Best Director, Best Script and Production of the Year. He also writes frequently for local television channels, as well as local films.

He was awarded the Young Artist Award by NAC in 2006.

He is presently the Company Director of The Finger Players.

**ALFIAN SA'AT – PLAYWRIGHT (*COOLING OFF DAY & NADIRAH*)**

Born in 1977, Alfian Bin Sa'at is currently a Resident Playwright with WILD RICE. His plays with the company include *Homesick*, *Landmarks: Asian Boys Vol. 2*, *Happy Endings: Asian Boys Vol. 3*, *Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs* and *Beauty & the Beast*. He is also an Artistic Artist with Teater Ekamatra, a Malay-language theatre company. His published works include two collections of poetry, *One Fierce Hour* and *A History of Amnesia*, as well as a collection of short stories, *Corridor*.

Alfian has been nominated six times for Best Script at the Life! Theatre Awards, eventually winning in 2005 for his play, 'Landmarks', and later in 2010 for his play, 'Nadirah'. He has also been nominated for the Kirayama Asia-Pacific Book Prize and the Singapore Literature Prize for 'A History of Amnesia'.

In 2001, Alfian won the Golden Point Award for Poetry as well as the National Arts Council Young Artist Award for Literature. His plays have been translated into German, Swedish and Danish and have been read and performed in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, London, *Zürich*, Hamburg, Munich, Berlin, Copenhagen and Stockholm.

**SIEW KUM HONG**

Siew Kum Hong is a corporate counsel, and currently also the pro tem vice-president of MARUAH (Working Group for an ASEAN Human Rights Mechanism, Singapore). He was a Nominated Member of Parliament from January 2007 to July 2009.

**WIJEYSINGHA VINCENT RENE**

Dr. Vincent Wijesingha (born 1970) is a politician and civil activist from Singapore. He is currently the Assistant Treasurer of the opposition Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) and was a candidate in the 2011 Singaporean general election.

**SEAH XUE LING NICOLE REBECCA**

Nicole Rebecca Seah Xue Ling (born 17 October 1986) is a Singaporean politician. She was a National Solidarity Party (NSP) candidate for the Marine Parade GRC in the 2011 Singaporean general election.<sup>[2]</sup> At age 24 she was the youngest female candidate standing in the election.

**TAN CHUAN-JIN**

Brigadier-General(NS) Tan Chuan-Jin (born 1969) is a retired soldier and former Chief of the TRADOC, Singapore Army, and currently a Member of Parliament for Marine Parade Group Representation Constituency.

**AU WAI PANG ALEX**

Alex Au Waipang, also known by his Internet *nom de plume* as Yawning Bread, is part of the Singapore gay equality movement. He is the author of a website, where he provides analyses of Singaporean politics, culture, gay issues and miscellaneous subjects

**THIRUNALAN SASITHARAN**

Thirunalan Sasitharan is the director of the Theatre Training and Research Program in Singapore.

**JOEL TAN – PLAYWRIGHT (*FAMILY OUTING*)**

Born in 1987, Joel Tan currently reads English Literature at the National University of Singapore. Between 2010 and 2011, he studied playwriting with Huzir Sulaiman, under whose guidance he wrote *Family Outing*.

He was previously a contributor to *The Online Citizen* for whom, in addition to providing social commentary on his personal blog, he wrote articles on a variety of topics, religion, GLBT issues and politics amongst them.

**GLEN GOEI – DIRECTOR (*FAMILY OUTING*)**

Glen's body of work embraces a wide range of the performing arts ranging from film, theatre, musicals, parades, large scale shows and World Expos over a twenty two year period. This started with his Olivier Award-nominated performance in the title role of *M. Butterfly* opposite Anthony Hopkins in London's West End. It grew through his multi-award winning tenure as Artistic Director of Mu-Lan Arts with productions like *Porcelain* (Best Play and Best Production 1993) and *The Magic Fundoshi* (Best Comedy 1993) which garnered acclaim in London, Singapore and worldwide. It reached another level with the development of his film career with his self-written, directed and produced picture *Forever Fever* (aka *That's The Way I Like It*) – the first Singapore film to have achieved a worldwide commercial film release. His second feature, *The Blue Mansion*, has just completed a worldwide tour of film festivals, including Pusan, Tokyo, Hawaii and Berlin (Asian Hot Shots Opening Film).

Underpinning this has been his constant and substantial contribution to the theatre, principally as Associate Creative Director of WILD RICE. Here his productions have included hits such as *Boeing Boeing*, *The Magic Fundoshi*, *Blithe Spirit* and his internationally lauded 2009 interpretation of *The Importance Of Being Earnest* and for



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Dream Academy, *The Revenge Of The Dim Sum Dollies®*, *The History Of Singapore* and *The Little Shop Of Horrors*.

### **VIJAY CHANDRAN**

Vijay was a pioneer faculty member in Singapore's first mass communication course, the Diploma in Mass Communication, launched by Ngee Ann Polytechnic in 1989. He was then instrumental in starting the Diploma in Film, Sound & Video, the first local programme in filmmaking, in 1993. In 1999, he initiated and headed the post-graduate Advanced Diploma in Film Production. Apart from teaching, Vijay has been involved in the film community in various capacities. He was seconded to the Singapore Film Commission in 2001 as a Resident Consultant during which time he developed the SFC's International Co-production Funding programme, established to incentivise collaboration among local and international film producers, and Singapore's first HD production initiative. He has provided script consultancy to the SFC, Raintree Pictures and other independent companies on feature film projects and served on film juries internationally and locally. He has worked with several government agencies in developing film initiatives and in 1999 assisted the Ministry of Education in starting the Schools Video Award competition in an effort to spur video production among primary and secondary school students. Vijay has also worked as an advertising copywriter and producer of television commercials.

He currently serves as the Chairman of the Media Development Authority's Films Consultative Panel, a citizen's consultative panel which advises the government on classification of films and video games. In 2010, he was appointed to the Censorship Review Panel formed by the government to review regulations and policies relating to all media and the arts in Singapore.

In 2009, Vijay left academia to head a consultancy project for the government agency, Workforce Development Agency, to create competency-based training frameworks for the Creative Industries.

Vijay possesses a Master of Fine Arts in Film Producing from the American Film Institute as well as a BSc in Journalism and BA in Theatre and Film from the University of Kansas.

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **ABOUT THE PRODUCTIONS**

#### **CHARGED**

Presented by **Teater Ekamatra**

Written by **Chong Tze Chien**

Directed by **Zizi Azah Abdul Majid**

Starring **Serene Chen, Yazid Jalil, Guna Morgan, Aidli ‘Alin’ Mosbit, Rodney Oliveiro, Anwar Hadi Ramli, Farhan Hassan and Tan Shou Chen**

Venue: **Drama Centre Black Box**

Dates: **3-7 August 2011**

**Winner, Best Original Script, Chong Tze Chien**

**Best Supporting Actor (Nomination), Yazid Jalil**

**Best Supporting Actress (Nomination), Aidli ‘Alin’ Mosbit**

**Best Supporting Actress (Nomination), Serene Chen**

**2011 Life! Theatre Awards**

It's Chinese New Year and the only soldiers in camp on guard duty are Malay or Indian. That is, until Corporal Russell Lim turns up. Things start turning ugly when the insults start flying and all that's taboo becomes fair game. By the end of the night, a Chinese and a Malay soldier are found dead.

Enter Investigating Officer Victor de Souza, who needs to uncover the chain of events that have led to the tragedy.

The stakes are high because the incident has led to an eruption of tension between the Malay and Chinese communities in Singapore. Yet with each interview that he conducts, he plunges deeper into a labyrinth of slippery half-truths and sly omissions.

Can Officer de Souza arrive at the truth? Or will he be confronted with something so terrible that there is no other choice but a cover up?

Set in the claustrophobic confines the army, Chong Tze Chien's CHARGED interrogates the thorny issue of race with brutal honesty and a refreshing lack of political correctness.

*“Charged is an effective piece of political theatre...explosive and volatile yet sensitive and nuanced....The script crackles with electricity because it feels authentic.”*

The Flying Inkpot

*“This gutsy play tackles truths with great writing...”*

SPH The Straits Times LIFE!



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## COOLING OFF DAY

Presented by **WILD RICE**

Written by **Alfian Sa'at**

Directed by **Ivan Heng and Jo Kukathas**

Starring **Jo Kukathas, Neo Swee Lin, Tan Kheng Hua, Rodney Oliveiro, Najib Soiman**

Venue: **Drama Centre Theatre**

Dates: **10-14 August 2011**

Why do you vote? What issues influence your vote? What does citizenship mean to you?

In the few months running up to the 2011 watershed elections, playwright Alfian Sa'at interviewed various Singaporeans to discover their responses to these questions. The interviews were conducted across a wide political spectrum, from election candidates, to pro-establishment civil servants, to die-hard opposition supporters, to young people who would cast their votes for the first time. These voices, ranging from the comic to the serious, from the fearful to hopeful, form a portrait of Singapore concerned about their role in shaping the country's future.

With the script assembled from the transcript of real-life interviews, *Cooling Off Day* is a play done in the style of testimony theatre. Performed by an ensemble cast of six, playing characters from 17 to 70, the play reveals how political views are not just the hot air of coffeeshop talk.

*"Memorable witty punchlines and insider jokes abound in Happy Endings...but there is a sense of heartfelt urgency in Alfian's words—the real star of the play...This play is, as it should be, for everyone."*

TODAY on *Happy Endings: Asian Boys Vol. 3*

*"Writer Alfian Sa'at is the voice that will not let you forget... he combines the density of language found in his poetry with his knack for arresting set-pieces and plot twists displayed in his short stories...a tender, wrenching exploration of the weaknesses of the human heart...a skillful marriage of political and personal concerns...Landmarks hits perfect pitch."*

SPH The Straits Times LIFE! on *Landmarks: Asian Boys Vol. 2*



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### FAMILY OUTING

Presented by **WILD RICE**

Written by **Joel Tan**

Directed by **Glen Goei**

Starring **Karen Tan, Lim Kay Siu, Galvin Yeo, Koey Foo and Johannes Hadi**

Venue: **Drama Centre Theatre**

Dates: **17-21 August 2011**

The Choos aren't used to being sad, even with a death in the household. A year after their son Joseph dies, the family—HDB auntie Doris, civil servant Amos and their neurotic youngest son, Brandon— pop a bottle of bubbly in good Christian cheer to celebrate his life and times. But a knock at the door promises to change things forever. A young man called Daniel arrives to announce the truth of a Joseph the family had never known.

What follows is intense family drama as the Choos and Daniel struggle to reconcile the facts of Christian life—hellfire and damnation— with the Joseph they've lost, want to remember and are already beginning to forget. Meanwhile, Joseph looks on and comes to terms with being dead, filling the loneliness of the grave with fond memories of his family.

*Family Outing* is both a playful romp and a moving biography of a family examining — with laughs along the way—some painful facts of life: the burdens of unconditional love and of saying goodbye.

Directed by Glen Goei, WILD RICE is proud to present Joel Tan's first full-length play.



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## NADIRAH

Presented by **Teater Ekamatra**

Written by **Alfian Sa'at**

Directed by **Zizi Azah Abdul Majid**

Starring **Siti Khalijah Zainal, Neo Swee Lin, Tony Quek, Shida Mahadi and Hatta Said**

Venue: **Drama Centre Black Box**

Dates: **17 – 21 August 2011**

**Winner, Best Original Script, Alfian Sa'at**  
**Winner, Best Supporting Actress, Neo Swee Lin**  
**Best Actress (Nomination), Siti Khalijah Zainal**  
**2010 Life! Theatre Awards**

Nadirah is the popular and articulate Vice-President of her university's Muslim Society. She convenes inter-faith meetings where students talk about how they should respect one another's spaces.

Nadirah is also the product of a mixed marriage. Her father is a Malaysian Malay and her mother a Singaporean Chinese who had converted to Islam.

One day, Nadirah's mother tells her that she's going to re-marry. To a man who's not Muslim. Nadirah's best friend Maznah, believes that everyone has a right to happiness. Her senior, Farouk, however, is outraged and urges her to do 'the right thing'.

How does Nadirah make peace between various religions in school when she's having the same problems at home? Can mother and daughter worship different gods? Will love or faith prevail?

Funny, insightful and moving, Alfian Sa'at's award-winning *Nadirah* wrestles with the complex issue of religion by grounding it in a story about a quirky family and the ties that bind.

Performed in Malay and English (with English subtitles)

*"The political incorrectness that drives much of the humour in the play is so funny because it rings so true."*

The Flying Inkpot

*"Neo Swee Lin delivered a sensitive, grounded performance as Nadirah's mother, easing us into the considerable complexities of her finely written character... and by the end it was clear that her surface tranquility was the product of the deepest of running waters."*

The Flying Inkpot