

press release

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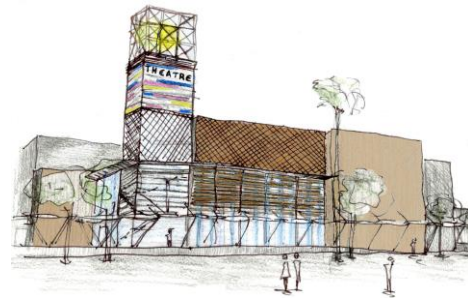
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The Next Stage for Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay

A new 550-seat waterfront theatre to be built for Singapore as Esplanade turns 15



Proposed site along the Esplanade Waterfront for the new 550-seat theatre.



Artist impression of the new waterfront theatre, for illustration purposes only.

SINGAPORE, 10 April 2017 – As Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay turns 15 this year, the national performing arts centre will be adding a new venue to its stable, enabling it to create more unique Singapore stories and shared experiences for society through the arts. To be completed in 2021, the new building situated along the Esplanade Waterfront will feature a flexible theatre which can seat about 550 people and an outdoor activities plaza integrated with popular dining outlets at the Esplanade Annexe. This waterfront theatre hopes to inspire our young and nurture the next generation of artists, by commissioning and producing more new works by Singapore artists and companies and taking them from home to the world stage.

Benson Puah, CEO, The Esplanade Co Ltd said, “Fourteen years since we opened and we are now bursting at the seams! We have programmes all year round, serving a very broad spectrum of our diverse communities, collaborating with as many Singapore artists and organisations as possible. There is much more that we can do but we have literally run out of space. We have introduced one generation of Singaporeans to the arts, we now have to look after the next. As we approach our 15th year, we are endeavouring to build this waterfront theatre that will enable more people, especially our young, to learn and bond through the arts. With this new venue, we will focus on creating even more made-in-Singapore works that will, hopefully, become the stories, music, movements or even traditional art forms, that the next generation of Singaporeans will hold dear. In the process, we will continue to develop local capabilities and talent, and tap on our regional and international networks to take some of these artists and works overseas.”

Esplanade's new 550-seat waterfront theatre

When Esplanade was first mooted in the 1990s, it was originally conceived as a much larger arts complex which included two large and three medium to small venues. However, the decision was made then, that the large spaces – the Theatre and Concert Hall – were to be built first in Phase One, with rehearsal spaces and the three medium-sized theatres in Phase Two. While Esplanade managed to convert the two rehearsal spaces during Phase One to two small Studios alongside the large Concert Hall and Theatre, it is still lacking its medium-sized venues that seat between 500 to 1,000 people and for which a majority of new works created in Singapore and internationally are best suited.

While the development of Phase Two is not viable amidst the current economic climate, Esplanade will build a 550-seat theatre to meet the more immediate needs of the Singapore arts community, as well as the schools and communities served through its programmes. For this, Esplanade has outlined its social and cultural priorities for its next stage, in which the new theatre will play a role (please refer to Annex A for details). The new theatre will be located within Esplanade's existing site, along the waterfront as part of the Esplanade Annexe.

The goal is to develop a raw and casual theatre space that is functional, accessible and welcoming to both audiences and those who come to enjoy Esplanade's waterfront (please refer to Annex B). Based on a feasibility study which was completed in September 2016, such a new theatre of this nature will cost an estimated S\$30 million to build. To complete this project, Esplanade will need to raise and secure funds of \$30 million, of which its parent Ministry, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth has committed to kick-start this effort with the first S\$10 million contribution.

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, Grace Fu, said, "We will be adding a new 550-seat waterfront theatre to Esplanade. Through its line-up of diverse and quality performances, Esplanade has created shared experiences for Singaporeans from all walks of life, and has played a pivotal role in growing our performing arts scene over the past 14 years. Esplanade is truly a national arts centre that belongs to all Singaporeans and is loved by all. This new waterfront theatre will meet the needs of our theatre companies and community arts groups that often require a smaller venue to showcase their works. We look forward to Esplanade enlarging the space for Singaporean content and talent to emerge, as well as enriching our arts and culture scene."

With the new 550-seat waterfront theatre, Esplanade will be able to:

- Develop and present a wider range of quality arts programmes for schools that inspire and challenge the young; develop in future generations empathy, curiosity and creativity; and provide them new perspectives on different cultures and our society.
- Allow Singapore's promising community, youth and traditional arts groups, especially in theatre and dance, to take that next step to reach a wider audience along Esplanade's busy waterfront.
- Work closely with both Singapore and regional artists to create new works and to take these artists and works beyond Singapore.
- Present a greater diversity of leading artists and productions that inspire, given that, a majority of works produced today for major arts festivals are for a medium-sized space.

Project timeline and fundraising plans

Esplanade will be calling for interested Project Consultants to submit their design proposals for Esplanade's new waterfront theatre later this year. Construction of the new venue will commence in 2019, and the venue will be operational by 2021. Esplanade has convened a fundraising taskforce chaired by board member Dr Ming Tan, and comprising other members of the arts centre's board of directors.

The arts centre is exploring a range of ways to raise funds for its next stage that it has not explored before, including offering naming rights for the waterfront theatre. It will also introduce creative and simple ways for the public to participate, support and leave their mark on the new waterfront theatre that different communities have helped to realise. Full details will be announced in October 2017.

Please refer to Annex A and B for details on Esplanade's next phase of development and the role of the new theatre, and a summary of the feasibility study on Esplanade's waterfront theatre respectively. For more information and updates, please visit www.esplanade.com and www.facebook.com/esplanadesg.

About Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay

Esplanade is Singapore's national performing arts centre. Its year-round line-up of about 3,000 performances presented by Esplanade, its collaboration partners and hirers include a diverse calendar of ticketed and non-ticketed programmes featuring dance, music, theatre, visual arts and more, making the arts accessible for everyone. The centre works in close partnership with local, regional and international artists to develop artistic capabilities and content, push artistic boundaries and engage audiences. It also develops technical capabilities for the industry nationally.

This architectural icon, with its distinctive twin shells, houses world-class performance spaces complemented by a comprehensive range of professional support services. Its two main venues are the 1,600-seat Concert Hall and a Theatre with a capacity of 2,000.

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. In 2016, The Charity Council awarded TECL the Charity Transparency Award and the Special Commendation Award – Clarity of Strategy.

Visit www.esplanade.com for more information.

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Annex A

The Next Stage for Esplanade and our Communities

Since Esplanade opened in October 2002, it has presented more than 34,000 performances, drawing an audience of 24 million patrons and 88 million visitors, making it one of the busiest arts centres in the world. About 70% of its annual calendar of 3,000 activities is offered free for people from all walks of life to enjoy.

In Esplanade's next stage of development, the performing arts centre for everyone will rededicate itself to developing and serving Singapore's various communities, artists and the arts and cultural sector. The key focus areas include:

- **Esplanade continues to encourage arts for social good**

Every year, Esplanade hosts some 10,000 beneficiaries from various Voluntary Welfare Organisations to arts performances and workshops, including children, youth, those with special needs, seniors and migrant workers. We believe that the arts has the power to uplift and inspire.

In addition, Esplanade develops and programmes some seven to nine longer-term flagship projects each year together with professional artists. We have seen these flagship projects help build confidence, a sense of self, friendships, as well as a sense of community, and empowering individuals in their own unique circumstance of life. Each of these projects takes place over three to four months with a dedicated group of beneficiaries. For example:

- Projects like *Songwriting for Hope* and *Footwork for Community* for youth at risk, which exposes them to songwriting and dance forms such as hip hop, as an important means of expressing the issues that they are facing.
- *Sing Out Loud!* acapella singing for seniors allows them to learn new vocal techniques, expand their creative energy, develop friendships and boost their confidence through performance. This project also includes a partnership with the Alzheimer's Disease Association to explore how singing benefits those with the illness.

Esplanade will continue to grow its [community engagement](#) programmes to enable more people, especially at-risk youths and other communities in need, to benefit from engaging with the arts. We also aim to develop the capabilities of artists and the capacity of the arts and social sector for community engagement, in partnership with donors.

- **Believing in the positive impact the arts have on the development of the young, Esplanade will expand its programmes and in-house productions for children and youth**

To develop imagination, creativity and empathy in future generations, and a society that focuses on what matters beyond the academic and material, Esplanade will expand its current programmes to bring the arts to the young in schools and with their families. Some of these programmes include [PLAYtime!](#), a series of in-house productions of highly interactive theatre that offer many incidental learning opportunities for two to four year olds; [Octoburst – A Children's Festival](#) which is a weekend of music, dance and theatre performances and workshops to delight and engage young audiences, and [Feed Your Imagination](#), a specially crafted programme for school children aged seven to 17 years to make arts excursions an integral part of student life.

Currently, at least one in five programmes at Esplanade is for the young – from young children to youths, for families as well as schools. We provide opportunities through the arts for young people to learn about different cultures, social issues, gain confidence, and

discover and express themselves. In FY2016/17, over 90% of secondary schools in Singapore have benefitted from programmes at Esplanade.

- **Recognising the seniors' contributions to society, Esplanade will create more access to the arts for them to enjoy their senior years**

With an ageing society, Esplanade also aims to better serve and engage the seniors, and provide them occasions to bond with their family and friends, enjoy learning and staying active through the arts. These dedicated programmes include [Coffee Morning & Afternoon Tea](#), a popular monthly series which showcases English and Chinese golden hits and evergreen favourites presented by veteran Singapore artists, as well as an annual festival [A Date With Friends](#) for our senior citizens to celebrate and promote lifelong arts engagement. For instance, in FY2016/17, Esplanade specially programmed over 100 activities dedicated to seniors, with over 90,000 people that comprised seniors from different backgrounds who attended the ticketed and non-ticketed events.

- **Esplanade to assume a larger role in driving content creation and talent development in the arts industry**

Over the last few years, Esplanade has increased the commissioning and producing of new works with Singapore, regional and international artists. In FY2016/17, Esplanade has produced or commissioned about 60 new works.

Moving ahead, Esplanade will assume an even larger responsibility as an institution that enables the creation of new work through exploration and providing a safe space for artists to create. The arts centre will also encourage deeper exploration between Singapore artists and their regional / international counterparts and provide them with suitable spaces to create new works that speak for and of Asia.

In addition, Esplanade has also taken a greater role in talent development. Esplanade has expanded its [mentorship programmes](#) across different fields. This includes the *Baybeats Budding Bands* programme, the *Mosaic Jazz Fellows* programme, the *Fusion Beats Mentorship* programme, as well as mentorship in areas for young people aspiring to apply their skills in writing, photography and videography in the arts.

In 2016, Esplanade also launched its *Mosaic Associate Artist* programme, and will continue to expand this programme, such as an *Associate Artist for Theatre* for young audiences. The *Associate Artist* programme aims to provide the next level of tailored support for practitioners, leveraging on Esplanade's producing and presenting capabilities, as well as international networks.

Plugging the gap in Singapore's arts industry with the new 550-seat waterfront theatre

To enable Esplanade to achieve these goals in its next phase of growth, a new purpose-built 550-seat waterfront theatre is much needed as the arts centre's current venues are fully utilised. Existing medium-sized theatres in Singapore are purely for-hire spaces, and these venues for hire such as Drama Centre and Victoria Theatre & Victoria Concert Hall enjoy over 80% utilisation rates. A programmed medium-sized venue at Esplanade can actively produce and present works critical to the next phase of Singapore's performing arts development. This was the feedback given by arts groups to the National Arts Council for its Performing Arts Masterplan of 2015.

With the new 550-seat waterfront theatre, Esplanade will be able to:

- Develop and present a wider range of programmes for schools**

Today Esplanade's programmes for the young are well subscribed. These comprise arts programmes for students created specially with the desired learning outcomes in schools, as well as for children and their families to learn about the arts and culture in various community and cultural festivals. There is opportunity for Esplanade to expand these programmes for the young, working closely with artists and arts groups. As our smaller studios are already fully utilised, the medium-sized theatre will provide an additional platform for such programmes that provides for a closer interaction with the arts.
- Better support the development of Singapore's promising community, youth and traditional arts groups, especially in theatre and dance**

Today, the development path for many of these groups starts from Esplanade's non-ticketed platforms to ticketed presentations at our small venues. Many have done well and are ready to take on a larger platform to reach an even wider audience. However, to make the transition from a small venue to Esplanade's 2,000-seat Theatre is often too big a step to take for these groups, and will require a lot more resources. Moreover, many traditional Asian art forms are better suited to a more intimate setting. The new 550-seat waterfront theatre will more aptly meet the needs of these groups.
- Work closely with both Singapore and regional artists to create new content, with touring potential, particularly in Asian traditional arts and contemporary theatre and dance**

Through our various cultural festivals, and platforms such as *The Studios* and *da:ns festival*, Esplanade has embarked on supporting, commissioning, or directly producing new works with both Singapore and regional artists in its smaller 220-seat Theatre Studio and 245-seat Recital Studio. Many of these new works have been well-received by audiences in Singapore, and some have even gone on to be performed overseas. There is a need to push artistic boundaries, to scale up these works, as well as continue to create new productions through a 550-seat venue for greater impact and reach. Esplanade can also leverage on the strong international networks that it has built up to promote Singapore works to overseas festivals looking to receive works for their mainly medium-sized venues.
- Present medium-sized works, which are a majority of all works produced today internationally for major festivals**

A majority of new works created regionally and internationally for major festivals are made for medium-sized venues. This will mean that audiences will enjoy a greater variety from Esplanade's programming – a presentation of medium-sized works amidst the existing large-scale and smaller studio-type works.

Annex B

About the new 550-seat waterfront theatre

Feasibility Study in September 2016

Esplanade completed a feasibility study in September 2016 to establish whether a 550-seat theatre can be built cost-effectively on Esplanade's site, maximising existing infrastructure without severely impacting on-going-activities.

Esplanade also desired for the theatre to be as open and accessible as possible to the public. Compared to Esplanade's more formal and larger venues, i.e. the Concert Hall and Theatre, the 550-seat theatre should be a more informal and casual space.

The study concluded that it was feasible to build a 550-seat theatre on Esplanade's existing site, at a projected cost of S\$30 million within a 36-month timeframe. Given that the initial conception of Esplanade's design had intended for a complex of medium-sized facilities on the existing site, the study established that there were efficiencies to be gained by leveraging existing mechanical and engineering infrastructure that have the capacity to serve a new 550-seat theatre. The study also made further recommendations on how to achieve maximum energy ratings and efficiencies with some diversion and new connection works.

Proposed site

The proposed site of about 3,000sqm is along the Esplanade Waterfront, comprising existing areas The Edge and Waterfront Carpark (see figure 1).

The Edge is where occasional free outdoor performances take place, including at the Powerhouse Stage during *Baybeats*, Chinese Street Opera Stage during *Moonfest – A Mid-Autumn Celebration*, and *What's Your Move?* stage during *da:ns festival*.

The proposed site is also part of a wider area, known as the Esplanade Annexe, comprising both indoor and outdoor food & beverage provisions, as well as Esplanade's Annexe Studio which was converted from a club space and opened in 2016.

This location allows the new 550-seat waterfront theatre to tap on the adjacent Power House for storage and support; leverage the existing access to Raffles Avenue for vehicular access to the theatre's backstage; and connect to the Esplanade Annexe food & beverage provisions as part of its front-of-house experience.





Desired Features for the Development

- 1) Visibility, accessibility and porosity from the Waterfront.

The proposed site is publicly prominent and accessible, and there is potential for the 550-seat waterfront theatre's eventual design to invite curiosity and engage even passers-by.

- 2) Outdoor activities "plaza" that is integrated with the Esplanade Annexe food & beverage provisions for a more casual and informal front-of-house experience.

Given its location, the entrance and "foyer" to the new waterfront theatre can be an informal and open space with some weather protection. It can also be a casual space where the public can gather.

- 3) An approachable back-of-house, which similarly invites curiosity and can incorporate planting.

The new waterfront theatre's back-of-house comprises dressing rooms and work spaces. While it is conventionally a space that is unseen by the public, given its location by the waterfront, there is also the opportunity for the new theatre to create a more welcoming space. The feasibility study illustrated an option of how modular structures, together with lush planting and public seating, can be more inviting and welcoming.

- 4) Flexibility in the staging and seating layout.

The feasibility study established that a stage with a 12m x 12m acting zone, crossover and 6m deep side and rear stages can be created in the location. The study also examined how the new theatre could potentially provide for some flexibility in the stage and seating layout. This would help meet the needs of different types of traditional arts performances, as well as contemporary dance and theatre performances.

Estimated Timeline

Esplanade will call for proposals for the project's different consultants, including a theatre consultant and architect, immediately upon this announcement.

The project targets to start construction in early 2019, with a minimum 18-month construction period. Following a period of commissioning, Esplanade targets for the venue to be in operation by 2021.