

SPEECH BY MS GRACE FU, MINISTER FOR CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH AT THE GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY OF THE SINGTEL WATERFRONT THEATRE ON 18 JUNE 2019, 10AM AT THE ESPLANADE

Mr Lee Tzu Yang
Chairman, Esplanade,

Ms Yvonne Tham
Chief Executive Officer, Esplanade

Ms Chua Sock Koong
Group Chief Executive Officer, Singtel

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning. It is my pleasure to be at the groundbreaking ceremony of Esplanade's newest performance venue – the Singtel waterfront theatre.

The Singtel waterfront theatre – a new venue for work and content

2. As Singapore's national performing arts centre, the Esplanade has played an integral role in nurturing and inspiring young talents, and bringing people from all walks of life together through the arts. Over the last 17 years, Singaporeans and visitors have been able to enjoy quality performances all year round at our beloved 'Durian'.

3. The Esplanade team understands the importance of ensuring that its programming remains relevant and affordable, to make the arts accessible to all. This has resulted in a calendar of events that appeal to all communities and age groups. For example, its cultural festivals **Huayi**,

Pesta Raya and **Kalaa Utsavam** present the richness and beauty of Chinese, Malay and Indian arts every year during Chinese New Year, Hari Raya and Deepavali respectively. Each of these festivals include both ticketed and non-ticketed programming, so that all can celebrate together through meaningful arts experiences.

4. The Esplanade has also helped to establish Singapore as a valued partner for arts and culture, both regionally and internationally. One example is the collaboration between the Esplanade and the renowned **Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan**. Two co-produced works were and presented during the Huayi Chinese Festival of the Arts in 2012 and 2015, before touring to other arts centres and festivals in Asia and Europe.

5. For budding talents looking to take their craft to a higher level, the Esplanade offers opportunities for them to connect and learn from veteran artists. Through the **Baybeats Budding Bands** mentorship programme, for example, local bands get to work with respected music mentors and Singapore music industry veterans. They hone their music skills and performance techniques, while also gaining exposure to other aspects of music management, such as marketing, production and recording. The programme cumulates in a showcase performance at **Baybeats**, alongside other Singapore and regional acts.

6. The new Singtel waterfront theatre will allow the Esplanade to provide an even wider range of engaging and enjoyable cultural offerings for all of us. The theatre is a response to a call from our local artists and arts groups. Many of these groups began performing in smaller studios and black boxes, before moving to a 200 or 300-seat theatre. This is the development path for many young, local talents, including those who get

their start at one of the Esplanade's non-ticketed platforms. They seek to grow further, but the leap from a 200-300 seater to a 1,000 seat theatre – let alone the Esplanade's almost 2,000-seat Theatre – may be too ambitious at one go.

7. With 550 seats and a highly modular configuration which can be customised to a range of needs, the new waterfront theatre caters to the needs of such groups, without having to leave the 'comforts' of the Esplanade. It will allow them to explore and create new content, including more works which reflect Singapore's culture through our arts. The Singtel waterfront theatre will help our artists push their artistic boundaries, scale up their works, and serve as a launch pad for our talent – from presenting their works to local audiences, to bringing these to regional and international platforms.

The importance of ticketed and non-ticketed events

8. Providing more opportunities for our arts practitioners is one way which the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and the National Arts Council (NAC) seek to achieve the priorities of **Our SG Arts Plan**. Under this plan, we want the arts to be an integral part of the lives of all Singaporeans and help bring together diverse communities.

9. To accomplish this, MCCY and NAC believe that we need to grow both ticketed and non-ticketed cultural offerings. We know instinctively that ticketed events are important as they provide revenue for our artists, and contribute to the sustainability of our arts sector. Ticket sales also serve as a tangible indication of audience support for our artists' work.

10. Non-ticketed events are equally important to both arts practitioners and our arts landscape. Such offerings provide opportunities for our artists to explore different facets of their craft, learn the relevant new skills, and develop capabilities in community art help us deepen our understanding of each other and form a bridge across different backgrounds, communities, and life-stages. And we hope that some audiences from non-ticketed events will ‘move on’ to form part of our ticketed audiences, as part of their journey with our arts and culture.

Enhancing research for audience development

11. Another way in which the NAC will help our arts practitioners develop new audiences is through research. We know that there is competition for audience attention, both in the physical as well as online worlds. It is therefore important that MCCY and NAC work with our arts community to grow demand for the arts.

12. The findings from the tenth edition of the National Population Survey on the Arts show that attendance and participation in the arts continue on a generally upward trend. In 2017, 54 percent of Singaporeans attended arts events and 22 percent participated in arts activities. To help us understand our audiences better, the National Arts Council will be commissioning various audience research studies over the next five years. These range from quantitative research on audience segments and consumption patterns for specific art forms, to qualitative research on audience behaviour. The findings from this research will be shared with the arts community.

13. One example is the second National Music Consumption survey, which will be conducted later this year. The inaugural survey in 2017 sought to provide an understanding of the general music consumption behaviour of consumers. Through this, NAC was able to identify consumer trends, attitudes and perceptions of homegrown music in Singapore. The second survey will build on these findings to provide insights into new opportunities to support Singaporean music.

Conclusion

14. The examples I have shared are an indication of the commitment by MCCY and NAC to foster an even more vibrant and sustainable arts and culture landscape in Singapore. To achieve this aim, the public sector works closely, hand-in-hand, with our partners from the private and people sectors. I would therefore like to express my heartfelt thanks to Singtel for their generous support towards the development of the arts in Singapore. I hope that Singtel will continue to be as stalwart a supporter of the arts in the years to come. I would also like to thank all of you who are here today for your contributions to our arts scene.

15. On that note, I wish everyone a pleasant day ahead. Thank you.

.