Asian Performing Arts: Collaboration and Exchange

Centre for Asian Theatre and Dance

Handa Noh Theatre, Department of Drama, Theatre and Dance
Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey, United Kingdom
30 May 2017, 10am-6pm

This academic symposium on Asian music, theatre and dance addresses the state of play in collaborative performance making in contemporary Asia and the participation of Asian artists in global performance projects and exchanges.

Through education, travel, rising incomes, new communication technologies and English-language competency (among other factors), boundaries between art worlds (‘traditional’, ‘modern’, ‘contemporary’, ‘popular’, ‘local’, ‘national’, ‘regional’, ‘international’) are increasingly porous and Asian artists, creative materials and cultural ideas travel with relative ease. At the same time, there are mounting concerns around creative rights and ownership of cultural properties that impact directly on collaborative practices and the sharing of skills and knowledge.

Questions to be considered include:

- How do the English terms ‘collaboration’ and ‘exchange’ translate into different Asian languages and contexts?
- How are ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ artists collaborating in Asia today?
- How are intermedial projects crossing art forms being conceived and executed?
- What are the politics of collaborating and performing internationally?
- How do training initiatives in Asia facilitate collaborative practices and intercultural exchanges?
- How do humans and non-humans collaborate?
- How do inter-Asian alliances and organisations (for example, ASEAN) play into international performance projects?
- Are there significant differences between East-West and Inter-Asian artistic collaborations and exchanges?
- How do practitioners from rich countries (e.g. Japan, Singapore, the US, the UK) exploit artists from poorer Asian countries in their art-making practices?
- What are the relevant ethical guidelines for collaboration and exchange in contemporary Asia?
- What are the relevant factors (political, economic, religious, linguistic etc) that prevent collaboration and exchange in Asian performing arts?

The symposium will also feature a discussion of a new piece developed collaboratively by a group of international Royal Holloway postgraduate students and staff with visiting Indonesian artists Lili Suparli and Achmad Farmis, with the support of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, involving gamelan music, Sundanese dance, Javanese and Sundanese puppetry, Malay dance and Indian folk theatre. This will be premiered in the Handa Noh Theatre on 25 May at 7pm. Free tickets are available at https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/not-just-a-collaboration-tickets-34486381696. All are encouraged to attend.

The symposium also marks and celebrates the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Royal Holloway and the Shanghai Theatre Academy.
SCHEDULE FOR THE DAY

9.15-10.00 Coffee, registration and welcome by Professor Matthew Cohen

10-11am Keynote address by Professor Keith Howard, introduced and moderated by Prof Matthew Cohen

11am-12.30pm Paper panel with Rowan McLelland, Amin Farid, Tomoko Hata, Hannah Marsden and Ye Teng, moderated by Dr Ashley Thorpe

12.30-1pm Lecture-demonstration by Walid Ali, moderated by Dr Ashley Thorpe

1-1.45pm Lunch

1.45-2.45pm Lecture-demonstrations by Sally Dean and Dr Carmencita Palermo, moderated by Dr Shzr Ee Tan

2.45-3.15pm Round table with Prof Matthew Cohen, Amin Farid, Satkirti Sinha, Sally Dean, Dr Lili Suparli, Ahmad Faris, moderated by Dr Shzr Ee Tan

3.15-3.30pm Comfort break

3.30-4.30pm Second paper panel with Dr Rossella Ferrari, Dr Laura MacDonald and Dr How Wee Ng, moderated by Professor Anna Morcom

4.30-5.00pm Roundtable with Yana Zarifi, Dr Margaret Coldiron and Dr Manuel Jimenez, moderated by Dr Glenn Odom

5.00-5.30pm Lecture-demonstration by Blooming Ludus (Francine Dulong and Haeweon Yi), moderated by Dr Glenn Odom

5.30-6.00pm Summary by Professor Keith Howard and general discussion

Following the symposium, participants are invited to attend the International Musical Feast. This annual event features ‘ethnic’ music performed by Royal Holloway students and staff in an informal, feast-like/potluck atmosphere. Among other performances, Dr Lili Suparli and Ahmad Farmis will be performing together with Gamelan Puloganti, Royal Holloway’s gong-chime ensemble. Symposium participants attending will be supplied with a boxed dinner. We expect this event to go on until approximately 9pm but feel free to leave whenever you like.
KEYNOTE

Working Apart and Together: Collaboration, Exchange, and the Troubling Notion of Cultural Relativism

Professor Keith Howard (SOAS)
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With Trump, Brexit, and the increasing shouts for isolationism to dismantle what globalization has achieved, the rationale behind the United Nations – that by understanding each other we might avoid new global conflict – suddenly sounds anachronistic. And yet this rationale is precisely what much of our academic and artistic practice is premised on. My paper surveys the scene, from our search for a past supposedly discarded by modernity to our penchant for travelling to World Heritage Sites and creating icons of intangible cultural heritage, from our promotion ‘cultural ringers’ alongside cultural pluralism to our yearning to create intercultural and transcultural productions that shift boundaries of culture, race and place. I attempt to expose some of the perils and disjunctures of much that we take for granted, and to explore how our search for authenticity and difference on one hand and equality in collaboration on the other tends to remain elusive.

Keith Howard is Professor of Music at SOAS, University of London. He was formerly Associate Dean at the University of Sydney, visiting professor at Monash University, Ewha Women’s University and Hanguk University of Foreign Studies, and, from autumn 2017, will be a fellow of the National Humanities Center, North Carolina. He has written or edited 20 books and more than 300 academic articles and reviews, as well as contributing to many national and international newspapers and journals. A regular broadcaster on Korean affairs for BBC, ITV, Sky, NBC and others, he founded and managed the SOASIS CD/DVD series and OpenAir Radio. Between 2008 and 2017, he served as editorial chair of the SOAS Musicology Series (Routledge).
PAPERS

Intersections, Interjections and Interplay: A Reflection on International Collaborative Dance Making
Soultari Amin Farid (Muhammad Noramin Bin Mohamed Farid)
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Presenting under his stage pseudonym Soultari, this lecture presents reflections as a facilitator and collaborator in collaborative ‘dance making’ with dance artists from various cultural background and dance disciplines. As a traditional practitioner and choreographer of Malay dance, Soultari’s experience in collaborating with artists from outside Singapore only started during his postgraduate studies in Europe (2014 to present).

In this lecture, he will share some of his ‘culture shock’ dealing with artists who are trained in Western Dance technique. He will highlight some of their feedback on Soultari’s ‘traditional’ choreographic approach in his maiden international project in the UK entitled Bhumi which was presented at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2016.

In addition, he will share how a high degree of reflexivity after his first experience has helped him re-fashion his own methods in facilitating collaboration for his next artistic collaborative project entitled Sonder, a collaboration with Classical musicians from the Royal College of Music, UK, and dance artists from Palestine/Jordan and Kyrgyzstan (UK, 2017).

Acknowledging that the experience is never the same from one project to the next, Soultari is determined to pinpoint the intersections, interjections and interplay that happens in collaborative ‘dance making’ which has served to shift the focus from product-driven practices to a process-centred one.

Asian Theatre as Method: Inter-Asian Collaboration and Sino-Japanese Transnationalism in Performance
Dr Rossella Ferrari, SOAS University of London
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In 2012, Zuni Icosahedron (Hong Kong), Za-Koenji Public Theatre (Tokyo), and the Jiangsu Kun Opera Theatre (Nanjing) launched the Toki Experimental Project, an intercultural platform devoted to the transmission of Chinese kunqu, Japanese noh and other Asian ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) theatre forms through contemporary performance. Originating from a Shanghai Expo 2010 commission, the Toki collaboration presents strategic interpenetration of national discourse and ‘minor’ transnational dynamics. Most significantly, it provides a theatrical application of Chen Kuan-hsing’s influential notion of ‘Asia as Method’. As epitomized by the One Table, Two Chairs inter-Asian collaborations produced yearly at the Toki International Arts Festival in Nanjing, the Toki Theatre partakes in Asia as Method’s effort toward ‘decolonization, deimperialization, and de-cold war’ through aesthetic and epistemological deconstruction, endorsing a dialogical model of intercultural performance as inter-Asian relations.

Finnish Kantele Music in Japan: Intercultural Musical Collaborations and Cultural Exchange
Tomoko Hata (Royal Holloway, University of London)
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This paper explores musical collaborations between Finland and Japan in an intercultural context by focusing on Finnish kantele musical activities. The kantele is a traditional Finnish instrument, associated with runo-song traditions. Since the official establishment of Japanese kantele association
in 2008, an increasing number of Japanese people have become interested in Finnish culture and kantele music, in collaboration with Finnish musicians. This fieldwork project involves two areas in which kantele players from these countries frequently make musical collaborations: Kuhmo, Finland and Sapporo, Japan. In Japan, there are two dissimilar scenarios that involve these collaborations. When Japanese kantele players collaborate with Finnish musicians, they aspire to learn Finnish songs. However, beyond their collaborations with Finnish musicians, Japanese players tend to perform kantele music in a Japanese cultural context. Kantele players in Sapporo also make connections between Finnish kantele and Ainu music, which is linked to their forest cultures and languages. Thus, this paper aims to ascertain both the Finnish and Japanese kantele players’ perceptions regarding these cultural exchanges through musical activities.

No Collaborative Business Like Show Business: East Asia’s Musical Theatre Industry
Dr Laura MacDonald (University of Portsmouth)
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While the global circulation of consumer goods and cultural products has long been a source of concern for the potential homogenization and loss of identity and local values it can precipitate, Western musical theatre has facilitated two-way cultural exchange in East Asia since it first put down roots in Japan in the 1960s. With their longstanding partnerships with Western companies such as Disney, and Vereinigte Bühnen Wien, Japanese musical theatre producers such as Toho and Shiki serve as role models of successful transnational collaboration for other East Asian producers. Acting as a wise parent to emerging producers in South Korea and China, the Japanese musical theatre industry is also forging trans-Asia partnerships, indicating the potential for regional collaboration alongside east-west partnerships. Musicals, performers and spectators circulate throughout East Asia, showing the shared enthusiasm throughout the region for musical theatre, and its potential to support cultural exchange and understanding.

Drawing on rehearsal and performance observation as well as interviews with East Asian theatre professionals, I survey musicals and audiences in Japan, South Korea, and China, to evaluate musical theatre’s development in the region. Analysing productions of Western musicals in translation, such as Man of La Mancha, Wicked, and Elisabeth, will reveal how East Asian industries have learned about musical theatre creation from the West. The more recent international collaborations generating the new Chinese jukebox musical, The Secret, based on the songs of Taiwanese pop star Jay Chou, and the Korean premiere of Mata Hari, will also be examined as experiments in domestic musical theatre production with the potential for trans-Asia success.

Chinese Ballet
Rowan McLelland (University of Roehampton)
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This paper examines ballet as a relatively new genre in the People's Republic of China, exposing ideologies central to ballet itself, and those unique to its new Chinese situation. Under Chairman Mao’s guideline, ‘Make the Past Serve the Present and Foreign Things Serve China’ (1956), ballet was consciously adopted and reformed. ‘Propaganda ballets’ with revolutionary themes were staged, incorporating elements from Chinese classical dance and Opera, and Chinese language terminology issued for the technique. Ballet in China has been radically altered in light of its socio-cultural historical situation, providing an excellent space for examining how ballet is mediated through culture. The paper draws on fieldwork conducted in China over three years to explore how the bodies of the dancers themselves are carriers of symbolic value and investigate how ballet as initially
an 'alien' genre and, more recently, an indigenous culture in China, functions as a globalized practice through processes of exchange and collaboration with the West. The paper will highlight how these processes work in both directions (both West to East, and East to West) with regards to choreography and performance, and also dance training, with specific focus on highlighting the importance of international ballet competitions to the global nature of the form.

**Participating in the Universal: India and Western Classical Music**
Hannah Marsden (Royal Holloway, University of London)
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Popular rhetoric often characterizes western classical music as a 'universal language', a global art form to which nationality, ethnicity and gender can be deemed irrelevant.

Within the western classical music scene in Mumbai, India, universalist ideologies dominate. However, the Symphony Orchestra of India, which performs concerts of canonic symphonic works for its local audience, commissioned a tabla concerto when invited to take part in an orchestra festival in Switzerland. Meanwhile, an Indian Catholic choir leader sourced and arranged sacred songs in various local Indian languages for her SATB choir, the Kadenza Cantori, when 'traditional Indian' sacred choral works were requested by a choir festival held in Germany.

In this paper I use these two examples as a lens through which I examine the roles and identities of Indian western classical musicians and ensembles participating in a transnational musical sphere. I examine the tensions (and the musics) created when ideologies of universalism meet requests for performances of nationality and otherness.

**Inter-NGO Collaboration in Community Theatre: Empowering Migrant Workers through Forum Theatre in Neoliberal Singapore:**
Dr How Wee Ng (SOAS)
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In an economically developed and neoliberal country like Singapore where low-skilled migrant workers from other parts of Asia struggle with exploitative work conditions and discrimination, is sociocultural empowerment through collaborative community arts possible? Looking at ‘failed’ forum theatre performances touring in the residential heartlands of Singapore, I examine the significance of the collaboration between three non-governmental groups in Singapore, namely, theatre company Drama Box, community arts charity Migrant Voices, and a youth international community service organisation, The Choice Initiative. The performance of bodies and voices of the silenced underclass Other in the host country Singapore raises questions about the politics of collaborative community arts converging at the intersections of nationality, ethnicity and class.

**Performing Chen-he Mulian Opera in the Context of ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage’**
Ye Teng (Royal Holloway, University of London)
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Chen-he Mulian Opera is west Hunan Province’s most iconic traditional ritual opera, and it has been performed during the Zhongyuan Festival for over five hundred years. Due to the propaganda and education of Marxist scientific atheism, this opera was banned by the government and disappeared
from public stages in 1949. However, it was revived in the early 1980s, and was listed as one of the first items of ‘national intangible cultural heritage’ in 2006, with governmental support. This was due to the revival of religion and the protection of the ‘local culture’ policy. I had the opportunity to participate in the Zhongyuan Festival Ceremony in 2014 and 2015 as an audience member, conferee and interviewer. My observation of the Chen-he Mulian performances made me confused as they showed a distinct secularization tendency. Since there is government intervention, how do performers and local government collaborate? What has been changed due to this collaboration? Drawing on the theories of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, this paper examines whether the Chen-he Mulian Opera can still be conceived of an ‘authentic traditional ritual opera’ in the context of ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage’. 
LECTURE-DEMONSTRATIONS

Performing Ipok Alud and Ipok Daya Spirits Using Masks
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The lecture-demonstration focuses on presentations and elements of Melanau masks in performance. The Serahang Parade performance for the ipok spirits contains stagecraft, spoken words and performance arts of the Melanau people of Sarawak. Performed on a river using wooden boats, two performers use individually-crafted masks that represent their interpretations of spirits such as Ipok Alud and Ipok Daya. The mask performers use different costumes to indicate to people that they are not similar to other performers on the boat which use a traditional Melanau black costume. The non-mask performers bring a Serahang, a seven-foot circular decorated object made of dried leaves which is a gift for the Ipok. The mask for the performance is one of important elements. The motifs and crafting from banana stems are the Melanau’s visualizations of their spirits. Crafting does not project emotions onto the masks. Crafting is only focused on the Melanau’s visualization of the spirits’ looks.

Amerta Movement and Somatic Costume
Sally E. Dean (Royal Holloway, University of London)
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This interactive and experiential lecture/demonstration will introduce the recent developments of the Somatic Movement, Costume and Performance Project, focusing specifically on how Sally’s ongoing work with the Javanese practice of Amerta Movement (Suprapto Suryodarma) has influenced the methodologies, approach and attitude of this ongoing collaborative project. One key aspect of Amerta Movement will be addressed: its relationship to environment. This will lead into the project’s relationship between the somatic costumes and the environment, with examples from workshops and performances. The audience will be invited to participate in simple somatic exercises and through trying on somatic costumes.

Building, Un-building, Connecting Cities: Critical Reflection on Collaboration with Korean Pansori Artists for the ‘How Much Space Do We Need for Living?’ Project
Francine Dulong and Haeweon Yi (Co-Artistic Directors of Blooming Ludus)
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Two artists from two different cities found a new city for living. Although their three cities are in three different continents with different cultural backgrounds, these urban environments share some similar shapes and changes—higher multiplex housings, gentrification, subdivided rental properties, increasing housing prices and rents, for example. A participatory theatre company Blooming Ludus started a project to explore these urban landscapes and share conversations inside and between cities about how to build sustainable community and make connections within urban development and gentrification. The first exploration began last year in Seoul with Korean Pansori Company Taroo. Through the three-week residency, Blooming Ludus and Taroo researched and developed this theme of sustainable living spaces and the combination of two genres—Pansori and participatory theatre. The lecture-demonstration will introduce the process of collaboration and facilitate practical approaches focusing on ethical and political discourses in three different relations
around the project 1) between western and eastern artists, 2) between contemporary and traditional storytelling art forms, 3) between artists-participants and artists-artists. It will also reflect how the intercultural relation of the French Canadian artist and the Korean artist inside the company based in England expands its dynamics through the international project.

**Embodying Alterity: From Traditionally-Trained Bodies to Presence on Contemporary Stages**

A lecture-demonstration by Dr Carmencita Palermo
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Indonesian performance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had as much influence on American and European theatre practitioners as other forms of Oriental performance. The influence of Balinese dance-drama on European theatre gained particular relevance after the publication of Artaud’s essay on Balinese Theatre in *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938). Consequentially, Balinese dance techniques were explored and employed in training and performances by directors such as Grotowski, Brook, Barba and Mnouchkine. Their work has created a trend of cross/inter-cultural theatre that still brings Balinese dance-drama 'masters' to Europe, South America, the USA and Asia. Concurrently, a constant flow of performers keep going to Bali to learn Balinese dance techniques. I followed this trend by starting my training in Balinese masked dance-drama topeng 25 years ago.

My presentation investigates through personal experience whether the learning of 'another's' traditional dance-theatre technique truly overcomes the superficial and exotic connotations that were expressed early in the 20th century. What do European (and non-European) actors inspired by Artaud’s readings learn from Bali? And what do they do with this learning? Is the flux toward Bali a source of inspiration for the actor’s training, or an aspect of cultural tourism that Bharucha would call ‘cultural piracy’? Furthermore, has the presence of foreign performers and researchers in Bali influenced Balinese performance practice? The search for modernity and otherness by Balinese performers has always had to take into consideration the discourse on identity and tradition, with doubtful results. Occasionally, where the search for a new global dimension of the performers' training is rooted in Balinese cosmology, the results are seemingly more appealing for the global contemporary stage.
ROUND TABLES

Not Just a Collaboration: Reflections on Process
Professor Matthew Cohen (RHUL) matthew.cohen@rhul.ac.uk, Sally Dean (RHUL) Sally.Dean.2014@live.rhul.ac.uk, Amin Farid (RHUL) soultari.amin@gmail.com, Satkriti Sinha (RHUL) sat.kirti41294@gmail.com, Dr Lili Suparli (ISBI Bandung) jaksun_bdg@yahoo.co.id, Ahmad Faris (ISBI Bandung), Tomoko Hata (Tomoko.Hata.2016@live.rhul.ac.uk)

This round table explores the devising that went on in the creation of an experimental performance involving acting, dance, costume, Indonesian puppetry and gamelan music, Not Just a Collaboration (Bukan Sekedar Kolaborasi). The performance explores differences and commonalities in notions of collaboration across different artistic cultures, languages, and media of expression. Interweaving open discussions with performer-generated exercises, musical and choreographic improvisations and dramatic fragments, we aim to open a space for dialogue through the arts that recognizes difficulties in translation, embedded power structures, gender roles and cultural stereotyping, while at the same time allowing possibilities for slippages, transformation and hybridity.

Hippolytos: A Case study in Collaborative Performance Making
Yana Zarifi, Artistic Director of Thiasos Theatre yanasistovari@aol.com, Dr Margaret Coldiron, Deputy Head of BA World Performance at E15 Acting School and Associate Director of Thiasos mcoldiron@mac.com, Dr Manuel Jimenez, University of Essex phantommusickr@yahoo.co.uk

In 2015, Thiasos Theatre Company set out to revive its 1997 production of Euripides’ Hippolytos, an ancient Greek tragedy reconfigured to an Indonesian dance-drama, using West Javanese jaipong choreography and Balinese masks. The 1997 production was re-commissioned and performed in London, Cyprus and the United States from 1998-2003. In reconstructing the production the choreography, music and mask work were substantially revised and a new cast assembled. It was performed at the Cockpit Theatre, London, at the Polish National Theatre and at the Indonesia Kontemporer festival of 2016. This roundtable discussion will look at the aims of the original production and its revival, the process of collaboration with Indonesian and London-based artists, and the performance’s reception by British, Polish and Indonesian audiences. Our examination will interrogate the nature of cross-cultural “collaboration,” the complexities of inter- and intra- cultural adaptation and the different interpretations of “traditional” and “contemporary” in Asian and European contexts. Speakers include the Artistic Director of Thiasos and noted Classicist Yana Zarifi, who conceived the production; theatre director and Southeast Asian scholar MJ Coldiron, who directed the production; and ethnomusicologist Manuel Jimenez, who was musical director of Hippolytos.