



RESTORATION OF COTTAGES IN PERTH, AUSTRALIA WINS A UNESCO AWARD OF DISTINCTION

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KAFKA on the rocks

THE SECOND EDITION OF THE ANNUAL FESTIVAL PRESENTS A WIDER VARIETY OF PROGRAMMES AND EXTENDS TO CHIANG MAI

FESTIVAL PREVIEW

PAWIT MAHASARINAND
SPECIAL TO THE NATION

WHILE THE 14th edition of Bangkok Theatre Festival, which kicked off last Thursday, is attracting local Thai-speaking theatregoers, the second edition of another major festival namely "Unfolding Kafka", which appeals more to the international crowd, started last Friday with two exhibitions in Soi Sathorn 1: Germany-based Yoko Seyama's "Saiyah #2.3" at Bangkok CityCity Gallery and Gold & Wirtschaftswunder's "K: Kafka in KomiKs" at the Goethe Institut.

The festival's official opening, though, won't take place until this coming Thursday at both venues, with French street theatre performance "Be Claude", a lecture by German literature scholar Thanomnuan O'charoen, a revival of 18 Monkeys Dance Theatre's "Red Peter" and "Bio-Erosion", a Dance and Motion Qualia Workshop by Sweden-based Satoshi Kudo.

Festival founder and director Jitti Chompee explains his curatorial ideas: "For me, Kafka is the archetype of many people in our society. They have the potential, or secretly wish, to live as an artist, but because of different factors, or preconceived ideas, they'd rather have a more traditional life. That's such a pity. Indeed, Kafka was a prolific writer, but he was mainly working as a lawyer for an insurance company in Prague. I don't believe he was a lawyer by choice. Even though he had to live this 'double life', he achieved what many haven't and became a genius artist who found his own unique style."

"As an artist, whether local or international, the key is to be your true self, not a mere copy of someone else," Jitti adds.

And as for why we in present day Thailand, a century later and thousands of miles away, still need to 'unfold' him, Jitti says: "The more I learn the more convinced I become that Kafka is highly relevant to our contemporary reality. Even if sometimes his books might be hard to read, his dark humour and animal characters appeal to me. In a way, his writing style set in a surrealistic world gives us plenty space for interpretation and creation. The openness of his stories, often without a clear ending, fits perfectly



French artist Pierre Pilatte performs "Be Claude" at Goethe Institut this Thursday and Rose Hotel on Friday.



In this revival of "Red Peter", 18 Monkeys Dance Theatre will collaborate with Yoko Seyama.

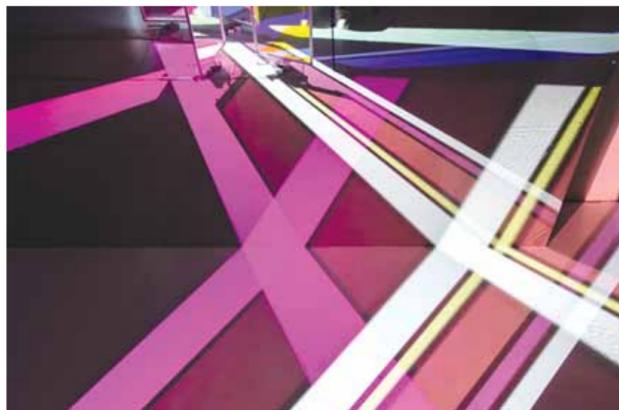
with the ideas behind abstract and conceptual arts.

"Kafka was a very troubled and self-conscious man," Jitti continues. "This is reflected in his works: we can hear his inner thoughts and the pressure he felt from his family, society and, of course, the bureaucracy. This is why I use the word 'unfold' in the festival's name: we need to gradually discover the concepts and ideas that connect the selected pieces and the direction of the festival, which is inspired by Kafka's works."

Jitti, himself a choreographer and artistic director of 18 Monkeys, is not the only one to have judged the first edition of the festival a success. And it's because of the support from his international artist colleagues and such partners as Goethe Institut and Japan



Hiroaki Umeda's "Holistic Strata" will be at Sodjai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts on November 20 and 21.



Berlin-based Yoko Seyama's "Saiyah #2.3" is at Bangkok CityCity Gallery until Sunday.

Foundation who've been with it from the start that "Unfolding Kafka" has become a biannual festival, one that is today enjoying even more partners and support.

"One of the invited artists from the first edition Laurent Goldring suggested that I add another layer to the festival by treating the subject matter of gender identity which, fortunately, relates perfectly to Kafka's works," Jitti adds.

"This year's festival has more participating artists from many countries - Germany, Japan, France, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and of course Thailand. We've kept the same strong artistic approach so that our audiences can enjoy abstract and conceptual arts in various media.

"The focus is more on the theme of gender identity. For example, 'Be Claude', supported by the French embassy, is a solo street theatre performance in which a man explores his feminine side. It's both funny and philosophical. We also have many female artists presenting their own perspectives on gender like young Israeli artist Roni Chadash. Her work 'Goofy', supported by the Israeli embassy, shows her unique physicality without showing her head. It changes completely the relationship to the woman's body."

"We've also expanded our educational programme since we believe in the arts as a medium for learning. Many youngsters may not need to learn solely through books. We also encourage the teachers and professor to come and exchange with our artists so that they

can share their experience in class."

Jitti is also taking his festival to the MAIAM Contemporary Art Museum in Chiang Mai where a Japanese digital dance wizard will present the Southeast Asia premiere of "Duo". He notes, "I think MAIAM's taking a risk for this but it's a good sign. We need to do something different and not follow the same prototype like the other festival in Bangkok, which is boring and with no signature."

Jitti is already thinking ahead to the festival's next edition in 2019, saying: "We launched an open call for artists and works. To my surprise, we received more than 350 applications from all over the world. We didn't know that Kafka has such an impact and inspired so many creations. The next festival should revolve around the idea of 'Kafka's Zoo'. I don't want to say more; you'll have to come and see."



Sharing the double-bill programme with "Holistic Strata" is Israeli artist Roni Chadash's "Goofy".

CENTRAL TO THE NORTH

■ "Unfolding Kafka Festival 2017" is at various venues in Bangkok until November 22. It will be at MAIAM in Chiang Mai on November 24 and 25. There are many free-admission programmes; to book your seat for the ticketed ones and more details, visit www.UnfoldingKafkaFestival.com

So, you think you can act?

BANGKOK COMMUNITY THEATRE CONTINUES TO PRESENT CONTEMPORARY WORKS

STAGE PREVIEW

PAWIT MAHASARINAND
SPECIAL TO THE NATION

THE FUN of Bangkok Community Theatre's (BCT) musical "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" is still fresh, and now BCT is giving us another reason to return to M Theatre where they've been staging Annie Baker's 2009 Obie-Award winning drama "Circle Mirror Transformation" since last Thursday.

This off-Broadway play takes the audience to a creative drama class in a small town in Vermont. *The New York Times'* Anita Gates wrote, "The artificiality of the acting games just emphasises the naturalness of the characters' real lives and feelings."

Group members pose as trees, beds and baseball gloves. They perform emotional scenes using only the words goulash and ak-mak. They pretend to be one another, telling their life stories. They write deep, dark secrets (anonymously) on scraps of paper and listen, sitting in a circle on the floor, as the confessions are read aloud." She added that the play was "absorbing, unblinking and sharply funny."

At the helm of the Thailand premiere of the English version is director Cian Green who staged "A Midsummer's Night Dream" at the Iron Fairies years ago.

He says, "I wanted a play that shows people learning how to act. Most people watching a stage play or movie don't realise the amount of work that's gone into making that piece of art. The final performance is only five per cent of the total effort with the other 95 per cent of the work being behind the scenes in rehearsals. This play challenges the stereotype of how people learn to act and hopefully will make the audience question their preconceptions of acting and if they could do it themselves."



Green chose an intimate venue, Blue Box Studio, explaining, "It forces the performer and the audience to be as close as possible. It also has a massive wall of mirrors facing the audience, which is perfect for the title of this play. Having mirrors behind the actors means you can see everything that is happening on stage. We don't

have to worry about what the audience can or cannot see as they can simply look in the mirror to get another angle. This has helped us keep the staging and actors positions very naturalistic. "Circle Mirror Transformation" is also the name of a specific acting exercise in which you transform the emotion or action of the

person you're observing. So ultimately I wanted to create this on a larger scale as the audience will be watching actors on stage and seeing themselves in the mirrors at the same time - and by the end will be transformed."

Working in collaboration with Green are BCT veteran Bonnie Zellerbach who performs Marty

AN ACTOR PREPARES

■ BCT's "Circle Mirror Transformation" continues at Blue Box Studio, on 2nd floor of M Theatre on New Petchaburi Road between Thonglor and Ekamai from Thursday to Saturday at 7.30pm.
■ The play is in English and recommended for audiences aged 15 years or older.
■ Tickets are Bt 500 at www.BangkokCommunityTheatre.com or email Info@BangkokCommunityTheatre.com.

Marty (Bonnie Zellerbach), left, welcomes us to her creative drama class.

Kriesberg, the resident drama teacher, and Stephen Thomas as James, her husband. Caitlin Lee Haas Chullasapaya portrays Theresa, a young ex-actress running away to a small town; Jeremy Wang is Schultz, a recent divorcee wanting to come out of his shell; the youngest member of the cast is Shreshtha Gupta as Lauren.