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GoLi - the Moving Theatre makes its international debut in Rotterdam

After popping up in different housing estates of Singapore such as Toa Payoh, Serangoon and Dakota Crescent, GoLi – the Moving Theatre is crossing oceans for the first time and set to make an appearance in the Dutch city of Rotterdam at the International Community Arts Festival (ICAF).

Drama Box has been invited to participate in the festival, which takes place from 29 March to 2 April 2017. ICAF had particularly expressed interest in having GoLi – the Moving Theatre appear at the festival.

Drama Box took up the offer, and decided to bring *The Lesson*, to be performed inside GoLi, to the festival. *The Lesson*, was first presented at the Singapore International Festival of Arts 2015 to critical acclaim. It is a participatory theatre piece that does not have a script or performers in the traditional sense.

Instead, a scenario is presented – a train station is to be built in a fictitious housing estate but due to the limited space available, an existing site must be demolished. A group of non-actors assume the role of residents of the estate, and gather on stage to vote for the site to be culled. If they cannot come to a consensus, the audience can then weigh in with their choice, if they can come to a unanimous decision. If both the “residents” and the audience cannot agree on a site to demolish, the decision is then left to the authorities.

“The issue of urban planning and conservation is something that is also relevant to the Rotterdam community. It would be an interesting to watch the dialogue unfold on an international platform,” says Koh Hui Ling, associate artistic director of Drama Box, and brainchild behind GoLi.

A sign of recognition and a dream come true

ICAF premiered in 2001, and has been at the forefront of bringing together community arts practitioners from all over the world. Coincidentally, 2001 was also the year that Drama Box began its work in the community, with two performances in the year – *Lian Can Cook* and *Have You Eaten*.

After 16 years of doing work in the community, the group is happy for the opportunity to present its work and ideology to an international audience. Koh sees this as a sign of recognition, to be in the same lineup as some of the artists whose works have inspired her practice. It is a “dream come true for GoLi to travel beyond the shores of Singapore,” says Koh.

“There has been a lack of understanding of community-based practices in Southeast Asia, so this marks an important milestone in its development and is a good chance for more people to know of such work and its relevance in Singapore.”

Since *Lian Can Cook*, Drama Box has consistently engaged the community in discourse on different social issues. GoLi was developed and built in 2015, not only expanding the technical and aesthetic possibilities for Drama Box's performances in the community, but also claiming and creating safe spaces for dialogue, both physically and mentally in land scarce Singapore.

Beginnings of GoLi

In 2010, Koh Hui Ling shared with her childhood friend Ting-Ting Zhang about her dreams of Drama Box having a mobile theatre structure that can travel to different parts of Singapore, transforming community spaces into vibrant places for arts and culture.

Ting-Ting, who is an architect by training and also one-half of Atelier Watt, together with her partner William Tan, then gave a form to this dream.

Once the designs were ready, Drama Box set to work to raise the money needed for its biggest project to date. Through a fundraising campaign, individual and corporate donations and government funding, approximately S\$350,000 was raised.

In 2015, the cherished dream became reality. GoLi was ready and put to use during Drama Box's festival *SCENES: Forum Theatre*.

Subsequently, it housed *The Lesson*, a part of trilogy *It Won't Be Too Long*, a commission by Singapore International Festival of Arts 2015 and *IgnorLAND of its Loss*.

* *The Lesson* was first created by Li Xie as part of the *It Won't Be Too Long* trilogy and presented at the Singapore International Festival of Arts 2015.

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