

MEDIA RELEASE

A landmark disability-led music theatre production at the Victoria Theatre, anchored by a main cast of 11 disabled performers, with ensemble support by 80 members from 7 community groups

For immediate release

A tribute to the past, a moving story of forgiveness, a benchmark for excellence in the field of arts & disability. From 4–6 August 2023, a total of 91 actors, dancers, singers and musicians across a spectrum of disabilities and ages, will take to the stage at Victoria Theatre for *Chachambo: Taking Flight!*

This landmark music theatre by ART:DIS Singapore, presented in conjunction with the non-profit's 30th anniversary of advancing disability inclusion, raises the bar of what performance excellence by persons with disabilities (PwDs) can be.

Throwing weight as collaborators behind this production are industry veterans including Golden Horse Award Winner actress Yeo Yann Yann, costume designer Max Tan, video designer Brian Gothong Tan, sound designer Dr Philip Tan and lighting/set designer Dorothy Png. All of whom are individuals who firmly believe more can be done to support the professional development and inclusion of artists with disabilities in our cultural landscape.

“The ambition of this production is to raise the bar of excellence in disability-led content produced and performed by artists with disabilities. We want to journey with the disabled artists that train and work us with to reach their fullest potential, to be included, represented and respected in our arts landscape,” said Angela Tan, Executive Director of ART:DIS.

Replete with powerhouse vocals, soulful dancing and heartfelt acting, *Chachambo* tells a story about how a visually-impaired girl tries to save an entertainment club from ruin. With the gloried legacy of her mother shadowing her, the livelihoods of the club's performers on her shoulders, the forbidden love between her and a dancer, audiences will bear witness to how a privileged young girl rises to the challenge, is humbled by the process and overcomes all odds to keep the dreams of artists alive.

A year in the making, the production embraces disability inclusion right from the beginning:

- Empowering a visually impaired young playwright Claire Teo (2022 Goh Cheok Tong Enable Award Winner) to develop the script.

- A pan-disability casting of 11 main performers (three are visually-impaired, three are autistic, two are persons with Down Syndrome, another two are Deaf and one is a wheelchair-user who has muscular dystrophy)
- Collaborative inclusion of 7 community partners:
 - Special Education schools APSN Tanglin and Lighthouse School
 - Social service agencies and interest groups Down Syndrome Association, YMCA Y Stars, Yong En Care Centre, Ageless Bridge, and Spring Wind Divas
- Integration of access across ALL shows through the artistic direction – weaves in Creative Captioning, Singapore Sign Language (SgSL for the Deaf) and Live Creative Narration during the performance

But it has not been without challenges though. Since rehearsals started in March 2023, the script has undergone a further 4 revisions, making this its 10th draft. One of the main considerations at the forefront of playwright Claire’s and Artistic Director Peter’s mind is highlighting the strengths of PwDs on stage.

“For instance, one of our autistic actors Luo Mang isn’t very eloquent. But this is theatre and we want to give her a solid character, not a decorative one. Since playing the violin and dancing are her fortes, we thus weaved in scenes where her instrument and movements carries the story forward,” added Peter, Head of Performing Arts at ART:DIS.

Luo Mang views the arts as a medium to express her thoughts and feelings. A once reticent child, her mother credits the arts as the key that unlocked Luo Mang’s heart to the world, giving her the confidence to interact with others. In one rehearsal Luo Mang confessed to having difficulties, stating: “I need to speak many lines. This is more than what I have to say in everyday life.”

Under Peter’s gentle coaxing and guidance though, she has slowly learnt to embrace her characters Bao Yu and Violin Sally, even taking the initiative to research the era by listening to music and speaking with her mom. “I find out that women in the past were very pure and innocent just like me,” shared Luo Mang.

As a pan-disability production, another main challenge was accessibility especially with regards to the actors on stage. This required precise choreographing and a lot of practice in order, for example, the visually-impaired actors to move from one position to another, or the Deaf to know when it is their turn to speak when the cue is auditory.

Take Claire for instance. As the visually-impaired lead character Ming Zhu, she has numerous scenes with her nanny Da Tao Jie, who is played by Deaf actor

Grace Ng, and boyfriend Ali, who is played by Deaf actor Ammar Nasrulhaq. With the former, Claire learnt SgSL so Grace is able to react live and deliver her lines (through SgSL) whilst in character. With Ammar, there are many action sequences between him and Claire so with hands preoccupied, SgSL was not a possibility. Consequently, Claire ensured she was always positioned with her mouth facing Ammar so that he is able to lip-read her lines in order to deliver his own. “I’ve practically memorised the entire script,” added Ammar.

“Working with such diverse disabilities has been very invigorating as it pushes every ounce of me to think of different ways to work with each and every one of them. This experience reaffirms my belief that we need a pan-disability ecosystem in order to be called truly inclusive. So even though *Chachambo: Taking Flight* is fictional, it carries so much truth in what we need to establish in our society,” Peter concluded.

Full of riveting drama, feel-good classic songs and spirited dance sequences, *Chachambo: Taking Flight* is a once-in-a-lifetime experience not to be missed. For more information about the story, songs, characters and behind-the-scenes, please access the programme booklet [here](#).

Performance details

Venue: Victoria Theatre (9 Empress Place, Singapore 179556)

Date/Time: 4 August (1pm), 5 August (7:30pm) and 6 August (3pm)

Duration: 1 hour 50 mins (including 20 mins intermission)

Price: \$40 (Category 1), \$30 (Category 2), \$25 (for seniors, NSF & Students), \$15 (for PwDs and their companions)

Ticketing: https://bit.ly/Chachambo_Tickets

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About ARTDIS (Singapore) Ltd

Formerly known as Very Special Arts Singapore, ART:DIS is a non-profit organisation established in 1993, championing learning and livelihood opportunities for persons with disabilities (PwDs) in and through the arts.

We provide a wide range of programmes to enable PwDs to develop their artistic interests, grow their self-confidence and engage them as active members of a supported community, outside of and beyond formal education.

Our parallel professional development pathways further supports sustainable & meaningful impact for PwDs to gain work experience, empowering them to live independently in the community.

At ART:DIS, we value the unique strengths and perspectives of persons with disabilities and believe the arts offers us a lens to understand who they are, to connect with and to experience the world together