

Arts & Disability International Conference 2018



Executive Summary

Advancing Inclusion in and through the Arts

The inaugural Arts and Disability International Conference was held in Singapore from 22nd to 23rd March 2018 at the Sands Expo and Convention Centre, and Enabling Village. The first in the ASEAN region, it brought together about 420 international and local arts practitioners, academics, industry leaders and policymakers, and provided a vibrant platform for intellectual debates and practical policy discussions that complemented the True Colours Festival.

The Conference was jointly organised by the National Arts Council and Very Special Arts Singapore, presented by The Nippon Foundation, and supported by the Singapore International Foundation and British Council (see Appendix A for Conference Programme).



Participants on Day One at Sands Expo and Convention Centre.



Participants on Day Two at Enabling Village (left). Ms. Kate Hood amongst the audience (right).

The following are key themes that emerged from the Conference:

- 1.1 Equalising Opportunities through Inclusive Measures
- 1.2 Instrumental, Aesthetic and Emancipatory Values of the Arts
- 1.3 Greater Disability Leadership
- 1.4 Collaborations across Diverse Sectors and Co-creation with the Disability Community
- 1.5 Role of Assistive Technology in the Arts

1.1 Equalising Opportunities through Inclusive Measures

Several speakers commented on the importance of moving away from the “medical” or “charity” model of disability – where disability is seen as an individual condition that should be cured, or a personal tragedy that deserves pity – towards the “social” model of disability, which points out that existing barriers are the result of society’s unwillingness to include people with disabilities. Attitudinal barriers, prejudices and biases are just as inhibiting as a physical world designed for able-bodied people; as norms prevent people with disability from fully participating in productive work or cultural life.



Mr Adrian Anantawan (left) and Dr Azariah Tan (right) gave a stunning performance before Day One came to a close.

“PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES CAN VALUE-ADD TO SOCIETY, SO MORE SHOULD BE DONE IN BRIDGING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MAINSTREAM AND DISABILITY COMMUNITY.”

DR AZARIAH TAN

Opportunities for people with disabilities can be equalised by instituting inclusive actions. For instance, Dr Justin Lee (Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore) said cultural institutions need to go beyond providing accessible infrastructure and enhance inclusive programming that are institutionalised; not just one-off efforts. He added that the disability community can be employed to conduct accessibility audits of cultural institutions, which in the process would both create employment and leverage the community’s expertise to improve accessibility. This would also send a signal that their views and ideas are not regarded as “lesser”.

Ms Kris Yoshie (SLOW LABEL, Japan) said the idea of “role restructuring” – for instance, creating new roles such as “access coordinator” or “accompanist” – in organisations can help create a conducive environment that enables the disability community to access creative activities. Ms Kate Hood (Raspberry Ripple Productions, Australia) said equalising access can also be achieved by establishing legal quotas in schools to ensure that students with disabilities in every cohort are given access to arts education. Mr Pete Sparkes (Drake Music Scotland, UK) added that such issues must be framed differently so that underlying assumptions about responsibility are reconsidered. For instance, rather than treating students as having “learning difficulties”, one can view teachers as having a “teaching difficulty” instead.

ACTION STATEMENTS

- a) Provide equal access to training, exposure and opportunity in the arts for people with disabilities.
- b) Aesthetics is no good by itself, if there is no access.
- c) Develop accessible infrastructure, but do not forget inclusive programming.

1.2 Instrumental, Aesthetic and Emancipatory Values of the Arts

Ms Sokny Onn (Epic Arts, Cambodia) elaborated on their efforts to roll out inclusive education for children and young people with learning disabilities to gain life skills through creative arts; many of whom have little or no access to public education customised to their needs. Ms Onn further shared that Epic Arts develops training resources and workshops to equip institutions such as schools with inclusive practices. These sentiments were echoed by the panellists at the Special Education discussion; the panel agreed that the arts played an instrumental role in enabling students within the special education system to develop socially, cognitively and emotionally. The arts have an instrumental value when it is integrated in pedagogy to teach literacy, numeracy and vocational skills, especially in special education.



Panel Discussion on Special Education in Schools with Singapore panellists on Day One.



Mr Alirio Zavarce conducting an experiential workshop on Day Two

This can improve the quality of life of special education students by teaching them important life skills such as social, cognitive and emotional learning. Equipping willing teachers with relevant capabilities and integrating it into mainstream education systems are crucial for this to be done well, as echoed through the sharing by Epic Arts (Cambodia) and during the Special Education Panel discussion.

Ms Hood highlighted the role the arts can play in challenging existing conventions of aesthetics and redefine who can be a dancer, musician or painter. Citing the example of Ms Caroline Bowditch, a performance artist and choreographer, Ms Hood posited that new artistic styles can be created when artists integrate their disability experience into the arts, the way Ms Bowditch features her disability at the forefront of her choreography. These shifts broadened aesthetic horizons enrich our collective experience with the arts.

Lastly, the arts can be used as a medium for advocacy or civic engagement. As Mr Alirio Zavarce (No Strings Attached, Australia) said, "there is nothing like the power of theatre." Mr Zavarce and Ms Onn elaborated projects that demonstrated the unique ability of the arts to evoke, express and communicate making it a powerful means to challenge stereotypes such as the assumed inferiority of disability. For example, Epic Arts challenged and subverted bodily norms in traditional Cambodian dance through a viral video that incorporated elements of traditional Cambodian dance, pop music and disability representation. No Strings Attached touched on their work in community engagement, using the arts as a bridge between the able-bodied and disability communities, making one more relatable and accessible to the other through the telling of stories.

ACTION STATEMENTS

- d) View disability as diversity and not tragedy.
- e) Respect and appreciate the talent that comes with the disability.

1.3 Greater Disability Leadership

Ms Hood said that representations of disability in mainstream arts often do not reflect the perspectives of the disability community because arts and media companies are largely led by able-bodied people, who may not fully understand disability issues even if they work with people with disabilities or produce disability-themed content. Thus, it is important to promote greater disability leadership to further inclusivity. For Ms Hood, a disability-led arts organisation is one where the chief executive or lead creative, and 50 per cent of its staff or board members identify as disabled. Most of the creative strategising would also come from people with disabilities. One example is her theatre company, Raspberry Ripple Productions, which promotes disability-led arts by placing people with disabilities at the forefront of developing character roles, plot, stage space and training regiments.

“ WE BELIEVE THAT ADVOCACY
EQUALS EDUCATION, AND WORKING
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CONDITION.”

MS KATE HOOD



Ms Kate Hood giving her keynote speech on Day One

However, Ms Hood also stressed that for disability leadership to be effective, leadership training opportunities designed for the disability community must precede leadership opportunities themselves. Another example is Mr Zavarce's company, No Strings Attached, which accords disabled artists full autonomy to shape the content of productions and heavily employs personalised narratives and props.

Greater disability leadership can also translate to better representation and role models for the disability community. This allows people with disabilities to see others who are like them in the media and normalise a wider range of diversity in the public imagination. For instance, Mr Adrian Anantawan (Violinist, Canada) mentioned a disabled violinist character in one of his childhood cartoons, Sesame Street, as a source of inspiration growing up.

ACTION STATEMENTS

- f) Leadership should focus on 3Cs - Connect, Collaborate, and Champion.

1.4 Collaboration across Diverse Sectors and Co-creation with the Disability Community

Ms Yoshie said a healthy relationship between artists and the disability community is key to respectful and productive collaborative artistic work. She added that the process of matching a suitable artist to a person with disabilities according to his or her needs is an important consideration. Artists who are highly motivated to work with people with disabilities, and more importantly, who see people with disabilities whom they work with as equal, are ideal partners. Collaboration between the able-bodied and disability community can also encourage greater communication, and facilitate better understanding and acceptance.

For instance, one of SLOW LABEL's initiatives, Slow Factory, is a platform that brought together both able-bodied people and people with disabilities to create art. Epic Arts' Epic Showcase also reaches out to the community to increase the wider community's exposure to artists with disabilities.



Ms Kris Yoshie giving her keynote speech on Day One



Epic Arts workshop during Day Two

Cross-sector collaborations are also avenues for furthering the disability cause. For instance, Ms Hood stressed how important it was for Raspberry Ripple Productions to work with other organisations such as Arts Access Victoria and Pretty Neat to develop resources, awareness and support for the disability sector. Similarly, Epic Arts collaborated with national governmental organisations, such as WaterAid Cambodia, to create artistic advertisements that were part of the water sanitation campaign, and featured the diverse talents of its members in the process.

Finally, greater collaboration also means reaching out to international allies. Both Epic Arts and Raspberry Ripple Productions cited partnerships with theatre and dance companies in the UK, where they were invited to stage productions together. International social networks and support can also pave the way for the strengthening of the disability arts sector and facilitate disability leadership.

ACTION STATEMENTS

- g) For sustainable impact on society, be deeply involved with the communities.
- h) Collaborate across disciplines and sectors because good ideas tend to come from groups you do not already know.

1.5 Role of Assistive Technology in the Arts

Several speakers also spoke about leveraging technology to further inclusiveness and level the playing field for the disability community. For instance, Ms Yoshie gave the example of Music for the deaf, an item part of the 2014 Yokohama Paratriennale where deaf dancers relied on special devices that converted soundwaves to electronic stimulation, which allowed them dance to the rhythm of these electronic stimulations without hearing music. Mr Anantawan talked about the Virtual Music Interaction software, which allows users to create musical notes with simple gestures.

Mr Yoshihiro Kaiya (Japan Barrier-Free Association, Japan) also gave the example of Eye Play the Piano, a virtual reality programme that allows for the playing of piano notes through the capturing of eye movements via headsets. Such innovations carve opportunities for people with disabilities to professionally engage art and music.



Mr Pete Sparkes demonstrating the technologies used by Drake Music Scotland during Day One's breakout session.



Mr Yoshihiro Kaiya amongst the audience during Day Two's Lecture

Mr Sparkes shared many examples of the technologies used by Drake Music Scotland that enabled the disability community to make wonderful music. One example was Soundbeam, a tool that uses ultrasonic sensors to sense movements and produce music. Soundbeam is extremely flexible and customisable, and can cater to different movements, which is key for working with people with different forms of disability.

Another piece of technology was Brainfingers, which uses sensors to pick up electrical activities in the brain and converts jaw clicks to music, allowing a person with cerebral palsy with limited physical movement to create rhythm and music. Mr Sparkes added that leveraging technology does not necessarily mean "high-tech". In fact, certain "low-tech" methods can be as effective. For example, Figurenotes is a form of musical notation that uses colours and shapes to indicate musical notes and rhythms unlike in the classical musical notation. This is a much more intuitive way of musical notation, which is extremely helpful for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

For instance, Dr Lee and Ms Maureen Goh (Very Special Arts, Singapore) have also been using a wiki space to engage the local artists and disability organisations to better understand the needs, map out the resources, and identify service or policy gaps in this area through the collective participation of the community. Artists, voluntary organisations, researchers and community groups who are interested in arts and disability are welcome to participate in this ground-up initiative.

ACTION STATEMENTS

- i) By all means, exploit technology where possible, but build a foundation of good relationships, meaningful participation and inclusiveness first

You Can Take it Slow, but Just Have a Go!

In the arts, standards of “perfection” and what is considered “good art” create barriers that hinder people with disabilities from entering and flourishing in the arts. Such notions reinforce the idea that people with bodily disabilities are “lesser than” what these aesthetic conventions demand, thus creating an expectation that if you cannot be the best, then you should not do it at all. Instead, we can learn how to recognise that all efforts in the arts contribute to our collective experience and that everyone should have equal opportunities to pursue the arts.

Ms Hood believed that the disability community is well-placed to subvert this “myth of perfection”, pointing out that people often worry that people with disabilities would fail in their attempts and forgetting that able-bodied people fail all the time as well. Thus, she emphasised the need to change the obsession with perfection and understand failure as a natural human condition for both the able-bodied and disability community.

This sentiment was echoed by Ms Yoshie, who said that the word “slow”, in the name of her company SLOW LABEL, embraces slowing down the co-creation process with people with disabilities so that authentic and quality products can emerge. In fact, she said the Japanese culture has no negative association with the concept of “slow” unlike in Western cultures. She added that while training through lectures and workshops for practitioners wanting to work with the disabled community can be helpful, it is sometimes important to “just do it”, to experiment and learn from mistakes, tweak and retry.

Drawing from their experience in Epic Arts, Mr Buntheng Ou and Ms Sokny Onn also said the existence of cultural stigmas of disability is an obstacle to advancement and success by the disability community. To overcome this, “you don’t have to go fast, you just have to go.”

ACTION STATEMENTS

j) Just Do It!

The National Arts Council and Very Special Arts Singapore would like to express our special thanks to Ms Shanthini Selvarajan and Mr Shawn Goh Ze Song from the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore, for compiling the executive summary.

Presenter



Joint Organisers



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Day 1 Thursday, 22 March 2018

Arts & Disability International Conference @ Sands Expo and Convention Centre

0800 hrs	Registration Level 3, Begonia Ballroom	
0900 hrs	Arrival of Guest-of-Honour Mr Baey Yam Keng Parliamentary Secretary Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth	
0905 hrs	Introduction	
0910 hrs	Welcome Address by Guest-of-Honour	
0925 hrs	Opening Remarks by Mr Ichiro Kabasawa, Executive Director, The Nippon Foundation and Dr Indrajit Banerjee, Director, UNESCO Knowledge Societies Division	
0940 hrs	<p>Keynote Speech 1</p> <p>Irregular Choice: The Importance of Disability Leadership in the Performing Arts by Ms Kate Hood, Artistic Director, Raspberry Ripple Productions (Australia)</p> <p>Ms Kate Hood will talk about the transformative nature of theatre and the arts, its broader effect on society in Australia, and why she formed her disability-led theatre company Raspberry Ripple Productions. This is a talk which encompasses Disability Arts in the past, the present and the future in Australia.</p>	
1030 hrs	Tea Break	
1115 hrs	<p>Keynote Speech 2</p> <p>From Comparison to Co-creation, New value in Diversity by Ms Kris Yoshie, Director, SLOW LABEL (Japan)</p> <p>Ms Kris Yoshie will introduce a variety of SLOW LABEL's arts projects and elaborate on the co-creation elements between professional creators, companies and persons with disabilities to address how diversity can create broader social benefits.</p>	
1200 hrs	<p>Panel Discussion</p> <p>Advancing Inclusion in the Arts Moderator: Mr Kenneth Kwok, Assistant Chief Executive National Arts Council (Singapore)</p> <p>Panellists</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ms Kate Hood (Australia) 2. Dr Justin Lee, Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore (Singapore) 3. Mr Pete Sparkes, Artistic Director, Drake Music Scotland (United Kingdom) 4. Dr Azariah Tan, Pianist (Singapore) 5. Ms Kris Yoshie (Japan) 	
1300 hrs	Lunch Break	
1415 hrs	Breakout Sessions	
	Session A Angsana Ballroom	Session B Begonia Ballroom
	<p>Session A1</p> <p>20 Years of Making Music with Technology by Mr Pete Sparkes, Artistic Director, Drake Music Scotland (United Kingdom)</p> <p>Mr Pete Sparkes will shed light on how Drake Music Scotland has created a varied programme of activity throughout Scotland, proving time and again that people with disabilities have the potential to make wonderful music. His sharing will also touch on commissioning composers and collaborating with other arts companies to create memorable and award winning performances, and ideas on building a team and structuring to enable collective music-making, and video examples of Drake Music's work.</p>	<p>Session B1</p> <p>The Epic Journey by Ms Sokny Onn, Co-Director & Mr Buntheng Ou, Operations and Tour Manager, Epic Arts (Cambodia)</p> <p>Epic Arts will share their tips and strategies on nurturing multi-sectorial partnerships, both internationally and in Cambodia, to advance disability arts. They will also provide examples on how to cultivate local leadership in disability arts in Cambodia and educate on the change that is effected, and its impact.</p>

1530 hrs	<p style="text-align: center;">Session A2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Panel Discussion: The Role(s) of the Arts in Special Education</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderator</p> <p>Dr Wong Meng Ee, Associate Professor, Department of Early Childhood & Special Needs, National Institute of Education (Singapore)</p> <p>The panel will discuss the current and future possible role(s) of the arts in SPED schools and explore how the arts can build bridges to community and improve the quality of life for our students. In what ways can the arts be integrated in other domains like literacy, numeracy, vocational skills and sexuality education? How can the arts support the fields of social, cognitive and emotional learning?</p> <p>The panel will also propose how Singapore can find its own approach towards harnessing the arts in the SPED landscape for a better quality of life.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Panellists</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr Bernard Chew, Director of Special Education Branch, Special Educational Needs Division, Ministry of Education (Singapore) 2. Ms Esther Kwan, Vice-Principal, Grace Orchard School (Singapore) 3. Mr Michael Cheng, Applied Drama Practitioner (Singapore) 4. Ms Faridah Ali Chang, Principal Trainer and Consultant, Rainbow Centre Training & Consultancy and Registered Psychologist (Singapore) 	<p style="text-align: center;">Session B2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Making Theatre for All by Mr Alirio Zavarce, Director, No Strings Attached (Australia)</p> <p>Mr Alirio Zavarce will share on methodology and approaches for inclusion for effective community engagement tailored to the skills, needs and abilities of artists with or without disabilities.</p>
1645 hrs	Tea Break	
1715 hrs	<p>Performance*</p> <p>Level 3, Begonia Ballroom</p> <p>Mr Adrian Anantawan, Violinist (Canada) and Dr Azariah Tan, Pianist (Singapore)</p>	
1730 hrs	<p>Wrap-up</p> <p>by Ms Maureen Goh, Executive Director, Very Special Arts (Singapore) and Dr Justin Lee, Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore (Singapore)</p>	
1750 hrs	End of Event	

*Piano for the performance is proudly sponsored by Steinway & Sons and AXA Insurance.

Note:

- Live captioning and signing (Singapore Sign Language) will be provided for the morning keynote speeches and panel discussion
- Signing (Singapore Sign Language) will be provided for breakout sessions A1 and A2
- Live captioning will be provided for breakout sessions B1 and B2

Day 2 Friday, 23 March 2018

Arts & Disability International Conference @ Enabling Village

0800 hrs	Shuttle Service from Bus Station outside Redhill MRT Station		
0830 hrs	Registration UOB Ability Hub (Auditorium)		
0915 hrs	Welcome Speech by Ms Chia Ai Ling, Deputy Director, Communications and Development, SG Enable (Singapore)		
0930 - 1230 hrs	Workshop A / B / C		Lecture
		0930 hrs	Breakfast
		1000 hrs	Guided Tour
		1030 hrs	Speaker 1 Mr Adrian Anantawan, Violinist (Canada)
		1110 hrs	Speaker 2 Mr Yoshihiro Kaiya, President, Japan Barrier-free Association (Japan)
		1150 hrs	Speaker 3 Ms Kate Hood, Artistic Director, Raspberry Ripple Productions (Australia)
1230 hrs	Guided Tour	1230 hrs	Live Q&A

Note:

- No prior arts experience is required for all workshops
- Signing (Singapore Sign Language) will be provided for all programmes in Day 2



Workshop A

Only Connect - Digital Instruments and the Human Musician

by Mr Pete Sparkes,
 Artistic Director,
 Drake Music Scotland (United Kingdom)

How do we choose the best technology to help someone with disabilities to explore and learn to play? What options do we have? We will explore in detail the way that Drake Music Scotland uses iPads, Laptops, Synthesisers and Soundbeams as improvisations to ensure that potential musicians begin their journey to success with ease. Also, we will understand how notation and structuring music is a vital part of the creative process-leading to genuine progression and growth, and thus developing skills and confidence.



Workshop B

Every Person Counts

by Ms Sokny Onn,
Co-Director & Mr Buntheng Ou,
Operations and Tour Manager,
Epic Arts (Cambodia)

The focus of this workshop is to use the Epic Arts Manifesto to explore equality, acceptance, adaptability and difference. A workshop that uses creative movement based tasks to explore the principles that Epic Arts stands by to encourage a more inclusive society for everyone to live in.



Workshop C

Creating Together - An Experiential Workshop for Artists of all Abilities and their Allies

by Mr Alirio Zavarce,
Director, No Strings
Attached (Australia)

A Practical Theatre Workshop that will allow you to experience methodologies, approaches and techniques for the creation of equal arts access and inclusive participation. A workshop that teaches you to brainstorm and experiment with approaches to planning, designing and implementing inclusive theatre workshops and activities.



Lecture

Voices for Arts, Disability & Inclusion

Get up close and personal with our 3 distinguished speakers as they share their unique journeys in the pursuit of artistic excellence and tireless efforts to advance arts inclusion. Through their lived experience of disability, their perspectives and insights offer us an opportunity to consider how the arts can and should be for everyone.

Moving Music Forward: Adaptation and Evolution

by Mr Adrian Anantawan, Violinist
(Canada)

Can Music and Technology Change the World?

by Mr Yoshihiro Kaiya,
President,
Japan Barrier-free
Association (Japan)

Life after acquired disability - as an Individual, Artist and Member of the Community

by Ms Kate Hood,
Artistic Director, Raspberry
Ripple Productions (Australia)