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# ICE

factory 2020

July 24-Aug 15

# WHO'S THERE ?

Created by The Transit Ensemble

Singapore | Malaysia | United States

August 4-8, 2020

# ABOUT THE SHOW

## WHO'S THERE?

Created by The Transit Ensemble

Presented by New Ohio Theatre

August 4th - 8th on Zoom

Part of Ice Factory 2020

A Black American influencer accuses a Malaysian bureaucrat of condoning blackface. A Singaporean-Indian teacher launches an Instagram feud calling out racial inequality at home, post-George Floyd. A privileged Singaporean-Chinese activist meets a compassionate White Saviour, and an ethnically ambiguous political YouTuber takes a DNA test for the first time.

A cross-cultural encounter involving artists based in Singapore, Malaysia, and the United States, *Who's There?* uses Zoom as a new medium to explore the unstable ground between us and "the other". In this pandemic contact zone, lines along race, class and gender bleed into one another, questioning the assumptions we hold of ourselves and the world around us. What sort of tensions, anxieties and possibilities emerge, and how can we work to reimagine a New Normal?

To receive updates on future iterations of the show, [join our mailing list here](#).



# COLLABORATORS

## Co-Directed by

Sim Yan Ying "YY" & Alvin Tan

## Featuring:

Camille Thomas - Performer 1, Iyla Rotum, Cops (interview)

Ghafir Akbar - Performer 2, Amir Hamzah, Angela Davis (interview)

Neil Redfield - Performer 3, Adam Noble, Karen (video)

Rebekah Sangeetha Dorai ரெபெகா சங்கீதா டொரை -

Performer 4, Sharmila Thodak, K. Shivendra (interview)

Sean Devare - Performer 5, Jordan Grey

Sim Yan Ying "YY" - Performer 6, Chan Yue Ting "YT"

Dramaturgy by Cheng Nien Yuan & J.Ed Araiza

Multimedia Design by Jevon Chandra

Sound Design by Jay Ong

Publicity Design by Sean Devare

Stage Manager - Manuela Romero

Stage Management Intern - Priyanka Kedia

Marketing & Multimedia Intern - Ryan Henry

*With interviews from S Rahman Liton & Janelyn, edited for length*

# CO-DIRECTOR'S NOTE

**Sim Yan Ying "YY", Co-Director**

Just two months ago, *Who's There?* was only a seed of an idea. When New Ohio Theatre reached out to me in May asking if I would be interested in doing a virtual production as part of Ice Factory 2020, I had just come out of a phase of mourning the "loss" of live theatre. I was starting to feel an excitement about online creation as a way of bringing people across geographically distant communities together, particularly during this time of isolation and grief.

On a Zoom call with Alvin Tan, my mentor and close friend in Singapore, he expressed his eagerness to explore the virtual form in the context of intercultural work, and we soon decided to co-direct this show. During our hours of conversation, we discussed racial conflicts that exist within and between individuals and how such issues are perceived through different cultural lenses. Can understanding them from the vantage point of "the other" help us continue our struggle towards racial justice with greater clarity and hope? How do we negotiate our complicated diversity and reimagine this "New Normal" that everyone is talking about?

Soon after, we assembled a team of trusted collaborators based in Singapore, Malaysia, and the United States. For most of us, it was our first full-length virtual production, and the learning curve was incredibly steep while the time incredibly short. Besides creating a show from scratch, we also needed to find a process of digital creation that worked for us. Fortunately, the team readily embraced virtual theatre not as a replacement of live theatre, but as an art form in and of itself. Rather than lamenting what we lose by not currently having live theatre, we shared an intense curiosity about the digital medium and the new possibilities it affords us.

In Phase I (Exploration), we researched and discussed videos and articles about racial controversies in Singapore, Malaysia, and the U.S.; experimented performatively with both historical and present-day texts and interviews; had Play with Zoom (PWZ) sessions led by our multimedia and sound designers where we expanded on the potentials of the Zoom medium; created characters and improvised (hyper)realism scenes in our bedrooms; and explored our impulses in the form of music, movement, and sporadic text in what we called "10-minute Jam sessions".

During the week-long “break” between Phases I & II, the team worked tirelessly to put the script together through a collaborative writing process, led by Alvin and myself. In Phase II (Pre-Production), the dramaturgs took the lead in revising the script up till the week before the show, while I choreographed the movement sequences and worked with Alvin to stage scenes that had been script-locked. The actors sculpted their scenes while adapting to the constant flow of changes, our designers worked as fast as they could to create the visual and audial elements of the show, and the stage manager and interns supported this work in every way possible.

It was a constant race against time—always plenty to get done before our next rehearsal in 24 or 48 hours. *Who’s There?* may be virtual, but it is one of the most time and energy-consuming projects I have worked on.

I am thankful to Alvin, without whom this work would not be as richly complex or collaborative as it is. Alvin’s wisdom and openness, relentless pursuit of depth, and boldness in trying unconventional ideas were integral to making this project as special as it is. I am indebted to our dramaturgs, Nien & J.Ed, for always going above and beyond, reworking draft after draft of every material until perfection. To Jevon and Jay, our multimedia & sound designers, for bravely pushing boundaries in rehearsal while putting in countless hours outside to finesse their work. To the performers Camille, Ghafir, Neil, Sangeetha & Sean who threw themselves headfirst into every exploration and created their characters with such dedication and care. To our Stage Manager, Manuela, for her patience and determination in navigating this complicated work, and to our interns Priyanka & Ryan, for their efficiency and readiness when stepping in to assist. And finally, to New Ohio Theatre for taking a leap of faith with us and providing incredible support throughout, and to DARR Publicity for their amazing work on securing press for us.

The *Who’s There?* process clarified for me that there is still much untapped potential in virtual theatre—territories that are unexplored and gems that are waiting to be discovered. I hope that our rigorous investigation into and commitment towards this new way of making work will open up possibilities and spark some inspiration. And as the world becomes increasingly polarized and conversations seem harder and harder to have, I also hope that *Who’s There?* will offer a new way of having these challenging discourses and give us the courage to delve into the uncomfortable but necessary grey areas.

Thank you for joining us today, from wherever you are in the world, during this immensely difficult year. We deeply appreciate your presence.

# CO-DIRECTOR'S NOTE

## THE CRACK OF A NEW DAWN

**Alvin Tan, Co-Director**

Co-director YY and I hang out after rehearsals in the same Zoom room. Performers, multimedia and sound designers visit to chill or discuss potential gems from improvisations. Otherwise, we are engaged in an uninterrupted flow of artistic and production processes. In the Zoom room, we share screen, call up files from Google Drive, and share recorded rehearsal moments or research materials, enjoying hours of conceptual exploration. These intensive cross-disciplinary conversations cover artistic and technological concerns with efficient immediacy.

*Who's There?*, sustained by a labyrinth of chat groups, ranging from FB Messenger to iMessage, Whatsapp and email, spawned numerous teams to keep communication channels open. Operating across five time zones, on a rotation of sacrifices, we help each other stay awake, present and ready to process work together. If that is not human contact, I don't know what is. I remain nourished by that more than the hundreds of physical bodies present in one theatre auditorium space.

Detailed preparation was designed to keep Zoom fatigue at bay. What could be done offline was, making online time immensely precious, even more so than the venue rental cost factored in 'live' theatre rehearsals. In the Zoom room, we send actors to breakout rooms: one pair improvises a brief and records it, a sound designer records a performer singing whilst another records her spoken word, and yet another is video-recorded by the multimedia artist so the footage can be worked on after rehearsal. Then the co-directors watch the recordings, harvest fragments and migrate them to a preliminary draft for editing, compression and dramaturgical analysis. A core comprising two co-directors, one multimedia and one sound designer, and two dramaturgs have organically formed this artistic clearing house. The performers access the 77-page draft in the Google Drive and comment, edit, and change syntax to suit their characters. Then the dramaturgs have another round of compression and hand it over to the directors for a final read of the scenes before they are locked down.

YY leads the Performance Ensemble (PE) jam sessions in collaboration with the multimedia and sound designers during Play With Zoom (PWZ) sessions. These are recorded and stored in Google Drive, which YY dips into to compose the final movement and magic realism scenes.

The artistic, production, technical, and administrative personnel are all in one Zoom space. It integrates anew what the professional practice of 'live' theatre atomises under the guise of capitalistic specialisation. Moreover, Zoom performances are not burdened by huge budgets for set, lighting, costume or theatre rental. What Zoom makes possible for an international project such as *Who's There?* is to relieve it of flight, accommodation costs, and per diems. Yet the richness of cultural exchanges were enjoyed by all involved.

To have a Black American woman interact with a Bumiputera character from Malaysia and a Singaporean Indian civil servant complicated race issues, because American privilege meant conversations became awkward and difficult. Differences now arose from intersectional dynamics as opposed to the usual binaries encountered when tackled in our respective local contexts.

The other challenge is having to engage an audience who may already view Zoom performance as a poor cousin to 'live' theatre. *Who's There?* opened up the opportunity for us to compose a work specifically on the Zoom platform, employing cyber devices whilst interrogating the form instead of using Zoom to platform tired realism. Conversely, it also means that a Zoom performance should not be adaptable for 'live' theatre. What was in my mind throughout this process was 'what Zoom makes possible'. Zoom performance proponents have to sustain the courage and stamina to explore, fail and recover from numerous failed attempts to afford the expensive price tag of the new. A Zoom performance should not be a substitute for 'live' theatre.

I am left to thank every single one of my collaborators for this huge learning opportunity, especially YY for her admirable artistic sharpness and openness to exploring the Zoom form with such creative verve. Not to leave out her meticulous leadership in production and administrative matters embracing all the challenges arising during this two-month time frame. The two wonderful dramaturgs who have put in such generous hours, the amazing multimedia and sound artists, the stage management team with the brilliant interns whose immense backstage support saw *Who's There?* take off the ground. Last but not least, the wonderful cast who have put in so much creative work in their improvs, composition and blocking on Zoom. Everyone has worked with such impressive rigour that I can't thank them enough, but sincerely hope that all will leave *Who's There?* with their hearts full.

Exploring digitalised performance on a Zoom platform has opened up a vista of interdisciplinary possibilities for me. I would like to stay a little longer, because the lessons to be learned would take yet another lifetime in the context of 'live' theatre practice if I were to return to it (if and when the vaccine is found).





An "Honest Minority Opinion about Race" appears!

What do you do?

- >> Listen
- >> Learn
- >> Reflect
- >> CALL POLICE



# SINGAPORE: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

## Historical Highlights

- In the 14th century, a Srivijayan prince steps onto the shores of a tiny island. He names it Singapura, Sanskrit for "Lion City", after the mysterious animal he encounters there.
- The British Empire comes knocking in 1819, when Sir Stamford Raffles negotiates a treaty with the nearby Sultanate for the island. Singapura becomes a British colony named Singapore, a flourishing trading port bustling with immigrants.
- Singapore's fortune shifts when the British surrender the city to the Japanese in 1942. Singapore is returned to the British three years later, but things are not the same.
- In 1959, Singapore holds its first general election and the People's Action Party (PAP) wins. Lee Kuan Yew becomes Singapore's first prime minister.
- Singapore merges with Malaysia in 1963, but deep political and economic differences between the two countries result in racial riots and tensions between the Malays and Chinese in Singapore in 1964.
- In 1965, Singapore is expelled from the Malaysian Federation, and becomes what historians call an 'accidental nation'. In a shocking press conference, PM Lee tearfully announces the news of this separation.
- Despite this traumatic 'divorce', and among threats of communism, unruly trade unions, and violent riots, Singapore overcomes all odds to become the peaceful and prosperous nation we know today.

The above story – known as The Singapore Story – is reproduced faithfully in Singaporean schools, museums, and National Day spectacles. What this story doesn't tell you is how the British left a legacy of social engineering and coercion: detention without trial, suppression of labor reform and press freedom, and division and discrimination along racial lines. This legacy is inherited by the PAP government, who remains the undefeated ruling party. To this day, a statue of Sir Stamford Raffles stands proudly on the banks of the Singapore River.

# SINGAPORE: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE (cont.)

## Cultural Politics

- Singapore boasts gorgeous architecture, manicured gardens, and delicious food. It also has the death penalty, state-controlled media, and staggering income inequality.
- Singapore's global capitalist agenda depends heavily on low-income migrant labor, who make up almost 20% of the population.
- The city is multiracial and multicultural, consisting of 76% "Chinese", 15% "Malays", 7.5% "Indians", and the unclassifiable remainder (1.5%), "Others". Just like in Malaysia, these racial categories are a colonial legacy.
- Another colonial legacy is Section 377A of the Penal Code, a law that makes sex between men a criminal act. The fact that this law still stands today despite the state's encouragement of the 'pink dollar' (the economic power of the LGBTQ community) speaks to contradictions within Singapore's logic of pragmatic and illiberal governance: they want their cake, and to eat it too.
- In theory, each race in Singapore is equally important, with success based on merit. In practice, policies on housing and the electoral system guarantee a Chinese majority in all constituencies and neighbourhoods, making it harder for minorities to be heard. Many elite schools are closed to non-Chinese students. Malays and Indians are often subject to ignorant cultural stereotypes and microaggressions by the Chinese majority.
- Speaking out about racial and religious issues is often a crime, even in the one place Singaporeans can hold protests: the Speakers' Corner.

## Singapore in 2020

- In February, Singapore is heralded internationally for its effective COVID-19 measures.
- In April, it becomes clear that the above celebration was premature. Migrant worker dormitories become severely affected by the virus due to cramped living conditions and the lack of government protection, despite early warnings by activists.
- In May, social worker and civil rights advocate Jolovan Wham is arrested for posting a photo of himself holding up a piece of cardboard with a smiley face in public.
- In July, the PAP wins the General Elections – but for the first time in history, the opposition holds more than 10% of seats in parliament. This is despite the government's heavy-handed use of the recently-passed "fake news" act (POFMA) to effectively censor and discredit voices which portray the PAP in a negative light during the campaign period.
- Raeesah Khan, the youngest and first female Malay opposition Member of Parliament, is also elected.



# MALAYSIA: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

## Historical Highlights

- Long before the Malay peninsula was the site of Western colonial power plays, it was a place of rich diversity and cultural intermingling. The cultural practices, religions, values, and cuisines of indigenous peoples, Malays, Bugis, Javanese, Sumatrans, Chinese, Europeans, Tamils, Parsees, Gujeratis, Bengalis, and Hadhramis were fused, adapted, transformed, and made local.
- As usual, Britain's arrival in the 18th century changed everything. What we know about 'racial difference' in Malaysia today must be traced back to the colonial enterprise. The British introduced the notion of race as the primary way to identify subjects and determine their economic function. In the guise of 'civilizing' inferior peoples, the British exploited them to their heart's content.
- In order to maximize political control of British Malaya's labor force, the colonizers largely relegated the Malays to rural and agricultural work, the Indians to manual labor, and the Chinese to more capitalistic merchant and mining sectors.
- It is no wonder that following Malaysia's independence in 1957, the Malay majority wanted to ensure material and political security for themselves. They implemented policies of affirmative action for Malays and non-Malay indigenous groups, who are collectively named "bumiputera" (son of the soil).
- In particular, the traumatic racial riots of May 13, 1969 reinforced the pro-Malay agenda, when electoral victories by Chinese parties caused widespread deadly violence between the Chinese and the Malays. Most of the fatalities were Chinese. This incident serves as a warning in history books to not upset Malaysia's 'delicate racial balance'.
- Unfortunately, postcolonial Malaysia's racial policies and politics reproduced colonial ones. Over time, the idea of "Malay supremacy" (ketuanan Melayu) emerged: the nation-state under the Malay male master.



# MALAYSIA: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE (cont.)

## Cultural Politics

- Malaysia has often been described as a “melting pot” of cultures, especially in tourist brochures. But a melting pot it is not. Racial lines are clearly defined, just like in Singapore, fixing these categories as fact.
- Official demographics: 50.1% Malay, 22.6% Chinese, 11.8% Indigenous non-Malays, 6.7% Indians, 8.8% ‘Others’.
- From 2000 to 2016, 284 Indian Malaysians died under police custody. That’s 23% of all custodial deaths in this period, despite Indians being 7% of the population.
- In the 2018 General Elections, the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional lost for the very first time. Malaysians, sick and tired of the blatant corruption of BN, rejoiced at the victory of opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan – the Alliance of Hope. Did it mark a new era, a.k.a Malaysia Baru or New Malaysia?

## Malaysia in 2020

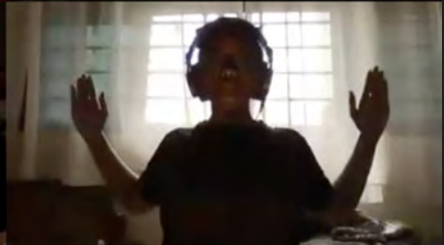
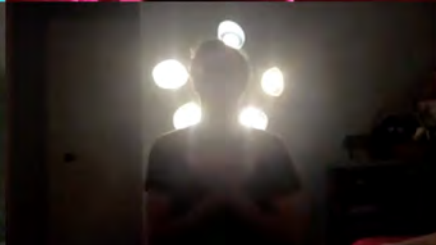
- Well...not really. Malaysia has been plagued by political crises since the elections which led to the collapse of the Pakatan Harapan government in February. This crisis is still unfolding.
- Authorities arrest at least 40 Rohingya refugees who sought asylum on a boat to Malaysia. They were sentenced to jail and caning for entering the country illegally.
- Authorities arrest a male migrant worker who spoke out against labor laws in Malaysia in an Al Jazeera documentary.
- In a shocking speech in Parliament, an ex-member of Malaysia’s conservative Islamic party, Mat Sabu, put forth that Malay supremacy and White supremacy are one and the same. He cites the racial divide and violence in the U.S. (and Donald Trump!) as a warning to Malaysians if Malay supremacy continues to be upheld: “We need to remember that if we prioritise a certain race without limits, it can lead to danger.”
- Former-PM Najib Razak was sentenced to 12 years in jail for corruption and the 1MDB scandal (please Google the scandal: it’s an unbelievable story that involves the Hollywood film *The Wolf of Wall Street*, a 126 million dollar yacht, and Picasso and Basquiat paintings).
- The four events above happened in late July, in the span of a single week.

*Prepared by Cheng Nien Yuan (Dramaturg, Who’s There?)*

25/5/20

8:12 AM

MAIN CAMERA



# THE UNITED STATES OF AMNESIA: A CULTURAL ODYSSEY

## **A BRIEF historicization, racial context, and demographic information**

about the United States to possibly help you understand how we got here. Pay attention – it could be helpful, there WILL be a quiz...USA USA USA!!!

- There were humans in the present U.S. over 14,000 years ago, nomadic hunters, some eventually settled in larger tribal communities to try agriculture. For over 13,000 years they were probably happy!
- 1492: Things change! Cristobal Colon arrived and discovered... 'India,' so they baptized Indians. In 1513, Juan Ponce de León became the first European to reach the mainland and called it La Florida. Like Columbus, he enslaved and displaced Indigenous natives. He made war...so they killed him.
- Numerous Spanish conquistadors explored the Southwest. Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo laid claim to the Pacific Coast of California in the mid 1500s. He probably came looking for gold but found peaceful natives instead so he forced them to build Missions and baptized them--to work for free.
- The British colonization of the Americas began with unsuccessful settlements in Roanoke.
- 1607: The first permanently settled English colony in Virginia.
- 1620: Plymouth Colony was settled by English Puritan separatists, an American trait that continues.
- British eventually gained control of the Eastern U.S. and the Caribbean.
- Wars continued – Britain gained Florida and Canada in the French and Indian War.
- The Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776 – after 8 years, 4 months and 15 days of war. Slavery was legal. Early American prosperity was largely based on slave labor and large scale agriculture.
- After the Civil War in June 19, 1865, two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, a Union General informed the still-enslaved individuals of Galveston, Texas, that they were officially free. There were more Black elected politicians in the South during the Reconstruction era, FOLLOWING THE CIVIL WAR, immediately after the abolishment of slavery than there are in the South today.

## THE UNITED STATES OF AMNESIA: A CULTURAL ODYSSEY (cont.)

- Racial War: May 31, 1921, a rumor that a black man attempted to rape a white woman sparked two days of unprecedented racial violence. 300 people died, and 800 were injured in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Just a few generations ago, schools were still segregated and the civil war was still in living memory. America has made progress in racial equity, but not enough...Interracial marriage has only been legal in the U.S. for 53 years.
- Dec 7, 1941: WAR! Japanese navy bombs Pearl Harbor! U.S. enters World War II! Just 2 months later on Feb 19, 1942, U.S. government began the forced relocation of Japanese and Japanese Americans Citizens. Yes, economics were involved.
- Recent census projections confirm that racial minorities will be the primary demographic engine of the nation's future growth, projecting that the U.S. will be "minority white" by 2045.
- The U.S. is only 244 years old. That's only about three average American lifespans plus a 10 year old!

## Cultural Fun Facts! Cuz' our history can be depressing...

- One in four American cowboys was Black. Culture AND History!
- Country music originated in the early 20th century. Generations of musicians blended English ballads with Celtic and Irish fiddle songs, adding influences from various European immigrants. Often overlooked was the influence of African Americans. The banjo came to the United States from West Africa via enslaved captives.
- Not only did jazz and the blues influence country music, but many white musicians, such as Hank Williams, learned their craft from black teachers and friends.
- Hip-hop music, perhaps the current defining American musical and cultural influence, is generally considered to have been pioneered in New York's South Bronx in 1973 by Jamaican-born Kool DJ Herc. In order to understand hip-hop, it is necessary to look at it as the product of a set of historical, political, and economic circumstances and to study the role it has served as a voice for those subjugated by systematic political and economic oppression.
- The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first significant law restricting immigration into the United States.
- The US does not have an Official Language. New York City has roughly 640 different languages spoken.
- Americans love talking about the "American Dream." Some believe it exists, others do not.
- Americans love the word "opinion" and share theirs often, like "*Birth of a Nation* is a racist film! ... so is *Breakfast at Tiffany's*."

# BIOS



**Sim Yan Ying "YY"** (Co-Director, Performer-Deviser) is a theatre artist based in New York and Singapore. She creates in the capacity of a director, performer, writer, and choreographer, and is drawn towards intercultural works that challenge existing forms and boundaries. YY is presently an artist in the Mabou Mines SUITE/Space program in New York and WILD RICE's directing residency in Singapore. Original works include: *I LOVE WHITE MEN* (Caveat, Ars Nova ANT Fest, Dixon Place), *Where Are You?* (NYU Tisch), *Without Reason* (Esplanade). Selected performance credits: *Mammelephant* (Superhero Clubhouse), *The Optic Trilogy* (Alchemical Studios). Assistant Directing: *Looking at You* (HERE Arts Center), directed by Kristin Marting. Training: BFA at NYU Tisch & 2017 SIT Company Summer Intensive. // [simyanying.com](http://simyanying.com) // IG: @simyanying



**Alvin Tan** (Co-Director) is the Founder and Artistic Director of The Necessary Stage and a leading proponent of devising theatre in Singapore, having directed more than 80 plays locally and internationally. He was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and in 1998, was conferred the Young Artist Award for theatre. In 2010, Alvin was conferred the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture, in recognition of his significant contribution to the arts. The following year, he was awarded Best Director at The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards 2011 for *Model Citizens* by The Necessary Stage. In 2014, Alvin was conferred the Cultural Medallion for his artistic excellence and contribution to Singapore's arts and cultural landscape.



# BIOS



**Camille Thomas** (Performer-Deviser) is a writer/actor from Detroit, Michigan and a graduate of Michigan State University. She received her bachelor's in Arts and Humanities and her BFA in Theatre. In undergrad she devised *Through the Storm*, a show that took a look at sexual assault and the healing process. Since moving to NYC she has interned at Manhattan Theatre Club with their Stargate program, where she assisted in devising *Sweetwater*, an off-Broadway production. Additionally, she performed with American Slavery Project in their Unheard Voices series and has workshopped her one woman show, *yOU CaN TAke ouT a PAReNT pLUs IOaN*, with Blackboard play reading series, Sacred Circle Theatre Company, and Women's Theatre Festival in North Carolina. She would like to thank God for this opportunity to continue creating art and her parents for allowing her to turn their dining room into a home studio.



**Ghafir Akbar** (Performer-Deviser) was last seen in *The Lifespan of a Fact* (SRT) and *Merdeka* (Wild Rice). Malaysia/Singapore: *Civilised*, *Those Who Can't, Teach* (TNS); *Raj and the End of Tragedy* (ICT-Cake); *Gold Rain* and *Hailstones* (Instant Cafe); *Guards at the Taj*, *Julius Caesar*, *Disgraced* (SRT); *Medea* (Cake); *HOTEL*, *Public Enemy* (Wild Rice); and *Hamlet* (Actors Studio). American credits include *The Perfume Shop*, *Life of Galileo* (Asolo Rep), *Life in the Middle* (Two River); *All The Way From China* (Mad Dog Theatre). Ghafir holds an MFA in Acting (FSU-Asolo Conservatory) and a BA in Theatre Performance (Western Michigan University).

# BIOS



**Neil Redfield** (Performer-Deviser) is an NYC-based actor and writer currently sheltering in San Antonio, TX (where he grew up). Favorite performance credits include Topper/Undertaker's Man in Dallas Theatre Center's *A Christmas Carol*, Bertolt Brecht in *Trial By Fire* at Columbia University (a devised theatre piece about Brecht's uncredited female collaborators), and the world premiere of Liz Swados' *The Nomad* at The Flea in NYC. He is currently developing a solo-show adaptation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. He has trained extensively in Suzuki and Viewpoints with both SIT Company and the Suzuki Company of Toga. MFA in Acting, Southern Methodist University. [www.neilredfield.com](http://www.neilredfield.com)



**Rebekah Sangeetha Dorai** (Performer-Deviser) is an actor, singer and voiceover artist. Recent selected theatre credits include her critically acclaimed solo show *Building A Character* at the 2018 Wild Rice Singapore Theatre Festival, *Discord of Discourse* (UK), the Esplanade Studio's *Miss British*, *Eloquence* (in collaboration with Santiago, Chile), and T:>works' *Three Fat Virgins*, for which she was nominated for Best Supporting Actress at the Life! Theatre Awards Singapore. Sangeetha has also written songs for numerous productions and debuted her solo jazz concert *Sangeetha Sings Sinatra: Live at the Esplanade* in early 2019. Her next solo concert, *Sangeetha Sings Simone*, is slated for 2020/21. Follow her upcoming theatre and music @ms.dorai or [msdorai.com](http://msdorai.com)

# BIOS



**Sean Devare** (Performer-Deviser, Publicity Design) is a New York City-based multidisciplinary performer, designer, musician, and director. He is currently a SUITE/Space fellow at Mabou Mines for his solo show *First Violin*, which premiered at HERE Arts Center and United Solo. A proud son of Chinese and Indian immigrants, Sean's work explores questions of cultural inheritance and hybridization through reinterpreting Asian diasporic performance traditions, from mask-making and shadow puppetry to Carnatic violin. He has performed in NYC at BAM, Signature, Target Margin, The Flea and more. Founding member of Trinacria Theatre Company. MFA Sarah Lawrence College, BFA RISD. [www.seandevare.com](http://www.seandevare.com) IG: @devarius



**Cheng Nien Yuan** (Dramaturg) is a scholar of Singaporean theatre and performance, with a research focus on the politics of storytelling. She completed her PhD in Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Sydney in 2019, and is now Honorary Associate of the university's School of Literature, Art and Media. She has published in the journals *Oral History Review*, *About Performance* and *Performance Paradigm*. Her writings on Singaporean art and theatre can also be found on New Mandala.

# BIOS



**J.Ed Araiza** (Dramaturg) has a long and varied experience working on multicultural and cross disciplinary projects as a writer, director, dramaturge and performer. For over 28 years he has been a member of the internationally acclaimed SITI Company, with whom he continues to perform and teach. As a playwright he has written seven produced plays and has directed and taught in theatres, Art centers and universities from China to Finland, Colombia to Canada. Since 2013 he has served as head of the MFA Acting program at the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, leading an interdisciplinary program based on collaboration and ensemble training.



**Jevon Chandra** (Multimedia Designer) is an artist, sound designer, and cultural worker. Drawing inspiration from therapeutic and peer counseling approaches, his art practice estimates the (mis)translations that occur between thought, theory, and praxis, as sometimes seen in acts of caring, meaning-making, and holding faith. Currently, he is working on an upcoming piece for the Fujinoyama Biennale 2020, an Associate Artist stint with The Substation in 2020/21 as part of art collective Brack, and a longitudinal project with a palliative care non-profit organisation in Jakarta.

# BIOS



**Jay Ong** (Sound Designer) is a Singaporean composer, arranger and musician. His most recent compositions include *ekphrasis*, *samsui women* (National Gallery Singapore), *Pelag and Play* (World Saxophone Congress) and original music for the Hwa Chong Centennial Musical (Hwa Chong Institution). Having trained as a Mosaic Jazz Fellow (Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay), his work is heavily influenced by the jazz idiom. He is currently the resident composer for the Xin Saxophone Quartet and has held residencies at Ba-Roque Grill and Sentosa Cove.



**Manuela Romero** (Stage Manager) is a theater and multimedia director from Bogota, Colombia based in New York City. Through her work, she attempts to question the invisible structures shaping our culture, traditions and identities. She is passionate about interdisciplinary art, collaborations and diversity in perspectives. Movement and multimedia are essential articulators for her approach to storytelling. She went to NYU to study Drama and Political Science.



# BIOS



**Priyanka Kedia** (Stage Management Intern) is an aspiring actress based in NYC and SF. She is pursuing her BFA in Drama at NYU Tisch, currently training at the Stella Adler Studio of Acting. Most recently, she performed in the Broke People Play Festival at NYU as well as various student films. She is extremely thankful for this opportunity to intern with The Transit Ensemble and learn from the incredible artists that put this relevant, vulnerable, and inclusive piece together!



**Ryan Henry** (Marketing & Multimedia Intern) is an aspiring Actor, Writer, and Director from Ramsey, New Jersey. She is currently studying Communications and Theatre at Villanova University while playing division one softball. Her current work ranges from solo performances, TED Talks, and podcasts but hopes to expand her experiences in any form. She wants to thank everyone in The Transit Ensemble for this amazing opportunity as well as all the kindness they have sent her way.

**David Gibbs** (Press Representative) is the founder of DARR Publicity, a boutique press agency specializing in theater, dance, music-driven shows and unique theatrical experiences. His clients have won Drama Desk, Lucille Lortel, Obie and Off Broadway Alliance Awards. [www.DarrPublicity.com](http://www.DarrPublicity.com)

# WHO'S THERE? (re) SOURCES

SPOILERS AHEAD! PLEASE READ AFTER SHOW. Here you'll find a list of sources that inspired the creation of each scene and/or helped us craft the scenes as we improvised or wrote them. This list is necessarily incomplete as there are too many points of inspiration to fit in one program. Nonetheless, we hope it can act as a resource for you if you'd like to find out more about anything you came across in *Who's There?*.

## ON THE MAKING OF *WHO'S THERE?*

- Cheng Nien Yuan - [The Making of Who's There?: A Non-Stop Flight in Transit](#)
- Bakchormeeboy - [Preview: Who's There? by The Transit Ensemble](#)

## CHARACTER SCENES

On Blackface in Malaysia (Amir & Iyla)

- Tan Mei Zi - [‘Unnecessary uproar’: Malaysian production company refuses to reshoot blackface scenes in Dayang Senandung despite colorism accusations](#) (article)
- Malaysia Kini - [‘Racist Malaysia’: Africans decry tenancy ban](#) (YouTube video)
- Shazly Zain - [‘Brownface’ Didn’t Start in Singapore. Doesn’t Mean It’s Not Relevant Here](#) (article)
- Kayla Wong - [‘Blackface’ not offensive in China due to Chinese standards, explained](#) (article)

On Guilt and Privilege (Adam & YT)

- Cher Tan - [What Privilege Looks Like in Singapore](#) (article)
- Viet Thanh Nguyen - [Close the Curtain on ‘Miss Saigon’](#) (article)
- Kai Cheng Thom - [7 Ways Social Justice Language Can Become Abusive in Intimate Relationships](#) (article)
- Coconuts Singapore - [Police Summon Jolovan Wham for Posing in Public With Smiley Face](#) (article)

On Global Anti-Blackness and Activism (Iyla & Sharmila)

- Manish Pandey - [‘Why I’ve used skin whitening products’](#) (article)
- Lauren Frayer - [BLM gets Indians talking about skin lightening and colorism](#) (article)
- Arundhati Roy - [“Indian racism towards Black people is almost worse than white peoples’ racism”](#) (interview)

- Jewel Stolarчук - [Pritam Singh seconds Tommy Koh's sentiment that Singapore needs loving critics](#) (article)
- The theme of different modes of activism came out of many conversations among the collaborators in *Who's There?* about what it means to be an advocate in Singapore and in the United States.

#### On Microaggressions and Taking Accountability (Adam & Iyla)

- Andrew Limbong - [Microaggressions Are A Big Deal: How To Talk Them Out And When To Walk Away](#) (article)
- Tre Johnson - [When black people are in pain, white people just join book clubs](#) (article)
- Ciarra Jones - [The Violence of white \(and non-Black PoC\) Apologies](#) (article)
- Elly Belle - [How White People Can Hold Each Other Accountable to Stop Institutional Racism](#) (article)

#### On Racial Ambiguity & "Free Speech Warriors" (Amir & Jordan)

- Sharmani P Gabriel - [The meaning of race in Malaysia: Colonial, post-colonial and possible new conjunctures \(2015\)](#) (journal article)
- Jennifer Ann Ho - [Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture \(2015\)](#) (book)
- Dave Rubin - [The Lazy Propagandist](#) (YouTube video)
- Aaron Freedman - [Why Should We Care about Faux Free-Speech Warriors?](#) (article)

#### On Social Media Callouts & Chinese Privilege in Singapore (Sharmila & YT)

- Ethel Pang - [As Long As SAP Schools Exist, 'Chinese Elitism' in Singapore Will Exist](#) (article)
- Linda Lim - [On race, Singaporeans must open their eyes at home to thrive abroad](#) (article)
- Kimberly Lim and Tashny Sukumaran - [George Floyd killing stirs Asian feelings on region's own racial strife](#) (article)
- Kopimotion - [我的名字是个名牌 \(My Name Is a Premium Brand\): Preeti's, Humour, Anger, Race and Chinese Privilege](#) (article)

## MULTIMEDIA, SOUND, AND MOVEMENT SEQUENCES

Multimedia on Sociopolitical Contexts, British Colonization of Singapore, Asian American history, SAP Schools in Singapore

- Stephen Dziedzic - [Singapore's Quarrel Over Colonialism](#) (article)
- Tommy Koh - [The British Rule of Singapore: An Evaluation](#) (article)
- Charlene Tan - [Change and continuity: Chinese language policy in Singapore](#) (journal article)

- Faris Joraimi - [Singapore's Malay Privileged: Affluence, Alienation and Anxieties](#) (article)
- Zhuo Tee - [The Special Assistance Plan: Singapore's own bumiputera policy](#) (article)
- Hua Hsu - [A New History of Being Asian-American](#) (article)

Audio references for "Trigger Away" scene (blackface, yellowface, brownface)

- Judy Garland - [Swing Low, Sweet Chariot](#) (song)
- Carl Douglas - [Kung Fu Fighting](#) (song)
- Avril Lavigne - [Hello Kitty](#) (song)
- Nicki Minaj - [Chun-Li](#) (song)

Audio & textual references for "Black & White" (racial politics in the United States)

- Alain Goraguer - [Déshominisation \(I\)](#) (song)
- Beyoncé - [Freedom](#) (song)
- W. E. B. Dubois - [The Souls of Black Folk \(1903\)](#) (book)
- Reni Eddo-Lodge - [Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race \(2017\)](#) (book)
- Robin DiAngelo - [White Fragility \(2018\)](#) (book)
- Ibram X. Kendi - [How to be an Anti-Racist \(2019\)](#) (book)
- Ijeoma Oluo - [So You Want To Talk About Race \(2019\)](#) (book)
- Michelle Alexander - [The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness \(2010\)](#) (book)
- Claudia Rankine - [Citizen \(2014\)](#) (book)
- [The Pledge of Allegiance](#)

## INTERVIEW SEGMENTS

Interview with "K. Shivendra"

- K. Shanmugam - [Channel NewsAsia interview on Preeti's rap video](#) (video interview)
- Selvaraj Velayutham - [Everyday Racism in Singapore \(2009\)](#) (book chapter)
- Cherian George - [Section 298 is Ripe for Review](#) (article)
- Yin Lin Tan - [In 2020, Singapore Still Doesn't Know How to Talk About Race](#) (article)

Interview with Cops in the U.S.

- This segment is based on interviews conducted anonymously by members of The Transit Ensemble with two police officers, one in Detroit and one in New York.

Interview with Angela Davis

- Angela Davis - [On Violence](#) (video interview)
- We used an interview excerpt from the famous 1972 interview above and crafted this segment in conversation with the ongoing discussions of protests and looting as part of the Black Lives Matter movement. See, for instance, Vicky Osterweil's article: [In Defense of Looting](#)

## Interviews with Migrants in Singapore

- The Transit Ensemble are very grateful to S Rahman Liton and Janelyn for their time and contribution to *Who's There?* in sharing their experiences with us, as well as their thoughts about the situation of migrants in Singapore. For more contextual information, see:
- Kirsten Han - [No, migrant workers are not trying to get COVID-19.](#) (article)
- Poh Yong Han - [Can Friendship Be The Future of Migrant-Local Community?](#) (article)

## GROUP DISCUSSION ON KARENISM

- Maya Singleton - [The Danger of Amy Cooper's Apology: When Privilege Inspires Selective Racism](#) (article)
- CBS News - [Woman apologizes after "Karen"-like confrontation with resident goes viral and draws backlash](#) (article)
- Alexis Romero - [The Violent Politics Behind Karenism](#) (article)
- Ijeoma Oluo - [There Is No Middle Ground Between Racism And Justice](#) (article)
- Devon Price - [Empathy Is Overrated](#) (article)
- This segment was also inspired by group discussions on how to have constructive and meaningful conversations with people who possess different points of view. See:
- ['Deliberative democracy'](#) (encyclopedia article)
- [What is Nonviolent Communication \(NVC\)?](#) (article on approach developed by Marshall Rosenberg)
- Julia Dhar - [How to disagree productively and find common ground](#) (TED Talk)
- [Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man: White Parents Raising Black Children](#) (YouTube video)

## REIMAGINING A "NEW NORMAL"

- NMP Kuik Shiao-Yin - [On the difficulties of talking about power, privileges, belonging vs fitting in](#) (social media post)
- Caridad Svich - [A Mortal Theatre](#) (article)
- Vinita Ramani - [A Letter To My Tamil Singaporean Daughter About The Singapore We Want](#) (article)
- Nazry Bahrawi - [A Vocabulary of Our Own](#) (article)
- Ijeoma Oluo - [Social Justice Must Be Complicated, Because Oppression Is Never Simple](#) (article)



# SPECIAL THANKS

The Transit Ensemble would like to thank  
the following people for all of their support:

Adrian Tan, Antonio Miniño, Bakchormeeboy,  
DARR Publicity, Danial Matin, Fazley Rubel,  
Jaclyn Biskup, Janelyn, Marc Weitz,  
Nicholas Chan, Rachel April, Renee Yeong,  
Robert Lyons, Rose Curley, S Rahman Liton,  
Sharon Frese, and Sol Cotti

To receive updates on future iterations of the show, [join our mailing list here](#).

## A NOTE FROM THE ETHER

We have been forced out of our beloved theatres by a global pandemic. The theatre's core relationship of physical bodies in a shared space is not currently available to us. And yet... artists continue to make art, and storytellers still have stories to tell.

The artists in this summer's Ice Factory have all embraced our current terms-of-engagement and committed themselves to a rigorous and playful investigation of digitally-mediated, live-streamed shared time. Because that is what artists do: they work with the resources at hand to make something radically new. Each of the different artists in IF2020 take different approaches - foregrounding, exploding, and exploiting different qualities of this new medium. They are joyful and fearless in the face of this new and uncharted territory. And that is why we follow them with such giddy anticipation.

Enjoy!

Robert Lyons, Artistic Director, New Ohio Theatre

## ICE FACTORY 2020 FESTIVAL LINEUP

**July 24-26**

**SOCIETY**

*BEGINNING DAYS OF TRUE  
JUBILATION*

A visionary vows to create a life-changing product, with the smartest minds of her generation ecstatically on board. What could possibly go wrong? A satirical journey through the cult-like, group-think of winner-take-all capitalism, from the early euphoria of a new start-up through its epic crash and burn. Written by Mona Mansour, and directed by Scott Illingworth.

**July 30-Aug 2**

**DIBBA/KHANIN/MADRONE/SMITH**

*we need your listening*

An empty theater lit by glowing blue screens. Phone

## ABOUT NEW OHIO THEATRE

New Ohio Theatre serves Manhattan's most adventurous audiences by developing, curating and presenting bold work by New York's independent theatre community. We believe the best of this community, the small artistic ensembles and the daring producing companies who operate without a permanent theatrical home, are actively expanding the boundaries of what theatre is and what it can be. From our home in the West Village's historic Archive Building, the New Ohio strengthens, nurtures, and promotes this community, providing a professional, high-profile platform for downtown's most mature, ridiculous, engaging, irreverent, gut-wrenching, frivolous, sophisticated, foolish, and profound theatrical endeavors.

*Help us develop and present the best of New York's independent theatre scene by making a taxdeductible contribution at [newohiotheatre.org](https://newohiotheatre.org)*

calls after dark. Spinning confessionals. In a shifting theatrical landscape, individual audience members enter a dim space between digital and analog reality and are taken through a series of intimate, one-on-one exchanges with performers - discovering and re-discovering the act of listening as radical engagement.

**Aug 4-8**

**THE TRANSIT ENSEMBLE**

*WHO'S THERE?*

A Black American influencer accuses a Malaysian bureaucrat of condoning blackface. A Singaporean-Indian teacher launches an Instagram feud calling out racial inequality at home, post-George Floyd. A privileged Singaporean-Chinese activist meets a compassionate White Saviour, and an ethnically

ambiguous political YouTuber takes a DNA test for the first time. This cross-cultural encounter involving artists based in Singapore, Malaysia, and the United States uses Zoom as a new medium to explore the unstable ground between us and “the other.” In this pandemic contact zone, lines along race, class and gender bleed into one another, questioning the assumptions we hold of ourselves and the world around us.

## NEW OHIO THEATRE STAFF

<i>Artistic Director</i>	Robert Lyons
<i>Producing Director</i>	Marc Stuart Weitz
<i>Associate Producer</i>	Jaclyn Biskup
<i>Ice Factory</i>	
<i>Associate Producer</i>	Rachel Denise April
<i>Box Office Manager</i>	Antonio Miniño
<i>Ice Factory Crew</i>	Ryan Henry, Priyanka Kedia
<i>Press Representative</i>	David Gibbs/DARR Publicity

## ARCHIVE RESIDENCY COMPANIES

The Archive Residency offers artists a two-year commitment of space, artistic support, and institutional continuity for the development and presentation of a new work. In partnership with IRT Theatre, our neighbors in the Archive Building, we provide independent theatre companies with that most elusive and invaluable resource: an artistic home.

## BLACK LIVES MATTER

New Ohio Theatre stands in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. We commit to fighting against those inflicting violence on Black communities, to wrestling with new questions, and holding ourselves more accountable as we move forward to a better future. If you would like to donate to support the fight for justice and equality, please [click here](#) to learn about one of our favorite organizations supporting Black trans lives.

## INDIGENOUS LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

New Ohio Theatre is situated on the Lenape island of Manhahtaan (Mannahatta). We pay respect to Lenape peoples and ancestors past, present, and future, and acknowledge our reliance on the land and waters of Lenapehoking, the Lenape homeland.

**Aug 13-15**

**LEVINGSTON/HARE/LUCKETT**

## *A BURNING CHURCH*

A kaleidoscopic new musical tracing the lives of church leaders and congregants amid political movements, tragedies, and spiritual rebirth, *A Burning Church* is about an American institution fighting to survive a crisis of faith. This iteration will be presented as a virtual religious service, weaving in performances of songs from the show with sermons, commentary, and moments to hold spiritual space together -- space to imagine the role of the church in movements for liberation, as well as the form that church and theater can take when gathering is not possible.

## NEW OHIO THEATRE BOARD

Scott Budlong  
Chris Dickey  
Margaret B. Grossman, *Chair*  
Erich Jungwirth  
Robert C. Lyons  
Vanessa Sparling  
Margaret Weber

*Current Archive Residency Artists*  
Byzantine Choral Project (2019-21)  
Radical Evolution (2019-21)  
Kareem M. Lucas (2020-21)  
Levingston/Hare/Luckett (2020-21)

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