



Presents

# BALING

In December 1955, what would come to be known as the Baling Talks was a unique attempt to bring peace to the Malayan peninsula devastated by the Emergency.

'Baling' is a documentary performance that reconstructs these historic negotiations between Tunku Abdul Rahman, David Marshall and Chin Peng, where various visions on building a new nation were imagined, discussed and discarded. Reading from publicly available transcripts, the performer-researchers relook at the meanings of freedom, loyalty, terrorism, reconciliation, surrender, sacrifice and independence, and consider how the phantoms of our history continue to haunt our present.



## Notes from Director Mark Teh

Dispersing the Documents and Reading the Ashes: notes on *Baling*

In her book *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (2002), Carolyn Steedman suggests that the practice of history is perhaps “just one long exercise of the deep satisfaction of *finding things*.”

There was never a conscious plan to make a series of *Baling* performances. However, since we first stumbled on the transcripts of the 1955 Baling Talks in 2005, my collaborators and I have revisited the text of these historic negotiations between Tunku Abdul Rahman, David Marshall and Chin Peng several times – using it as a spine for finding new questions, frictions and readings in Malaysian history, as well as devising different formats and tactics with which to perform them.

In 2005 and 2006, we toured *Baling (membaling)* across 11 universities, colleges and futsal centres in a performance that juxtaposed selected excerpts from the talks against the lived experiences of the performers’ families during the Emergency. In 2008 and 2011 respectively, we organised participatory, durational events where the entire text of the talks were read out over 4-5 hours at the *Emergency Festival* and the *Singapore Arts Festival*, involving students, journalists, lawyers, activists, actors, filmmakers, sociologists, politicians, and audience members. Another version, *Re:Writing the Baling Talks*, was made in 2011 as a performance-intervention in three London libraries that housed large collections of books relating to Malaysian historiography.

In this latest version of *Baling*, using publically available documents, we investigate how public heroes and enemies are created, circulated and remembered in contemporary Malaysia – to try to understand and deal with this phenomenon in a more human way. The media storm and reactions that surrounded the potential return of Chin Peng’s ashes to Malaysia in 2013 provided us with clues on how our present continues to be infected by the hysterical symptoms of our history – the notions of pollution, borders, exile; as well as the permeability of ashes, ghosts, virus. Or how something absent can be made present.

Finally, at the heart of the 1955 Baling Talks, and this particular version of *Baling*, is the question of citizenship – at the political, emotional and individual level, with all the complexities, contradictions, expectations and consequences that this responsibility brings. Malaysia seems stuck in a perpetual stasis of crises, existing in between a time and space of an unsustainable one Malaysia; of awkward, counter-alliances to selamatkan Malaysia; of faded wawasans.

There is no nostalgia to pine for in this performance. We invite you to time travel simultaneously through our history and our present, and to witness these unique debates between Tunku Abdul Rahman, David Marshall and Chin Peng against the backdrop of 2016 Malaysia – debates that consider seriously the compromises of nationhood, the impossibility of consensus and reconciliation, and the promise of the future and the alternative ways ahead – all before Malaya became independent, and Malaysia was invented.

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I would like to register my debt and gratitude to the *Baling* team for their immense work, talent, points of view, sensitivity, flexibility, rigour, humour, and diversity during this journey – words in a programme book will not suffice: Ali Alasri, Anne James, Fahmi Fadzil, Fahmi Reza, Faiq Syazwan Kuhiri, Hoe Hui Ting, Imri Nasution, June Tan, Syamsul Azhar, Vivian War, Wong Tay Sy, and Yiky Chew. Thank you also to Leow Puay Tin and Marion D’Cruz who lent wise ears, eyes and advice during some personally anxious moments during the making of this *Baling*. Finally, Sharyn Shufiyan – who knows more than most the complexities of embodying our inherited histories – terima kasih is not enough.

### **Notes from Producer June Tan**

This month, Five Arts Centre celebrates a newly refurbished space. A space for performance and showcase. A space to ask, to question, to consider and to examine ideas and alternatives. A space, during a time in Malaysia when the act of questioning is expanding. More than ever today, Malaysians are asking questions. Asking questions it appears, is easy. Getting answers is the tough bit. And what constitutes an answer... our opinions may differ on this.

Mark and the Baling team’s quest to unpeg the condition above had brought them on a 11-year journey through text and research surrounding the 1955 Baling Talks. The negotiations, the questioning, and the answering. Each side painting a picture, an image. Each side continuing to paint the picture, the image.

For the Baling team, this is a historic year where we had the opportunity to bring this performance to six different cities. In each city, we found both similar and different questions and answers. This experience and extraordinary tour would not have happened without the foresight and commitment from our co-Producers, Asian Arts Theatre (South Korea), Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama 2016 Executive Committee (Japan) and Kyoto Experiment (Japan). Our tour to the Opening Festival of the Asian Arts Theatre in Gwangju, South Korea was supported by The Royal Arts Gala 2015 and our production in Kuala Lumpur was supported by Yayasan Sime Darby. To our partners and sponsors who have, and continue to provide us with the means for us to create work, we thank you so much for your hard and critical support.

Watching Baling again, amongst different communities and configurations, reminds me that it is not merely enough for us to consider the images presented. In the mix of different responses from different communities, I found myself attempting to tease out the subtle colonisation, impact and influence that had coloured the basis of my assumptions. And in between the choice of asking, of answering, of accepting, of deconstructing and reconstructing assumptions, lies the cliché that every patriot mutters, and the basic aspiration of every rational citizen – the building of a nation.

## CREATIVE / PRODUCTION TEAM

### Director

**Mark Teh** is a director, curator and researcher whose diverse, collaborative projects are particularly engaged with the issues of history, memory and the urban context. Performance projects include the evolving *Baling* series (2005-present); a number of docu-portraits on Malaysian artists (*Dua*, *Tiga Dalang Berlari*, *Gostan Forward* and *Something I Wrote*); and “*Sudden Death*”: a participatory performance in memory of *Teoh Beng Hock* (2009). He also co-curated *Emergency Festival* (2008), *Save Our Placards* (2011) and *Para-Sites* (2014); and co-produced *10 Tahun Sebelum Merdeka* (2007), *Projek Angkat Rumah* (2010), *The Fairly Current Show* and *That Effing Show* on PopTeeVee (2008-2011). Mark graduated with an MA in Art and Politics from Goldsmiths, University of London, teaches at the Department of Performance & Media, Sunway University, and is a member of Five Arts Centre.

### Production Designer

**Wong Tay Sy**, has been actively involved in local visual and theatre art scene since 1999. As a visual art graduate, Wong has been and is constantly searching for her role and her relationship with her environment through the arts. Wong believes in the strength of collective creativity where each individual contributes and gains respectively through a process. For the past 10 years since her returned from the UK, her involvement in the art scene has always been as an arts producer, collaborator and facilitator with different local art groups and film productions.

### Light Designer

**Syamsul Azhar** is a freelancer for film and theatre and is trained in acting, filmmaking, theatre production and stage performing. His recent work include editing season two of the Malaysian TV game show *Versus* (2013), and directing and shooting a 2011 documentary about a rock star from Switzerland named *GOLA* who toured Australia. Syamsul has also worked as a Videographer at Popteevee, a channel that creates online documentaries and internet series.

for *Something I wrote* (2013), Lighting Assistant for *Princess Wen Cheng The Musical* (2012) staged at Istana Budaya, and as Stage Manager for *Gostan Forward* (2012) in Singapore.

### **Visual Projection Designer**

**Fahmi Reza** is a self-taught graphic designer, arts worker and political activist based in Kuala Lumpur. As a political graphic designer, he has been openly critical of the government through his work, and have been arrested and banned for his activism. He is currently being investigated by the police and the MCMC for drawing the Prime Minister as a clown. In 2007, he directed the cult-favourite historical documentary *10 Tahun Sebelum Merdeka*. He is also an armchair historian, currently on the board of directors of the Pusat Sejarah Rakyat in Kuala Lumpur.

### **Performers**

**Anne James** trained in acting at Universiti Sains Malaysia and Northwestern University (USA) and is a member of Five Arts Centre. She is a much-respected actor and dancer (*Marion D’Cruz and Dancers*) who has performed both locally and internationally. She has had the privilege of working with directors including Krishen Jit, Ong Keng Sen, Kee Thuan Chye, Richard Schechner, Joe Hasham, Ivan Heng, Claire Wong, Zahim Albakri, Jo Kukathas, Natalie Hennedige and Chee Sek Thim. Her film credits include *KIL* and *Terbaik Dari Langit* with Nik Amir Mustapha and *Pineapple Town* with Tan Pin Pin (Spore). She loves being on stage.

**Fahmi Fadzil** is a writer and performer. He believes in a better Malaysia.

**Faiq Syazwan Kuhiri** is an actor/performer and collaborator of devised theatre. His most recent collaborations have been with dancer choreographer Ren Xin in the dance piece *BED* (2014) for the d'Next Artist Project, theatre director Mark Teh in *2 minute solos (Ballad Of The Ultras)* (2014) and *Something I Wrote* (2013). Other theatre works include *Election Daze* (2010) a reading / performance of an excerpt of Election Day by Huzir Sulaiman.

**Imri Nasution** is a filmmaker and educator. Always keen in sharing knowledge, Imri has been involved in many film workshops for young people (Panasonic Kid Witness News, Apple Video in Education, Microsoft Video Workshop) while at the same time he continues to direct television programs related to knowledge (*Oh My English, 8 Bulan, Gol & Gincu*, etc). Imri’s on-going interest in knowledge also brought him to be involved in several research and documentaries projects (*The Golden Age of Malayan Films, 10 Tahun Sebelum Merdeka, Revolusi 48, Tukang Perahu Pulau Duyung, Mencari Nusantara*). Besides making films, Imri also dabbles into theatre, having performed for *Baling Mem-Baling, In 1969*,

*Something I Wrote, Baling* (Readings) and directing projections for *P.Ramlee The Musical, Terang Bulan* and *Cakap Dapur*.

### **Producer**

**June Tan** is a biologist from Imperial College, London who has worked in finance, software product management, toxic waste management and renewable energy from 1997 to 2009. She is a member of the performing arts collective, Five Arts Centre and from 1998, has stage-managed and tour-managed theatre performances to Berlin, Singapore, Korea, India, Japan and UAE. June's creative producing begun in 2006 and she is interested in facilitating space for new and alternative discourse.

### **Stage Manager**

**Hoe Hui Ting** graduated from New Era College's Drama and Visuals Department in 2011. She is currently working with Five Arts Centre as office/production manager. She is an active freelance stage manager and has worked with well-known theatre companies such as Instant Café Theatre, Five Arts Centre, W!LD RICE, Pentas Project, O Puppet Theatre and others.

### **Production Assistant**

**Vivian War** is an emerging producer and is currently in midst of producing her first theatre production with emerging artists, *Tiga*. In the past, Vivian has been production assistant for *Cheras, THE MUSICAL!* (2015) by Five Arts Centre directed by Chee Sek Thim, *Another Country* (2015) by W!LD RICE directed by Ivan Heng and Jo Kukathas. Vivian is currently production assisting and tour managing for *Baling* directed by Mark Teh. Vivian has also worked as an arts officer at British Council Kuala Lumpur (2014) and was involved with *Cooler Lumpur Festival* (2014) as logistics assistant and production managed touring gigs for *The Wknd* (2014). Vivian is a graduate from Sunway University's Diploma in Performing Arts programme.

### **Baling Tour 2015/ 2016**

- i) Opening Festival of the Asian Arts Theatre, Gwangju, South Korea - 5, 7 & 8 September 2015.
- ii) International Theatre Festival of Kerala, Thrissur, India - 11 & 12 January 2016.
- iii) Performing Arts Meeting (TPAM) in Yokohama, Japan - 9 & 10 February 2016.
- iv) *The Time is Out of Joint* exhibition, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates -13 & 14 March 2016.
- v) Five Arts Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - 30 March to 3 April 2016.
- vi) Festival Theaterformen 2016, Braunschweig, Germany - 12 to 14 June 2016.
- vii) Kyoto Experiment 2016 Autumn Season, Japan - 22 & 23 October 2016

## About Five Arts Centre

**Five Arts Centre** is a dynamic collective of Malaysian artists and producers, dedicated to generating alternative art forms and images in the contemporary arts landscape. It is well-known for cutting edge performances in theatre, dance, music and young people's theatre, and incorporates aspects of the visual and digital arts as well. The collective has performed and presented its work in Southeast Asia, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, India, Egypt, Australia, Canada, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, Finland, the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates.

Since it was formed in 1984, by theatre directors Chin San Sooi and Krishen Jit, and dancer-choreographer Marion D'Cruz, Five Arts Centre has been committed to articulating the complexity of Malaysian culture and identity through explorations and fusions of local vocabularies, forms and traditions, in relation to the global, modern and cross-cultural. As such, it has been instrumental in the growth of a Malaysian identity in the arts, that draws from multiple influences and hybrid histories.

For over three decades, Five Arts Centre has been at the forefront of creating experimental, interdisciplinary and intercultural work, providing platforms for the next generation of arts practitioners. Contemporary social, political and cultural issues impinging on Malaysian life are precipitated by way of performances, exhibitions, creative seminars and research workshops.

From 2004 to 2006, Five Arts Centre was the manager of *Arts Network Asia*, a regional organisation supporting arts work in Asia. In 2006, ASTRO and Five Arts Centre launched the *Krishen Jit ASTRO Fund* to support artistic work by Malaysians and others committed to the development of the arts in Malaysia. At the 12th Boh Cameronian Arts Awards in 2015, Five Arts Centre was awarded the inaugural "Most Inspiring Award".

Today, the collective consists 13 individuals from diverse generations and disciplines. They are Anne James, Chee Sek Thim, Chew Kin Wah, Fahmi Fadzil, Ivy N. Josiah, Janet Pillai, June Tan, Kubhaer T. Jethwani, Mac Chan, Marion D'Cruz, Mark Teh, Ravi Navaratnam, and Suhaila Merican.

Five Arts Centre

Tel/Fax: +603 77254858

[fiveartscentre@gmail.com](mailto:fiveartscentre@gmail.com)

[www.fiveartscentre.org](http://www.fiveartscentre.org)

[www.facebook.com/FiveArtsCentre](https://www.facebook.com/FiveArtsCentre)

[www.twitter.com/FiveArts](https://www.twitter.com/FiveArts)

## **CREDITS**

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Conceived and directed by  | Mark Teh  |
| Creative Producer          | June Tan  |
| Production Designer        | Wong Tay Sy   |
| Lighting Designer          | Syamsul Azhar   |
| Visual Projection Designer | Fahmi Reza  |
| Stage Manager              | Hoe Hui Ting  |
| Production Assistant       | Vivian War  |
| Performers                 | Anne James, Fahmi Fadzil, Faiq Syazwan Kuhir,<br>Imri Nasution. |

Produced by: Five Arts Centre (Malaysia).

Commissioned by: Asian Arts Theatre (South Korea).

Co-produced by: Asian Arts Theatre (South Korea), Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama 2016 Executive Committee (Japan) and Kyoto Experiment (Japan).

The Korean tour is supported by The Royal Arts Gala (Malaysia).

The KL performance is supported by Yayasan Sime Darby (Malaysia).

## **VENUE**

Kotak

27 Lorong Datuk Sulaiman 7,

Taman Tun Dr Ismail,

60000 Kuala Lumpur.

## **DATES & TIMES**

30 March – 3 April 2016, 8.30 pm

2 & 3 April 2016 – 3.00 pm

Entry by donation – RM40 (Adults) and RM20 (Senior Citizens/Students)

