

## *Only company in Singapore with a long-term ensemble.*

22-10-2018    Words by Luna    Location Singapore

Co-founded by local theatre practitioners Nelson Chia and Mia Chee, Nine Years Theatre (NYT) is a Singapore Mandarin theatre company that focuses on the re-imagination of classic work and the creation of new work. Some of their previous work will include Tartuffe as well as Cut Kafka! - the difference in presentations and the nature of the works go to showcase NYT's diverse range. Their Mandarin theatre productions always offer surtitles - a gesture of including audience members from all language backgrounds.

The one thing that really draws NYT apart from other Singapore-based theatre companies would be the fact that they are the only company in Singapore to work with an ensemble of actors. Also known as the NYT Ensemble, this group of actors train regularly on a long-term basis via systematic methods such as Viewpoints and Suzuki Method of Actor Training. With a firm belief in actor training, NYT also makes it a point to share these training philosophy and methods through classes and open training platforms.

Their upcoming show **Lear Is Dead** is a play-within-a-play, inspired and based on Shakespeare's King Lear. It speaks about wisdom and power, and at the basis of it all, the human condition.

Nelson shares with B-Side about the training philosophies Nine Years Theatre lives by and why working with a core ensemble has its benefits.

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# 李尔王

LEAR IS DEAD

愚人，君王，戏中戏  
A play-in-a-play about Fools as King

26-28.10.2018  
2018年10月26-28日  
新加坡滨海艺术中心  
ESPERANTO THEATRE  
4148 0081  
WWW.NYT.CO.SG  
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## Intentionally working with an ensemble is a rarity. Is that the case

On the contrary, there are many examples of ensemble model in countries with mature theatre culture. This model, however, is less explored in Singapore.

We see examples of this model in companies such as Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatret, Peter Brook's Theatre Bouffes Du Nord and Ariane Mnouchkine's Theatre du Soleil, Theater Mandiri led by Indonesian director Putu Wijaya, Suzuki Company of Toga by Tadashi Suzuki, and SITI Company by Anne Bogart, to name a few. Furthermore, the essence of the ensemble model is cross-disciplinary as we see how major dance companies largely rely on a core group of dancers who train together over extended period of time in order to produce quality works.

NYT believes that there are unique qualities in an ensemble model and that these qualities, which are at this moment under-explored in our local theatre scene, are in fact the factors that will propel us towards higher standards in our work. These are the reasons for the initiation of the NYT Ensemble Project.



**What are the main qualities that led you to choosing your current core members**

Essentially, they are firstly, willing to make the commitment to always challenge themselves and improve and secondly, their belief in long-term, regular training.

**What are some difficulties in maintaining an ensemble?**

Having a system that can sustain an ensemble. This include having a healthy programme where there are enough productions per year where ensemble members get the chance to perform and be challenged to improve, a training system that can build synergy, develop common language, and cultivate the qualities in the actors, and a philosophy that binds the company towards a common goal.



## Why Suzuki Method Viewpoints training are chosen among the other training

We train for many reasons. But generally it is to become a more capable, and hence a more creative actor. To constantly return to a “zero” state, so that we may see, experience and feel with refreshed perspectives. And by training together, it builds a common language and synergy that allows us to create works that are consistent, grounded and integral.

The Suzuki Method created by Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki is adopted as our Regular Training because it is systematic and adaptable, creative and disciplined at the same time. Its essence of structured freedom is closely related to real-life performance situation, making the method most suited for long-term, regular practice. Although it uses a series of formal physical exercises (known as disciplines) in its practice, these exercises are means to uncover the inner creative potential of the actor. In other words, these exercises are essentially components of a “method” rather than rigid aesthetics, making the Suzuki Method a system of training that transcends gender, age and culture.

As for Viewpoints, it trains actors to work together as a group by providing a common language in performance. It heightens the actors’ awareness of their bodies in space and

time, and their relationships with other bodies and structures on stage during creation and performance.

To add on, gathering from what we gained in our practices in the Suzuki Method of Actor Training and Viewpoints, NYT is now developing our own system of training - tentatively called the "NYT Actors' Work" - which is a system of approaches to rehearsal and performance for actors.



**With your example, do you think other theatre companies may follow suit?**

Some companies have similar models although NYT is the only one with a core group of actors that undergo long-term, regular and systematic training, and the only one where a stable ensemble creates together over extended period of time for the main programme of the company.

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