

# Singapore Government **PRESS RELEASE**

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SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR FINANCE, MR HON SUI SEN, ATG No. 0032 NARC 15  
THE OPENING OF THE THIRD SINGAPORE FESTIVAL OF ARTS AT THE VICTORIA CONCERT HALL ON 10 DECEMBER 1980 AT 8 P.M.

Although unaccustomed as a Minister of Finance to be Guest of Honour at a cultural event, I should like to express my great pleasure, nevertheless, in being here with you all tonight on this auspicious occasion, the opening of the Third Singapore Festival of Arts.

The Singapore Festival of Arts is the result of an unusual chemistry, of corporate patronage reacting with popular enthusiasm in the pursuit of the performing arts. It has had many models, but from the beginning the Festival has encouraged excellence by having performing groups, both visiting and local, vying for honours. The first two Festivals enjoyed a success brought about by their novelty, the challenge to the spirit by the sponsoring company and the excitement of those who felt they were assisting at a birth or a renaissance from the marriage of rich cultures making up Singapore's multi-faceted society. This Third Festival will enable us to see whether the inspirational atmosphere continues and whether our gains can not only be consolidated but increased.

An example of how an Arts Festival can change the tone of a city and transform it completely - for its duration - is provided by the Edinburgh International Festival. Now in its

35th year, the Festival attracts thousands of performers, tourists and culture lovers from all over the world. The organisers of the Singapore Arts Festival can take a leaf from the Edinburgh Festival. Being strategically placed in the midst of the rich traditional cultures of South, Southeast and East Asia, Singapore can be the magnet drawing exponents of these cultures as well as those of the West for a magnificent and unique artistic event.

The success of a festival, such as the Edinburgh Festival, is not achieved overnight. An arts festival takes shape finally when a society is ready and mature for one. It needs the resources and energies of a great number of organisations. It draws upon the supporting services of the media, cultural facilities, transportation and others. It should involve the whole community, charge the atmosphere with expectation and celebration, and generally infect everybody with a festive mood. And, most important, it must be fortunate to secure for itself, adequate patronage - from a well endowed company or institution, or from wealthy individuals. In the history of the arts, patronage has played a most vital role. While it may sound romantic for artists to starve and work in their garrets, the output of such artists without patronage must be abysmally low. A Michaelangelo could not have given of his best without the

beneficence of a Pope Sixtus with a Sistine Chapel to be decorated. Neither could other artists of the Renaissance have done their work without the patronage of princes whose vanity must be flattered or wealth displayed. Nor indeed could artists in other countries and later generations without the merchant princes and wealthy burghers to commission their works. The mantle of patronage in our generation has, in the Free World, at least, fallen more and more on wealthy companies, although a few rich individuals here and there remain to endow the arts. In the case of the Singapore Arts Festival we are fortunate that the function of patronage is being performed by Mobil Singapore, although some support is being given by the Ministry of Culture. With the continued generosity of Mobil Singapore, and the active involvement of the Ministry of Culture, the Singapore Festival of Arts may hope to grow in stature with the years.

I suspect that the reason I have been invited to this Festival is the hope that in my corporate capacity as the Minister for Finance, I may be induced to agree to the Government doing more than play a supporting role, through the Ministry of Culture, in the patronage of the performing arts, and, in particular, in the development of the Singapore Festival of Arts. The Ministry of Culture must have an ambivalent attitude towards such further development. Even in its infancy,

the Festival has attracted a fair amount of attention in foreign cultural circles. The number of visiting groups performing at the Festival is testimony to the international interest created by this major event. However, the expansion of the Festival, welcome as it is, is also an irksome burden on the present scant resources, both organisational and financial, of the Ministry of Culture. In addition to work for the Festival itself, the groundwork must also be laid by the Ministry of Culture in its year-round programmes of arts promotion which are catalysts for increased arts activity. These programmes are aimed not only at raising standards of excellence but at educating public taste in the arts. The Ministry is also busy upgrading cultural facilities to provide proper venues for artists and performers. These activities and their expenditures have had the support, without undue extravagance, of the Government's Budget. The Victoria Concert Hall and the Singapore Symphony Orchestra which it serves are examples of such support. Further patronage by the Government will be encouraged by greater public response to the performances, indicated preferably by buoyant ticket sales or alternatively, by private benefaction.

The Singapore Festival of Arts, conceived as a people's festival, will be made more significant by a greater sharing of its cost. If it is to expand very considerably, the basis of sponsorship, currently provided by a generous solitary company, can, with advantage, be broadened. It has been shown that

business and the arts can mix and in the most happy form of the Singapore Festival of Arts. This gesture has spawned others. More business groups are coming forward to support arts projects. This is a development we must welcome if we are to see the Festival permanently established as the premier event on the cultural calendar. The fine example of Mobil Singapore deserves to be emulated: their satisfaction will be in seeing the germ of an idea take root and the green shoot flower and bloom.

I now have pleasure in declaring the Third Singapore Festival of Arts open. I wish you, one and all, joy of the many interesting items in its programme.