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Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY MR YATIMAN YUSOF, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (INFORMATION AND THE ARTS), AT THE SINGAPORE YOUNG DRAMATIST AWARDS FINALS ON 12 FEB 2000 AT 10.30AM AT THE SUNTEC CITY AUDITORIUM

Good morning, distinguished judges, guests, budding playwrights, ladies and gentlemen.

2. I am delighted to be here this morning to witness the raw energy and creativity of the Singapore Young Dramatist Award or SYDA Finals.

3. TheatreWorks is one of our leading theatre companies in Singapore. It has been working very hard over the past fifteen years to develop the local theatre scene. The Writers' Laboratory, an initiative of TheatreWorks, is a programme committed to nurturing Singapore theatre and writing. It not only looks after established playwrights, but also strives to provide a platform for younger writers, through the SYDA.

4. This competition is a good way of encouraging more students to come out of their writing closets and cultivate a passion for writing plays. Getting the young

hooked on the arts is not an easy task, in the face of stiff competition from other pursuits such as Internet surfing and electronic gaming. However, once they come forward, it will help to pave the way for the grooming of budding artists and an arts-loving audience for the future.

5. In this age of rapid technological advances, with the ever rising demand for quick results, there is often little patience left to appreciate "the process" - the much-ignored stage where time, effort and resources are invested to develop a product. Emphasis has unfortunately, been often placed on the product itself.

6. We cannot and should not ignore processes. Without it, there will be no products. In every process, there are failures and there are successes. Similarly, for us to see the real gems appearing in our arts scene, we need to invest in the future of the arts. Nurturing our local talents is of utmost importance for us to have a thriving arts scene to call our own. I commend Theatreworks and Singapore Press Holdings for their commitment to this cause.

7. While we may only get to see the fruits of a developmental programme such as the Writers' Laboratory over a period of time, I am heartened to note some interesting and positive results for the moment. Plays such as the Three Fat Virgins and Undercover have become part of the Singapore canon, and they had first seen the light of day through the Writers' Laboratory. Local established playwrights like Eleanor Wong and Robin Loon who are judges for the SYDA finals today, have also developed new works through the Writer's Laboratory.

8. The National Arts Council or NAC is also exploring innovative ways of developing the literary arts. It introduced two new schemes to promote literature last year – the Mentorship Scheme and the Writers-in-Residence Programme. The Mentorship Scheme provides young aspiring writers with a one-year tutorship programme under an established writer or literary expert. Together with their mentors, the writers will go through critical feedback, dialogue sessions, workshops and public readings of their works. Playwrights Tan Tarn How and Desmond Sim who had participated in the Writers' Laboratory, are now mentors in the Mentorship Scheme. Under the other scheme, the Writers-in-Residence Programme, local or foreign established writers are invited to spend a period of two to three months with the host organisation. During this period, the guest

writers will exchange with the host community, local writers and interested members of the public to nurture the creation of new literary works.

9. NAC also organises programmes such as the Singapore Writers' Festival and the Golden Point Award and promotes literature to schools through the Arts Education Programme. Together, NAC and the local arts community will build a vibrant and enriching arts scene in Singapore.

10. Before closing, I would like to congratulate Theatreworks on the 10th anniversary of its Writer's Lab. I also applaud the hard work put in by all the budding writers for this competition. I understand that the selected finalists are of great playwright potential. May the best "playwright" win !

11. Thank you.

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