

KEYNOTE ADDRESS to close the EFA ATELIER

Singapore May 20 2011

Minister,

H.E. Doug Chester High Commissioner Australian High Commission

H.E. Olivier Caron Ambassador France Embassy in Singapore

Mr Yves Corbel Executive Director Alliance Francaise

Ms Moh Siew Lan Prog. Co-ordinator Goethe-Institut Singapore

H.E. Minda Cruz Ambassador Embassy of Philippines in Singapore

Amb. Roland Van Remoortele Ambassador Embassy of Belgium,
Singapore

Dr. Ulrich Sharm Director Goethe-Institut Singapore

Prof. Ostelio Remi Director Italian Cultural Institute

H.E. Oh Joon Ambassador Embassy of the Republic of Korea

Ms Sutthathip Vathitphund First Secretary Royal Thai Embassy,
Singapore

Amb. Roland Van Remoortele Ambassador Embassy of Belgium,
Singapore

Amb. Waldemar Dubaniowski Ambassador Embassy of the Republic
of Poland, Singapore

Colleagues , mentors from the Atelier, fellow artists ,

Distinguished guests

Participants in the Atelier

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I first extend my thanks for all of you involved in the generous hosting of the European Festivals Association's Atelier for Young Festival Managers in Singapore and the personal opportunity to renew friendships with colleagues here, and to meet so many new and interesting people in the arts. Singapore is always a lively and engaging place to spend time – especially because of its active support of arts and culture. Thanks to Lasalle – I was given a great tour of the facility yesterday and you have a splendid place here – any student would be privileged to study the arts at this institution. Thanks to Culture Link and Goh Ching Lee for her brilliant brokerage skills, and thanks too to the Asia Europe Foundation for making it possible for so many young arts festival managers to participate.

I am honoured to have been invited to attend this atelier and have to say that as in all good programs of any kind, it's always a two – way process. As mentors and presenters we get at least as much out of the participants as they may get out of us. It's a privilege to be allowed into the presence of youthful energy and ambition, and I've learned a lot from these gifted young people. I think we should all applaud them for making this edition of the Atelier such a resounding success.

The Atelier will keep growing, and deserves strong support: it's a truism to say that young people hold the keys to the future, but rapidly changing global demographics and shifting parameters of mobility demand that those, like the mentors in this program, who have been so fortunate in their careers, address issues of succession and intergenerational change in an open and direct way. We can do this very effectively through the Atelier.

In my own role at present as the Creative Director of the Centenary of Canberra in 2013, I have become aware, through our friendship city relationship with Dili, that 50% of the population of Timor l'Este is under 15 years of age. Capacity building amongst the young is clearly essential and urgent there, but it's something required in all places. All of us, one way or another, are involved in mentorship in our own countries, in informal ways and as an adjunct to our professional structures; but the Atelier is special. It is a hothouse for the exchange of ideas. With a rigorous and intentionally compressed timeframe, the Atelier allows hungry young participants (in this edition from 20 countries) to feed from a banquet of festival experience and expertise from across the world.

For all concerned it is a formal framework in which we all learn and all take back these fresh and re-freshed ideas into our individual workplaces – for the benefit of audiences, community and artists alike. Initial feedback from some of the participants is overwhelmingly positive. While an artist can train in all manner of formal situations, such here in Lasalle, where 'masters' of the craft can teach and assist skills acquisition in all genres from dance to film, music to design etc, there are fewer opportunities for 'training' in festival direction. I think most of us in the older guard made it up as we went along, and as we learn about the experience of the young participants here, there are certain parallels as they venture into new territories, trying to implement new ideas, but often without specific guidance. Here, they have told me, they are overwhelmed by an appreciation of being able to work so closely with so many experienced festival directors, to ask their questions

and to hear the wide variety of stories we are able to offer about festival-making, our approaches, our successes, challenges and failures.

And it would be well nigh impossible to teach 'festival direction' in this way in any one fixed institution. In this group of Atelier mentors and presenters there are more than two hundred years of festival experience – you don't ever get that in one place or at one time. EFA initiated the Atelier because there is a real need for education and exchange explicitly concerning the programming of festivals. There are many programs that deal with and teach arts organisation and management, but just not enough concerning the content and conceptualisation of festivals. Well now there *is* one – and it is powerful and effective.

In addition, participants have said that one of the other great and lasting benefits of the Atelier is simply the unique chance to meet their peers from so many different countries, cultural, social and political backgrounds. The opportunity to speak at length with each other has been invaluable – and they have already begun to establish their own ongoing network. This creates a simple but remarkable context for the future health of global co-operation in arts and culture – and as I will go on to say - in so many wider aspects of society as the natural outcomes of artistic production.

So thanks to everyone who has made it possible, and will continue to do so. The Atelier now, still in its infancy, has an impressive list of alumni and there is no doubt it is creating an invaluable legacy. We thank you all in advance for your support of this program into the future.

In the context of festival direction, and in the midst of Singapore's much-loved flagship event, I have been asked to address the topic of artists and audiences, in particular the statement "When you serve artists, you serve the audience". We need to unpack this statement.

There is at present, in many and varied cities, regions and countries, an intense focus on audiences, and in one form or another this aspect of arts and culture has been in question for a long time. We now have to take into account not only those audiences who are likely to be interested in what artists in all genres produce, the arts audience, if you like, but also those potential audiences who may not yet have encountered the arts.

The festival construct itself, applicable to all festivals, has been widely observed for many years now as a highly successful marketing tool. For more than half a century now, data has been gathered to show that people are more likely to attend a performance in a festival context than they are if that performance is a one-off: this especially applies to slightly edgier or riskier work. During festivals new audiences are created, and existing audiences get more adventurous.

But as useful as data-gathering can be in the financial and political context, and as necessary as it has become for most arts organisations to justify their existence, it can create *problems* for artists, as well as *rewards*.

During the last half of the twentieth century there were any number of approaches to government for justifying funding to the arts. It's a matter of perpetual grief to many of us in the arts, that the case is not self-evident. I will refer to the thorny matter of evaluating the arts a little later, but suffice to say here that I think we all understand that a civilised society's hallmark is in the way it regards and supports arts and culture as a core value to all citizens. I was recently at a football match in Adelaide and sat next to a fellow Ambassador of that club: he is Australia's (and one of the world's) most celebrated cranio-facial surgeons. He is currently reading Joyce's *Ulysses* and will use that book as a centrepiece to an upcoming keynote to surgeons. He said that you can have all kinds of professions – surgeons, engineers, judges etc – and they will all have infinite expertise and wisdom around their own patch, but it is only the arts which create *awareness* across the whole spectrum. I was grateful to this scientist for his observation on my profession.

Unfortunately it is not a view shared at all times by all of those who have the power of the purse-string, and so over the years there has grown a perceived need at various critical times for successive waves of justification. One of the strongest has been *jobs*. The Arts create jobs. Well, it's true, when we think of what surrounds a theatre production – carpenters, lighting technicians, publicists, cleaners, caterers, ushers, ticket-sellers, launderers, printers, drivers, on and on, in addition to the core group of actors, director, designer, composer etc ; yes, there have been some great studies that show how many jobs the arts create.

But that data-collection has had a couple of consequences : on the one hand you have an industrialisation of the arts to the point where arts boards have members with only business skills and no understanding of the way the arts work, and arts companies are weighed down by the weight of paperwork , acquittals and statistics to justify their existence . On the other hand, it is often forgotten that without the first spark of creation... the author sitting alone with some concept popping into their brain... or the collective working through all kinds of material to arrive at what they will start working into a new production... it is often forgotten that without these, there is nothing around which all those subsequent jobs eventually develop. Without the art and the artist, nothing follows.

In the current context of what we've been hearing during the week about various countries' needs to face ongoing financial crises, it's worth recalling the first phase of that crisis in the United States of America. When it was announced that President Obama would be constructing a national stimulus package , lobby groups went to work to battle for a portion of that package to go to the arts. This was in the face of hundreds of museums closing their doors, and companies folding – most often because in that country where government funding is not the principle source of income for the arts, their vital philanthropic lifeline had been cut off – and that same well-heeled audience was also not going out as much.

I was speaking at that time in New York to the annual conference of American Performing Arts Presenters and found that their powerful lobbying was invoking FDR and the New Deal. At the time of the 1929 New York Stock Exchange Crash and the Great Depression, which we must recall had dire consequences,

then, as now, for the rest of the world, Franklin Delano Roosevelt constructed The New Deal, and part of that New Deal was the WPA – the Works Progress Administration which was the stimulus project of its time. It included the arts, often by putting artists on a payroll to document the times. Many authors, film-makers, writers and photographers joyfully signed up for a working wage and projects which they found stimulating and satisfying along with the feeling they were ‘helping out’ But it has to be said that many also protested the idea that they had to work on prescribed projects deemed useful, rather than deserving to be paid just to continue the intense trajectory of their own work.

The WPA was invoked by APAP and other lobbyists and if you google the WPA or New Deal and the Arts, you will see that this idea has gained traction in various forms and other countries. The lobbying proved successful, and although \$50 million was not a lot in the context of the billions of dollars in stimulus money – and probably quite out of proportion in terms of how many Americans are working or otherwise involved in the arts (remember everytime you hear music, and you hear it many times a day from many unbidden sources, in each case there was a composer – we encounter the arts all the time) - nevertheless those in the arts took great heart that at least there was some recognition of the role of the arts in American life.

I talk about this now, because we are currently in another wave of justification – and its name is community. Many artists are happy to work in community and with social engagement . There is a new wave of young artists for whom pressing issues in a wide range of areas – environment, ecology, refugees, democracy itself – are integral to their work .

I was speaking recently to an accomplished artist and documentary film-maker and asked him ‘ why do you do all your projects out in tiny towns in the Australian bush ?’

He said “rural and regional Australia ‘s got all this ‘latent cultural wealth’ . We’re not good at history and we should pay attention to the wealth of wisdom that’s just lying fallow out there.” So this artist is a miner, excavating regional Australia for the wealth of stories and knowledge that lies beneath the surface of remote communities – and will be lost to us if not for artists , like Malcolm Mackinnon, who are willing to find and preserve that wealth in creative ways.

I have done a great deal of work of this kind in the past and I chaired the Australia Council’s Community Cultural Development Board , but in the midst of this good work and its great benefits, are we yet again going to forget the moment of creation, and the support of those whose *job* is simply an exercise of the creative imagination, something out of nothing, and uninhibited by social necessity. If anyone dares to say that artists *must* be socially engaged, let’s never forget that artists are also human beings and citizens: they also pay taxes and eat and thus support the food and power industries. They too pay bills, and raise children for the future. Of necessity they are engaged . Must they also direct their work exclusively to works that are also of direct benefit to society ? I maintain they bring that benefit whatever they do.

I am wholly supportive of , and I frequently commission artists who wish to work in a context of social engagement. Benson Puah threw out the challenge in a brief address to us on Wednesday night – do you only work for your passion, or do you work for society ? It’s a good question – because if your passion

goes beyond individual creativity and you want a clear and measurable effect in the wider world – then there are smart ways to do this . There’s an arts company in Australia called bigHart . They do beautiful excellent projects all over Australia, especially in remote areas, and especially with outsider cultures – *GOLD* was a study of farmers having to walk off the land and leave their properties because of drought and their usual practice is to train young people (most of whom who have had problems at home or on the streets) in a new technique (in this case interviewing) to record the stories. These projects have multiple good social outcomes .*Namatjira* is about the famous Australian Aboriginal painter who faced many severe challenges in his life : but the show is connected to a study of the local arts centre and the role of such centres as the largest employers of Aboriginal people in Australia. Profits from the show are being used to restore Namatjira’s royalty payments to his family. Have a look at BigHart’s website.

They do all this with virtually no arts funding. Their funding comes from social welfare, police etc because of their outstanding non-recidivist rate. One of their founding members, Scott Rankin, takes changes in government policy as a constantly shifting opportunity. He looks at their priorities and because the communities and range of artists and young people he works with is so vast, he can usually bend a project to these priorities and get it funded – in very large amounts I have to say. So this kind of ‘start with the need’ and be flexible enough to bend your art to that current need, works very well for some.

BigHart will have a role in the 5th World Summit on Arts and Culture. This is being held in Melbourne October 3-6 this year and is called Creative Intersections. It is all about those policies in all

continents ,which can better enable this kind of intersection between art and other sectors; health, disability, cultural diversity, science, regional rebuilding, city and place-making, indigenous issues etc . I am devising the program for the summit, so you may be able to see that I find the field very interesting and often inspiring. If you google 5th world summit or IFACCA you'll find the details and I invite you to register and come to Melbourne for what I know will be a challenging and vigorous summit.

But I would also strenuously argue for a holistic structure which also supports artistic endeavour per se . Dr Vilayanur S. Ramachandran has done extensive experimentation to show that the arts are by far the best means of enlivening all parts of the brain at the same time. No mathematical or scientific challenge can equal the arts – especially the shock of the new. It's something the same as Dr David David (the cranio-facial surgeon genius) claims about stimulating and creating awareness of the way the world connects. The most important quality of such a structure would be Resilience – and let me talk about that.

Resilience is defined as ‘the ability of any system to absorb unexpected disturbance without wholly changing its nature and function’. We are currently experiencing a whole range of unexpected disturbances (economic, earthquake, drought, tsunami etc) and the arts sector (and many others too – vehicle manufacture for instance) is found wanting in resilience – we suffer and many go under. The theory comes first from economics, and then from environmental streams – and I use it for the arts . Do get a copy of *Resilience Thinking* (Brian Walker and David Salt, Island Press) . Briefly everything is cyclical. A forest will grow

beautifully for 150 years, then start to implode. If you have only taken care of the top of the tress, the beautiful canopy, and neglected the undergrowth then you will be faced with chaos at the ultimate implosion. But if you've cared for the growth close to the ground then your forest will continue to grow without a huge period of absence or chaos.

The automatic response in the face of crisis is to let your undergrowth die, and shore up your tallest and most beautiful – it's exactly what you ought not to do. To build resilience you must maintain education, experiment, the smaller stuff closer to the ground – its easier to maintain in hard times, and it caters specifically to your future audience, not the one which is not going out so much any more ! I think you see that here in Singapore – the arts, including classical music, attract a young audience.

So – what is needed is a structure which does not topple when times get tough, which is built in a way that will also withstand this agonising roller coaster of good times for the arts (a powerful politician who understands the core role of the arts) and then bad times the minute an unexpected disturbance hits –a change of arts minister or a change in treasury, a financial crisis or an earthquake. And the only thing that will allow that to happen is to create an unassailable evaluation of the arts – something written into *everyone's* constitution – not just the UN Bill of Human Rights. It would value a stable framework for artists to be able to continue their creative process, even when times are tough: if we don't maintain the motor of creative stimulus at the heart of society, at a certain point the ship is going to stop moving and actually start to go backwards or sink. We can't survive without

brave creative thinking on all fronts, and nothing stimulates all those fronts like the arts.

Therefore, in the festival context, it may be dangerous only to think about your market, your audience and how to serve it. If you are only in the business of giving your market what it wants, how do you stimulate the creative muscle in your society: this will only happen if you expose them to the new. How do you expose people to the new?

You support artists in the creative process, to come up with the new, and then you support the results of the creative process to get to the public. Then commerce usually grabs up the very best of those ideas (advertising, digital applications , fashion etc) and the innate creativity is even further dispersed. It's a vast ecological network which will be starved of the nutrition it needs if you don't maintain constant creative process in the arts .In fact I often argue that this is the most legitimate avenue of government support –if you care about your people, you will not put the majority of your funding only into those things which people already know and love.

Because it may be giving them immediate pleasure or comfort, but it is not necessarily waking them up their creativity or extending their awareness. If you'd like to do that – to have a creative ,aware and awakened population ,which will then work actively for a great society- you will see that the most essential function of the arts is to stimulate , and your funding goes to artists who continue to do exactly that.

If people already know and love things, then there is indeed a market, and some of that market ought to be able to operate on commercial terms. A government ought *not* to get in the way of the commercial and entrepreneurial transaction between supply and demand, but it should support those things which have as yet no market, but show splendid potential. Of course there's nervousness. New things have risks – experiments fail. But look at scientific research. Some scientists spend their whole lives failing – but no-one questions the value of their work. Those failures are contributing to the much greater and longer path to eventual success. Why do we not value artistic experiment in the same way, as a invaluable contribution to human progress, whether the specific project succeeds to please a public or not? To build resilience we need to be more robust in our arguments for the value of research and development in the field of artistic endeavour.

As to community, I believe we are in a time when young artists are more socially engaged. As I said before, we are again in a lively time when politics and society and issues of community at the grass roots level are intimately related to what many artists are doing and want to do. It's great to support that activity, but it will be greater if policy-makers develop a methodology for equal interaction of artists in the decision making and planning, not just developing policies to which artists are forced to respond. And we ought not to neglect those great contributors to community who insist on working on their own terms, not because they are selfish, but because their most effective contribution will come when they remain true to themselves and their muse.

Festivals are often in a unique position to offer all kinds of opportunities to artists whose passion is to stimulate us, not just repeat things we already know and love, and often not with conscious social or community involvement in mind. In a sense 'community' is a loaded word – are artists not part of various communities ? Where they live, where they buy food, where they work, where they send their kids to school etc ? We can easily find ways for festivals to embrace broad audiences , I've done it for many years, but always with respect for that audience to enjoy things that are new and fresh and stimulating, not just feeding them the crumbs of worn-out entertainments. We can also always find avenues for work which has arisen from community , when artists do engage in this way; inspired by the stories and courage of certain communities, this is often the most exciting work we can present. But we must also serve those artists who don't work in those overt ways, yet still have incredible value to community in that their difficult and painstaking process eventually comes up with new ideas and forms which eventually make their way into our lives. And we must develop a language to defend those decisions.

If we commission and support the kind of art which is genuinely creative, not just copying, not just recycling – and this goes for genuinely fresh versions of old work, or the creative placement of traditional work in a surprising context, or the commissioning of brand new work bristling with new challenging ideas - then we are doing the greatest service we can to our audiences , our community, our society . We are presenting them with the means to stimulate in them the creative muscle and awareness they need to go out and do all their respective jobs in a

way that works towards a more engaged society , a clever society, and one receptive to new ideas.

Some of these artists will passionately wish to work in community and to see that effect close at hand and immediate; others will work in artistic isolation, but their ideas will be disseminated equally for the good of society. Having argued for art in community for twenty years now, it's terrific to see it being taken up with such enthusiasm in so many countries. Certainly I believe that our national cultural policy to be announced later this year will have this kind of emphasis, given the Federal minister's portfolio which includes both arts and regional Australia. But I hope in that generous sense of inclusion , we do not lose sight of the inherent value of the arts, and artistic process which is often extremely private – often the finest ideas, as in science, occur in this way and we neglect that process at our peril .

This is a very different approach from only looking at the audience, deciding what they like – so that they will buy tickets and you will have a neat books that adhere to the bottom line and heaps of economic development through bed-nights, attendant visits etc. If the arts go on relying only on their consequent benefits – jobs in the industry, contributions to community well-being , usefulness in education and health etc (all good things in themselves) or whatever other justification is required in years to come, then I believe we are not building resilience.

We just continue to sidestep the most difficult measure of valuing the arts – that is the inherent value of having people in your society working at the edge of new ideas and creativity, experimenting, sometimes revealing those experiments, sometimes those experiments succeeding, sometimes failing – but

always making a serious contribution to society. This is an argument that needs to be developed, refined and passionately presented every time someone says 'these artists are just selfish and indulgent, doing obscure work we don't understand and making no contribution to our society'. Unless we have convincing arguments against that false accusation we will never have a resilient ongoing framework for the continuous support of creative endeavour. And we all desperately need it.

During the atelier someone reported a comment from one of the break-out groups and it concerned engagement with government – that we should be willing to show Ministers and bureaucrats around the places of our artistic endeavour – 'to show that we are not elitist'. This is interesting. When major sports organisations take Ministers on a tour of their stadia or facilities, they are at pains to show that they *are* in an elite group, with fabulous elite facilities for the training of elite sportspeople. How did this division occur? How can this incredible double standard continue?

People love sport because it is measurable, because you can see obviously who won and who lost, who went faster or higher: you're on sure ground. But this is not the case with the arts. It deals with that fantastic grey space where truth and beauty is up for debate and negotiation – it's unsure ground, there are no winners or

losers , and precisely why it's good for the brain. I love watching sport ,and I love it because I can return for a moment to being/feeling 'tribal'. But that's in a context of a life where all things are unmeasurable , especially whether art is good or bad. And I do wish to live a life which is beyond simply tribal - I want to think and act in a more evolved human way than tribal. And I want that for everyone – tribalism is fun when it's a game, but tribalism in life can lead to the very worst of consequences – and that, of course, is war. It's why we have sport as a tribal game – to give vent to that ancient tribal instinct, to stop us making war on each other.

We , and that includes you young mob out there, need to develop strong arguments also for elite artists, and elite groups of audiences – those who love intense fine music, or intense new music, those who are passionate about minority things rather than just the middle of the road. Everyone accepts the necessity, for the survival of the world, of biological diversity – I would argue the same for artistic and cultural diversity. If we develop into a mono-middle of the road always audience-pleasing globalised culture, then we are doomed.

The democratisation of opinion through new communication technologies has rendered expert opinion almost extinct. The Arts are a three-legged stool – artists, audiences and the conversation that surrounds , disseminates and interprets them. Our 3rd leg is vaster today, but wobblier. I love to hear the constructive views of

someone who is an expert in the field, someone who loves the art and knows about it and can mediate opinions about it. But the only way expert critical opinion is going to survive is if it takes on the responsibility of developing itself as an artform which can engage public interest because *it* is great and engaging writing or speaking, as well as carrying the weight of experience and knowledge of the form. And we need it.

Otherwise we are left only with what audiences like or don't like – and while every taste is valid, the best commentators can create an expanded awareness, a context both historical and geographical, and can start to expand taste, and thus, in my opinion, tolerance for new and different perspectives.

I think the reality is that when we think about audiences or community in isolation, we don't necessarily serve the arts. It is possible, in times of bread and circuses, to please audiences without artists– sports, light entertainment, shows created merely to please and swell the stats. They can all bring pleasure – but I would argue you do not serve your audiences well if you only *please* them. You are not stimulating the curious and creative in them and thus not availing yourselves of the very best means to inject new ideas and energy into your society.

But I do absolutely believe that if you serve artists you serve audiences. There are some, but very few artists who will claim they do not need or want an audience. Most work in remarkable ways to fashion their most imaginative work , and they want to take that before the public and share that awareness of the human condition with others – they want it debated and responded to.

The result of that invention and creative process is thereby shared with the wider world first through an audience, and they with others. Whether it's a creation to expose an audience to an apprehension of pure beauty in visual image, music or movement, or whether it's a hard political reality framed in the skills of drama and actors – art has a knock-on effect.

And even if the artists works in isolation, spare a thought for van Gogh – unknown, unloved, before his time, a tormented artist with little recognition in his own lifetime, and with only the support of his brother. Look what his works continue to do for us – how they elevate the human condition and make millions in the world respond to colour , passion and life itself. Have a look at the stats, and the tourism benefits of the van Gogh museum. It took a while, now its' phenomenal , but the artist never saw the benefit – in fact

he was rather sad and miserable and died earlier than he should have. Let's hope that history doesn't make fools of *us* – that we are not seen as the century that advocated the utilitarian use of art and artists, or art for the sake of swelling audience numbers, economic development, tourist stats and bragging rights, to the detriment of conditions for those whose real value is contingent on a space for thought, sometimes isolation and experiment. Let's make sure we serve artists, in their right. If we serve them to ensure continuing practice of creativity at the edge, then we serve not only audiences but we serve community, society and the world at large.

I dedicate the following to all artists, in all countries, currently doing it tougher than they should have to:

HARD TIMES (Stephen Foster, USA, 1854)

Let us pause in life's pleasures and count its many tears
 While we all sup sorrow with the poor
 There's a song that will linger forever in my ears
 Oh Hard Times Comes Again no more

'tis the song, the sigh of the weary
 Hard Times Hard Times come again no more
 May a days you have lingered around my cabin door
 Oh Hard times come again no more

While we seek mirth and beauty and music light and gay
 There are frail forms fainting at the door
 Though their voices are silent their pleading looks will say
 Oh Hard times come again no more

'tis the song , the sigh of the weary

Hard Times Hard Times come again no more

Many a days you have lingered all around my cabin door

Oh Hard times comes again no more