

Fourlies

Avant Theatre

27 – 29 June 2013, Arts House Chamber

Production information

An example of Tamil comedy in contemporary Singapore, *Fourlies* is an experimental and surreal theatre piece which focuses on many key issues - such as historical revisionism, creative freedom and character autonomy in a literary work.

Developed through improvisations around the text by Bhargav SriGanesh, 'Fourlies' is a pun on the word 'follies'. It focuses on the mis-happenings of a narrator who chooses to rewrite her own story in her favor of her own happy ending. The intervention of 4 archetypes, the four lies results in much hijinks and the ensuing hilarity of situations rewritten beyond probable belief.

(Synopsis and Theme)

Fourlies, led by director G Selva, concerns the following questions: What should be a writer's main priorities be?

- Accuracy of information?
- Creativity or Artistic Freedom?
- Fear of Censorship?
- Financial Success of a book?

These over-arching questions combined with a veiled social commentary form the backbone of *Fourlies*, and raise others:

Do all humans want to rewrite their past to remodel people's perceptions of them?

What if writers are too emotionally connected to the characters in their stories?

Can the tale written be objective then?

On a deeper level, is history always subject to reinterpretations?

CAST

Censorship	.....	Andrea Anne Aloysius
Natasha	.....	Silver Ang
Shruthi	.....	Divya Anujan
Financial Rewards	.....	Sophia Begum
Creativity	.....	Willy Beh
Rennie	.....	Mohit Ranade
Jay	.....	Suresh Subash
Accuracy	.....	Ramaraj Sunthar

PRODUCTION

Playwright	.....	Bhargav SriGanesh
Director	.....	G Selva
Technical Co-ordinator	.....	William
Lighting Designs	.....	G Selva
Music	.....	Devi Vijayan
Keyboard	.....	S T Siva Kumar
Drums	.....	Reuben Proshanth Dominic Michael
Video Recording	.....	Segar Varathan & Team from Perfect Cine
Video Editing	.....	Steven Saudararajan
Graphic Designs	.....	JS Sasikumar

Stage Manager	.....	G Selva
Production Secretary	.....	Devi Vijayan
Production Assistant/FOH	.....	Darshini M Sambanthan
Production Support	.....	Maddy Selvam
Logistics Support	.....	Suresh Subash
Make Up	.....	W Deva Charles
Still Photography	.....	Tamilchelvan Tivathas (TVT Photography)
Meals Sponsorship Liaison	.....	Prem Kumar
Meals Liaison	.....	Paramasivam
Meals Liaison	.....	Balakumaran

Photos of Cast and Production (appearing in the documentary photographs)



Andrea Anne Aloysius



Silver Ang



Divya Anujan



Sophia Begum



Willy Beh



W Deva Charles



S T Siva Kumar



Reuben Prashanth Dominic Michael



Mohit Ranade



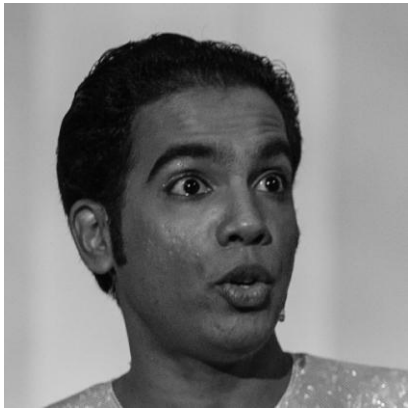
G Selva



Bhargav SriGanesh



Suresh Subash



Ramaraj Sunthar

PROCESS NOTES

Avant Theatre's *Fourlies*, by Christopher Fok

Initial Conversations:

Selva, the Director, aims to have elements of devised theatre in their landmark English production seeking a merging of audience and performance boundaries.

Avant Theatre started in 2001 in Australia and only transposed here to Singapore in 2011. In this work, there is the dichotomy of transposing (literary) versus transcreation (creating the performance in a different language). There is also the infusion of literary and local text, with the aim of balancing both elements.

Previous Avant Theatre performances such as *Romeo and Juliet*, with the screens above the stage are similar instances where the 'literary' clash with the 'local' text, framed by media devices.

Avant Theatre is more director-based, helmed by Selva, with his own stance on the text which allows room for interpretation but still steers it with his own directorial vision.

Fourlies aims to represent multicultural Singapore rather than Indian point of view whereas in Australia, there was a need to present an Indian essence in English.

The use of the word “screenplay” is emphasized in prior interviews and in talks with Selva: this is mayhap a misnomer but with the casting of television actors and with an Indian television background (Selva has a double degree in Theatre and Media), it has perhaps informed the performance’s farcical elements.

5th June 2013 Rehearsal (First encounter with the script with full cast):

Easy camaraderie in the square room in Aliwal, the sound of the space is slightly damp with the acoustics of a music room. The narration of the first scene, breaks naturalistic conventions with the use of puppetry, in an end-stage configuration.

There is an eclectic amount of real-world references in the text, i.e. Issac Assimov, *Les Miserablés*, *Wimpy Kid*, Taylor Swift.

There is also an intermixing of local text (dialogue) with the literary text (the book).

‘The book’ is used as the launching pad for the creation of the fictional reality and the re-creation of the same fictional reality.

Unique features include the following:

- Performance with melodramatic flair enhances the physical comedy of a scene.
- Interjection of audience participation of ‘wow’ and ‘aww’ to create engagement with the conflict on stage.
- The narrator’s animated atmosphere is juxtaposed with the emotional veracity of the character's she plays and manipulates.
- There is a dynamism of character energies.
- A fine line between comedy and dramatic realism.
- Use of the greek chorus by archetypes named: Accuracy, Censorship and Money - dramatic representations of a commercial writer’s dilemma.
- The meta-text is self-reflexive to a point, post-modern but only to a point.

The text (*Fourlies*)

- The drama (meta-commentary of a text, that no one has actually read)
- It is multi-lingual insofar as the capabilities of the actors and the languages they can speak.
- There are a lot of word gags, puns, comebacks and slapstick humour.
- The archetypes personified serve as meta-commentary on the situation.

In terms of director/actor interaction during rehearsal:

Round circle self-reflection. The tone of self-reflection by the actors was mostly negative. The rehearsal was a semi-full run, where the actors felt that the first part of the play was better than the second half. Notes sounded by Selva were a regress of performance, the lack of comic timing and the break of momentum. There seemed to be a fair distribution of positive and negative comments. The last portion of the rehearsal was forgivable because there hadn't been thorough rehearsing on that part. Selva’s individual comments and criticism were delivered in the mode of a mentor.

9th June 2013 Rehearsal (Only 4 archetypes and Mohit Ranade):

Script interpretation and deepening of action of the lines for comic relief.

Communal sit around, where the main characters are not present.

Looking at the authenticity of minutia, i.e. 10 cents not 20 cents for a public phone call.

Selva, the director sits at the front of the room, a focal point.

The last half of the play is being rehearsed, where the archetypes are writing and rewriting the scene.

The actors themselves are now presently writing the script.

Selva inputs line changes in the script as well, he tells Accuracy to say "Testing the character's patience, exactly."

The actors are diligent in their own note taking of all the lines they've devised.

The archetypes create specific line gags that are suitable for each of them .

There is a whole lot of ad-libbing of the original text.

Actors and director change and add lines (probably in line with 'devising' the piece). Yet the playwright's absence is noted. Bhargav Sriganesh is in the army serving the nation at that moment.

There is an emphasis of actor's (who attention is straying) to contribute to the lines even though the actor himself will not be speaking it. A reiteration of focus and inclusivity.

Selva makes the actors write down the lines created for textual safe-keeping and also to make sure the actors absorb the lines as well.

The actors are now doing a read-through of the reassembled lines. Cutting as when necessary.

Looking at the musicality of the divvied lines, and for a dynamic argument between the characters.

The juggling of 4 voices needs a clear ear. Selva also takes note of the energy levels of the ensemble.

Timing is precedent for comedy.

The use of the term 'the breaker' is to delineate beats in action and the scene.

Breaking of a sentence structure between descriptive and action portions.

The actors themselves are placed in a position of simultaneously acting and memorization of lines, almost expected to give a performance ready delivery so that it will be tuned into their memory. (This is with the note that the show is 2 weeks away)

Ensemble responsiveness to each other is paramount.

Selva expects his actors to have self-awareness with everything they express.

Selva does a more hands-on stance, standing, moving and enacting what he wants from the actors as well.

There is the use of one text that is shared by all 4 actors which delays the pacing - as actors struggle to remember their lines.

The extra girl in the rehearsal room changes the dynamic because of her negative energy. She interjects with actor tips and lines that the actors miss. She also arrives late into the rehearsal room.

Note: The title '*Fourlies*' is a pun on the word 'follies'. Which focuses on the mis-happenings of a narrator who chooses to rewrite her own story in her favor of her own happy ending. The intervention of 4 archetypes, the four lies results in much hijinks and the ensuing hilarity of situations rewritten beyond probable belief.

Researcher: Christopher Fok, 27 July 2013

General Editor: Aubrey Mellor, 29 July 2013