

KA: Knowledge Possesses the Soul of Man

Shahrin Johry with Maya Dance Theatre Ltd

15 & 16 January 2016, Drama Centre, Black Box

Production information

A new dance performance conceived, produced and choreographed by Shahrin Johry. Developed over a year of collaborations with a creative team of twelve artists, the work was presented in five (5) segments, variously conceived and titled.

Shahrin's first full-length dance, *KA* both tributes and features two of his teachers, Kavitha Krishnan and Susan Yeung, with lighting by Albert Wileo and music composed, and performance live, by Bani Haykal and Kailin Yong – with Ragha. Shahrin also performed amongst the company of seven dancers.

KA is an ancient Egyptian concept: the body's spirit, conscience and guardian. Believed to live on after the body dies, *KA* is also knowledge, passed down from teacher to student. It lives on when the student becomes the teacher.

The performance also featured a photographic exhibition of the process by Tan Ngiap Heng.

(Synopsis and Theme)

In Egyptian mythology, *KA* is described as spirit of the body, the conscience and the guardian. Believed to live on after the body dies. *KA* is the within.

Shahrin's work is based on this description and on finding a co-relation between *KA* (Spirit) and the Knowledge attained. This spirit lives through the passing down of knowledge from the master to students. The work was created as a gift and tribute to his teacher/mentor Kavitha Krishnan, her living expression transferring and transforming through the dancers who receive her knowledge; and another teacher, Susan Yeung.

Discovering the interaction of the knowledge within each person, Shahrin's research focused on the living self of the *KA* of the Master in the students, taking on a new transformation of expression based on the different embodiments of knowledge.

Knowledge attained like inscriptions on our body, just like hieroglyphics that tell us a story, our body has many tales to tell about oneself.

CAST




Dancer	.....	Gianti Giadi
Dancer	.....	Star Guo (Guo Xiaoxing)
Apprentice	.....	Muhammad Hirzi Bin Jasmin
Dancer	.....	Shahrin Johry
Dancer	.....	Kavitha Krishnan
Dancer	.....	Bernice Lee
Dancer	.....	Sun Phitthaya Phaefuang
Dancer	.....	Eva Tey

PRODUCTION

Producer/ Art Director	.....	Shahrin Johry
Choreographer	.....	Shahrin Johry
Co-Choreographer	.....	Susan Yeung
Mentor	.....	Kavitha Krishnan

Music Collaborators	.....	Bani Haykal, Kailin Yong, Ragha
Composer	.....	Bani Haykal, Kailin Yong
Musician	.....	Kailin Yong, Ragha
Dramaturge	.....	Neo Kim Seng
Lighting Designer	.....	Albert Wileo
Lighting Design Assistant	.....	Petrina Dawn
Support	.....	Imran Manaff, Lavanya Dave, Samantha Teo, Logan Narayanasamy, Lim Jia Ying, Vetrivelan Gunasegaran, Yeap Sook Lee
Videography	.....	N.Mohamed Yahssir (Millenia Motion Pictures Pte Ltd)
Photography Documentation	.....	Tan Ngiap Heng
Project Documentation	.....	Caren Carino

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

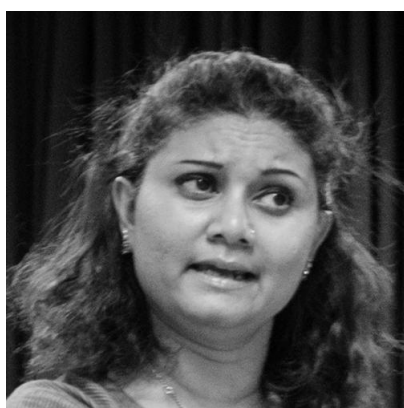
 <p>Lavanya Dave</p>	 <p>Gianti Giadi</p>
 <p>Star Guo (Guo Xiaoxing)</p>	 <p>Bani Haykal</p>



Muhammad Hirzi Bin Jasmin



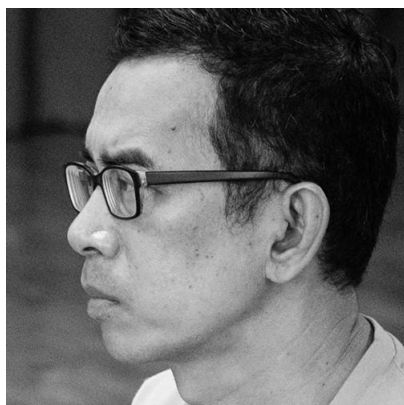
Shahrin Johry



Kavitha Krishnan





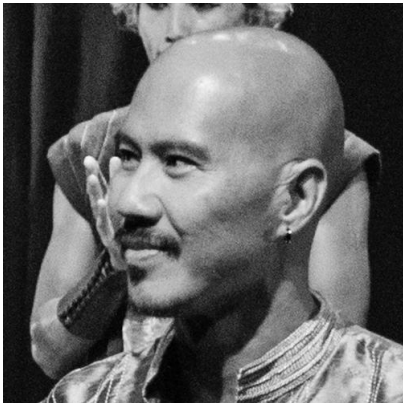
Bernice Lee



Neo Kim Seng



Sun Phitthaya Phaefuang

 <p>Ragha</p>	 <p>Eva Tey</p>
 <p>Susan Yeung</p>	 <p>Kailin Yong</p>

PROCESS NOTES

Final Performance Structure:

- Segment 1: Introduction
- Segment 2: Investigation 1.1
 - Part 1 Choreographed by Susan Yeung in collaboration with Dancers
(Film director – Russell Morton, performers – Ribbot Singh, Susan Yeung)
 - Part 2 “Transference” Choreographed by Shahrin Johry in collaboration with Dancers
- Segment 3: I Love Rhythm
- Segment 4: Receiving & Giving
(Jathi, vocal rhythm by Master Ajith Bhaskaran Dass)
- Segment 5: The Spirit Lives on...

Project Documentation by Dr Caren Carino

‘KA to me means my spirit, the within, the people who feed my spirit and knowledge itself. KA also symbolises my guardian: ak(KA), my teacher: (KA)vitha’, who, for Shahrin is a catalyst.’ – Shahrin Johry

Shahrin Johry, Assistant Choreographer and Principal Dancer of Maya Dance Theatre, known for his ‘cross-cultural collaborations and integration of Asian traditional dance forms with contemporary dance’ created *KA: Knowledge Possesses the Soul of Man*, his first full-length dance presented at the

Drama Centre, Black Box, on 15th and 16th January 2016.

KA represents a process that transpired over the duration of approximately a year beginning on 9 January 2015 and performed on 15 and 16 January 2016. Shahrin collaborated with a creative team of twelve artists at various times and durations towards KA's creation.

Creative Team

Producer, Artistic Direction, Choreographer, Dancer Shahrin Johry
Responsible for grant proposal; artistic team coordination; artistic direction

Mentor, Dancer Kavitha Krishnan
Involved from the start.

Advisor to Shahrin – provided guidance on grant writing and artistic direction role

Dramaturge Neo Kim Seng
Engaged from the end of October 2015, 3 months before the performance.

Advisor to Shahrin - provided a 'third-eye' to clarify KA's multidisciplinary aspects.

Co-Choreographer Susan Yeung
Engaged from April 2015.

Shahrin was interested to represent knowledge (ingest, synthesis) in response to Susan's Master's thesis that centred on Bloom's taxonomy.

Note: Shahrin's original plan was to involve many of his dance teachers who were of significant influence on his development as a dance artist, including Albert Tiong, Kavitha Krishnan, Osman Abdul Hamid, Susan Yeung, etc. Eventually, Kavitha Krishnan and Susan Yeung responded.

Lighting Designer Albert Wileo
Albert created the lighting design and was assisted by Patrina who executed the design –
Lighting set-up and lighting board operator.

Music Collaborators
Bani Haykal (Composer/Musician)
Engaged from March 2015.

Following discussions with Shahrin about the concept of KA in March 2015, Bani attended KA rehearsals in May until July 2015. During this time he had drafted three tracks for the Introduction and Duet sections as well as a section called 'Receiving and Giving'. From July until September 2015 Bani proposed more tracks: 'Rhythm', as well as composed according to the choreography. Hence, choreographing and composing became a back and forth process between Shahrin and Bani. For example, Bani would propose a sound to a video of Shahrin's choreography, and added layers during rehearsal. Later in September 2015 Bani returned to finish the process which involved reallocation of music tracks and ideas and perceptions based on videos of Shahrin's choreography. Returned in December and January to view the run and make any adjustments and advised Kailin and Ragha – gave him liberties.

Kailin Yong (Composer/Musician)
Engaged from November 2015.

Kailin began by playing live for the improvisation section and eventually was given liberties to support the other sections composed by Bani.

Ragha (Musician)
Engaged from November 2015.

A flautist recommended by Kailin, Ragha performed live together with Kailin.

Dancers

Bernice Lee (Maya Full-time Dancer)
Involved from the start.

Eva Tey (Maya Full-time Dancer)
Involved from the start.

Gianti Giadi (Gigi Art of Dance)
Engaged from September 2015.

Gianti travelled to Singapore from Indonesia sporadically to rehearse over the course of 5 months in 2015: 1 day each in September and October, 1 week each in November and December, and 2 weeks in January including the performance.

Muhammad Hirzi Bin Jasmin (Apprentice)
Involved from end of October 2015.

A student of Gianti Giadi.

Star Guo a.k.a Guo Xiaoxing (Project Dancer)
Involved from the start.

Process (Creation) and Practice (Rehearsals)

Based on observation and interviews with Shahrin Johry

Segment 1: Introduction (Part 1)

The solo by Gianti was largely an overseas collaborative process that began with a brainstorming of ideas. Gianti was given the liberty to create a solo based on key words, tasks and ideas provided by Shahrin. During her solo Gianti also sang an improvised Egyptian tune which was in turn played by Ragha on the Indian flute.

Segment 1: Introduction (Part 2)

This segment reflected the Bharatanatyam training classes taught by Kavitha – both formal as well as improvised Bharatanatyam movement.

Segment 2: Investigation 1.1

Part 1 Choreographed by Susan Yeung in collaboration with the Dancers
Film Director Russell Morton; Performers Ribbot Singh and Susan Yeung

Movement material was derived from a process that involved the transference of information. Elements from four categories were written on post-its: Space (planes, path), Time (slow, fast, staccato, still), Quality (subtle, sudden, bound, percussive) and Gesture (taken from Susan's film: arched back shaking hands, arm on the forehead, trembling).

Susan assigned Shahrin and Eva the following tasks:

- Task 1 Choose one post-it/element from each category and create a movement phrase
- Task 2 Choose more than one post-it/element from each category and create a movement phrase with the following condition. If more than one element is chosen from the same category, these elements cannot be performed sequentially in the phrase.
- Task 3 & 4 Use the remaining post-its/elements to create movement phrases.

Shahrin and Eva created 16 movement phrases each from the given tasks. They were asked to show their phrases to each other and interpret each other's phrases by creating another movement phrase. This produced 8 phrases.

Susan created a phrase from movement selected from the dancers' phrases that represented her idea of degeneration and regeneration.

Shahrin and Eva viewed an excerpt from *Susan's film and discovered movement connections (i.e. movement that echoed their own) as well as interpreted the meaning of the video. Eva gleaned from the video a message about how the young struggle whereas the old await liberation with a sense of peace. Shahrin's interpretation saw life as the need to co-exist, balance as well as compliment. The dancers then identified points in their own phrases that illustrated their interpretations such as balance, lift, prolonged time, pull/drawn towards and push/repel, which were written on post-its. Susan then guided the dancers to create a duet by connecting their individual explorations. This re-enactment became a section in KA: Segment 2: Investigation 1.1, Part 1.

*Susan created a film in 2013 of one of her productions. In the excerpt used for KA Susan dances behind an old man with balloons. Susan's view on life as a cycle of time and energy in which experiences colour one's life are portrayed by the old man carrying a bunch of colourful balloons while Susan in a black dress danced with weighted movement following the old man with balloons.

Part 2 'Transference' Choreographed by Shahrin Johry with the Dancers

Shahrin and Eva gave their post-its from their original exploration with Susan to Hirzi and Bernice. Hirzi and Bernice created 8 phrases each based on the same tasks given to Shah and Eva.

Hirzi and Bernice then observed Shahrin and Eva dance their phrases instead of viewing Susan's film. They described Shahrin's and Eva's phrases conceptually such as: diagonal line (space), level change (space), stillness (time).

Shahrin then identified complimentary or juxtaposed movement connections with Hirzi's phrase which were represented by placing his post-its together with Hirzi's. This process was re-enacted in KA seeing Shahrin putting post-its on Hirzi's body which evolved into a duet.

Eva and Bernice underwent a similar process as Shahrin and Eva which also became a duet.

Eventually, both duets were performed simultaneously.

Finally, Gianti picked up the post-its and interpreted this segment in a solo comprised of Sudanese, Javanese and Contemporary Dance movement. She depicted suffocation from information overload.

Segment 3: I Love Rhythm

This was the first segment created in Shahrin's choreographic process.

Shahrin developed 2 phrases consisting of Bharatanatyan rhythms (3s, 7s and 5s) to create a 'korvay' (a combination) which ended in an even number.

Phrase 1 4 x 3s, 4 x 7s, 3 x 5s
Phrase 2 3 x 5s, 4x 7s, 4 x 3s (reverse of phrase 1)

Shahrin developed footwork and arm movement based on the rhythmic phrases. He also inserted *5 poses depicting 'giving' (2 poses), 'receiving', 'holding', and 'reading'.

*Shahrin photographed an Egyptian exhibition at the British Museum during a trip to London in 2013/2014. He was inspired by the positions and representations of the images.

Shahrin assigned the following tasks to the dancers:

Task 1 Explore transferring the rhythmic phrases to different parts of their body.
Task 2 Use the rhythmic structure in Task 1 and create floor pattern.

Finally, Shahrin arranged the phrases for this segment of KA.

Later in this segment, Gianti observed and attempted to emulate the dancers which eventually saw her hit the pedestal with different parts of her body to create a rhythm.

Kavitha goes to the pedestal where Gianti is at and writes in the book before interacting with Gianti who responds by also writing in the book.

Segment 4: Receiving & Giving

Jathi, vocal rhythm by Master Ajith Bhaskaran Dass

Shahrin was inspired by the Alarippu (traditionally the first dance piece that Bharatanatyam dancers learn and perform) that he saw Kavitha dance 10 years ago. Ajith used what Shahrin created in segment and created 2 korvets for Shahrin and Kavitha to explore. One was eventually used for this section while the other was used for the final segment.

Kavitha performs a Bharathanatyam solo while Shahrin watches. He eventually dances echoing her movement which develops into a rhythmic duet revisiting the korvet. The duet departs from its classical form and eventually the 5 poses introduced in Segment 3: I Love Rhythm emerge.

The 5 dancers enter and Kavitha performs a duet with each dancer where the 5 poses were explored. This segment finishes with Kavitha dancing a Bharathanatyam solo encircled by the dancers.

The dancers move towards the pedestal and exit to transition into Gianti's solo which reflects surrendering while Shahrin eventually physically and metaphorically supports her.

Segment 5: The Spirit Lives on...

This duet between Gianti and Shahrin using Javanese and Contemporary Dance was based on the ideas of support, balance (yin and yang) and harmony and resolve.

The movement material from the previous segments were highlighted and explored to create a finale:
Duet between Shahrin and Eva choreographed Susan
Duet between Kavitha and Shahrin
Introduction
Rhythm

Shahrin takes the book from Kavitha and walks around with the book on his head – a Muslim custom performed by a student as a sign of respect for the knowledge received. This transitions into his

Bhahratanatyam solo that is eventually deconstructed, contemporised and includes Shahrin's other movement experiences such as Jazz, Hip-Hop and Javanese Dance. This segment was accompanied by Bani's music layered by Ajith's Jathi.

Gianti joins Shahrin to perform a duet.

Towards the end of the segment, the dancers form a diagonal line and pass the book that Kavitha took from the pedestal from one to the other until the last dancer in line.

Finally, the Namaskaram (a form of respect in Indian culture) was performed by the dancers in a circle to give respect to mother earth, their teachers and fellow dancers.

Researcher: Dr Caren Carino, 27 March 2016

General Editor: Aubrey Mellor, 13 April 2016