



(../)



(../)

(../)


IN  
[p://subscription.focusmalaysia.my/Login.aspx](http://subscription.focusmalaysia.my/Login.aspx)

SUBSCRIBE  
<http://subscription.focusmalaysia.my/Subscribe.aspx>

**HOME (../)** **FOCUSLIFE (../DefaultFL.aspx)** **REWARDS (Http://Rewards.Focusmalaysia.My)**

HOME (../) MAINSTREAM (../LISTING.ASPX?TITLEID=1&INTERESTNAME=MAINSTREAM&INTERESTID=1) PROPERTY (../LISTING.ASPX?TITLEID=1&INTERESTNAME=PROPERTY&INTERESTID=2) ENTERPRISE (../LISTING.ASPX?TITLEID=1&INTERESTNAME=ENTERPRISE&INTERESTID=3) COLUMNS (../LISTING.ASPX?TITLEID=1&INTERESTNAME=COLUMNS&INTERESTID=4) MARKETS (../LISTING.ASPX?TITLEID=1&INTERESTNAME=MARKETS&INTERESTID=5) FOCUS VIEW (../LISTING.ASPX?TITLEID=1&INTERESTNAME=FOCUS+VIEW&INTERESTID=15) INCOME+ (../LISTING.ASPX?TITLEID=1&INTERESTNAME=INCOME%2B&INTERESTID=16) **FOCUSLIFE (../DEFAULTFL.ASPX)** **REWARDS (HTTP://REWARDS.FOCUSMALAYSIA.MY)**

[\(HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/FOCUSMALAYSIA.MY/\)](https://www.facebook.com/focusmalaysia.my/)

<http://subscription.focusmalaysia.my/login.aspx>  <http://subscription.focusmalaysia.my/subscribe.aspx>

**FOCUSLIFE** [Cover Story \(../listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Cover+Story&InterestId=21\)](http://listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Cover+Story&InterestId=21) [Style \(../listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Style&InterestId=22\)](http://listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Style&InterestId=22) [Function \(../listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Function&InterestId=23\)](http://listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Function&InterestId=23) [Indulgence \(../listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Indulgence&InterestId=24\)](http://listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Indulgence&InterestId=24) [Form \(../listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Form&InterestId=25\)](http://listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Form&InterestId=25) [Muse \(../listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Muse&InterestId=26\)](http://listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Muse&InterestId=26) [Scene \(../listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Scene&InterestId=27\)](http://listing.aspx?titl=fl&InterestName=Scene&InterestId=27)

COVER STORY

# Do Not Go Gentle

Evanna Ramly



*The klpac has hosted shows from many different genres over the years.*

**A-** **A** **A+**

The journey of the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (klpac) began back in May 2005.

“We wanted to have a performing arts centre, not too different from the first centre we opened in 1995 at Plaza Putra underneath Dataran Merdeka,” recalls Datuk Faridah Merican, executive producer and co-founder of The Actors Studio (TAS), klpac and the Performing Arts Centre of Penang.

When she and her husband, co-founder Joe Hasham, lost their first arts centre to floods, they were forced to look for another place. “We were very fortunate to have been introduced by friends to this place in Sentul. Thankfully, it belongs to Tan Sri Francis Yeoh, who is another friend.”

At the time, Kuala Lumpur did not have a performing arts centre of klpac’s magnitude. “We wanted to have one for the city but also for The Actors Studio, and so we joined forces with YTL and Yayasan Budi Penyayang Malaysia, which was founded by the late Datin Seri Endon Mahmood.”

advertisement [X]

Enjoy the Conveniences and Comfort

Totally Fulfilling Experience

BOOK DIRECT & SAVE at [www.chm-hotels.com](http://www.chm-hotels.com)  
Refer to Our Best Rate Pledge at selected hotels, T&C apply

Citel Hotel Management Sdn Bhd (139103-W)

KUALA LUMPUR - MiCasa All Suite Hotel • Cititel Mid Valley • JOBA KEMARAU - Cititel Express  
IPOH - Cititel Express • PENANG - Cititel Penang • Cititel Express • PANGKOR - Revivalpoint

CHM HOTELS

Its very first show came from Japan. "It was called, appropriately, Shoku (meaning "survival of the fittest"). I remember the dancers were gorgeous. They were wearing vibrant red and somehow it told me that this was a great beginning," says Faridah, 78.

Looking back, it was perhaps the spark of a great fire that would later spread throughout the local arts community. "There were not just shows. In the early stages, we used to have open days to raise awareness for this place. Thousands of people came. They were curious and loved what they saw."



*Even in her late 70s, Faridah still has the passion to promote the love for the arts*

Well, Klpac has lived up to her expectations. "Running it 365 days a year, we have shows every week in all the different theatres that we have here. We have theatres in various sizes and the other areas at the venue also can be turned into performance spaces. For instance, the staircases and balconies have been used for butoh, a Japanese form of dance theatre."

The range of performances seen here covers everything from drama and comedy, heavy or light-hearted. "Everything that you can think of, we have had it here. The best thing about having a space like this is people can come here with ideas for experimenting, doing what they want to do in a space."

The centre has yet to turn down any genre. "Our intention is to open our doors to everyone. We are also big on teaching the performing arts to children from as young as three up to any age."

The arts maven knows it is a blessing to have such a platform. "You can dream of having a place like this but you may not get it. We are so fortunate."

Some of her young students have gone on to become industry stars. "People that we can look at and say, they started with us from the very beginning," she smiles, adding how proud she is of them. "Malaysian artists have performed across the world. We just don't talk enough about them and we should."

Why don't we? "Because the performing arts is not a part of our lifestyle, one that we feel we want to be proud of. The reason we don't talk about it is the focus of Malaysians is not on the artists we should be proud of."

Faridah believes there is still hope. "More parents are willing to bring their children to classes and encourage them. It used to be difficult in the early days. Ballet, piano and violin were better received but not to study theatre – that was unheard of. Now it has gained popularity."

While she feels that the future augurs well for the performing arts, the country and the government must do more to support it. "By that, I mean the education and culture ministries; you cannot depend on the individual only because the government must set the



policies for schools to bring back the arts. When I was studying it was part of the curriculum but then they took it away to focus on science and technology as well as information technology. We lost a few decades of teaching the arts. What a loss," she laments.

The industry needs thinkers in order to grow. "Many have put in their blood, sweat and tears into growing the performing arts scene and are trying to survive in Malaysia. Unfortunately, we have just become quiet little fires that do not get a chance to burn."

When news broke of Mount Agung's eruption in Bali, Faridah had a realisation. "I was thinking to myself, that is the kind of volcanic force it takes to be recognised, how powerful you have to become. You just want to feel the heat, to be recognised. But we are not and are so easily satisfied being quiet. We cannot go on like this - we must make noise."

Recent news of the centre's dire straits, she says, is not to sadden but to make the public take notice. "A place like this needs assistance to survive. We're not talking about creative work, which we can do. We don't have this pot of gold somewhere that we can keep using. We need the public, corporates and government to help fund us."



*Most will judge by klpac's awesome façade and assume it cannot possibly be facing difficulties*

Most will judge by klpac's awesome façade and assume it cannot possibly be facing difficulties. "It is a brave front but we need money. Many have been sponsoring us but some have pulled out. Maybe there was something they were looking for and they were not getting it from us. I don't know what their reasons are."

It has been a slow process but people are now beginning to realise the importance of the arts. That said, this can only be quickened by the relevant authorities. "You cannot just teach the arts but you do not have the infrastructure and places where people can perform and use what they have learned."

Occupancy remains a major challenge. "We must reach a break-even point of 60 to 80% but we don't always achieve that," she reveals. "It's very hard work to sell tickets."

Generally, it costs less than RM100 to see a show, yet some insist on free admission despite being able to afford it. "How can you want free tickets to see people who have been practising for months to go on stage? How can you call yourself a decent human being when you say you will not pay to watch them? It's an insult to the performer."

Faridah sees this as a worrying indication of how poorly human life is valued. "Does the arts mean anything to your life? Will you learn from it? Will it make you think and create something beyond what you are used to every day? If you think there is value in it, then the arts might have a chance."

The problem, she says, is that Malaysians are not hungry enough for the arts and all it has to offer. "We're not hungry enough to widen the scope of what we experience."

She urges people to go see live performances. "Come out and have a discussion, as you would at a cinema. It's not too much to ask."

Faridah always welcomes feedback in the interest of klpac's growth. "If you have anything to say or recommend, send me an email ([faridah@klpac.org](mailto:faridah@klpac.org)) as I would like to hear from you. I want to know what others think of this article: have they read something like it before? Are we just harping on the same old stories? Is there something they want to see? I would really love a dialogue."

## **Veteran Voices – What others in the performing arts industry have to say**

### **Kee Thuan Chye, playwright, director and producer**

klpac provides a hub for the performing arts to be presented, deliberated upon, and developed. It is a place for artists to stage their works. It also offers developmental programmes that reach out to arts aficionados and eager learners. I often see young people gather there, presumably to take part in creative activities. That's really heartening to see.

We don't have to look far for a model for promoting awareness of the arts. Just look at Singapore. The arts are thriving there because the government came up with a concerted effort nearly two decades ago to turn Singapore into a Renaissance City with the objective of developing the island nation into a global arts city. We need that kind of foresight and national policy in Malaysia.

## **Bernard Goh, founder and artistic director of Hands Percussion**

Faridah and Joe are great supporters of Hands Percussion. We go way back to 2012 when TAS was still at Plaza Putra and we were preparing for our production Ritual of Drums in 2002. Our 10th and 15th anniversary celebrations were held at klpac. For our 15th anniversary, we had a big stage constructed outside the centre to accommodate our celebratory programme, which included a parade of 1,000 drummers, workshops, a bazaar and a concert. All of this would not have materialised without klpac's support.

For many years, klpac has been providing an open, dynamic and unbiased platform for opportunities in the performing arts for both upcoming and experienced artists. This is done through various programmes such as the Short + Sweet Festival, Theatre for Young People (T4YP) as well as the klpac Orchestra, the klpac String Ensemble and the klpac Symphonic Band.

The arts make people think; it builds character and encourages us to express ourselves. It is about truth and challenges, and it is optimistic and unbiased. Performing arts-related programmes in schools have the potential to help children (and parents) see the benefits early on and understand the importance of the industry. At a community level, having activities that include everyone would show that music, art, dance and drama can be enjoyed and benefited by all walks of life. There could be art projects, open theatre programmes, art markets, dramas based on the story or history of a particular community so that people are able to connect with it.

## **Lim Soon Heng, BFM producer and actor**

Sometimes I feel as if I live (at klpac). My day job takes me there to watch performances. On weekends, I'm rehearsing as a member of KL Shakespeare Players. Often the place feels like a second home, with Joe and Faridah being the patriarch and matriarch there. In 2008, when I was in a production directed by Joe and produced by Faridah, my mother passed away right in the middle of the run. Joe and Faridah organised a car to drive me to my hometown and back. It was a kind deed that I will not forget. And when I messed up in the first performance back, they didn't say a word about it but showed tremendous support. KL Shakespeare Players is where it is today because klpac gave the company space and support to grow.

For sure, klpac nurtures new talent and performance groups. As someone who deals with the performing arts industry, I know how the Short + Sweet programme spawns more performance groups and engenders greater interest in the performing arts that young people are opting for a career in the industry. Short + Sweet also provides the platform for new people to write, direct and perform.

## **Safia Hanifah, executive producer of Sifu Productions and actress**

I started my career here almost 10 years ago and everyone here is very welcoming. I always feel like I'm home when I'm in klpac. I'm currently involved in two shows rehearsing and performing there.

klpac has contributed tremendously to the local arts scene. It is the hub and heart of English theatre and has been for the past 10 years, especially since it's been spearheaded by the dynamic duo of TAS. They provide rehearsal spaces, training programmes for the young and old, new and experienced, and performance spaces for all kinds of shows. They have nurtured performing artists and also provide space to develop and grow new works.

I believe everything starts with education. If they instil the importance of the arts in the young, it will inform the parents and our arts scene will flourish. Joe and Faridah are still at it even after 30 years. Outreach programmes could work, too. In addition, support from the government would help a great deal. So far, the arts community lacks funds and it always becomes a hindrance for us to produce more work. We only rely on patrons who believe in the arts and to be honest, there are not a lot of them and certainly not enough to support the number of new works that are dying to be produced and workshopped.

## **Suhaili Micheline, dancer**

My fondest memories would be of the lush garden that welcomes you into the space, and of the beautiful spaces that overlook all the greenery. Then there are the ducks, swans and little puppies that the klpac community has adopted.

It has contributed tremendously through many ways, as a place for artists and teachers to give classes, for the community to enhance their skills through workshops and definitely bringing everyone together in one space, harmoniously with nature.

My hope is for every emerging artist or entertainment company to emphasise high-quality performances because that is the only way for the corporate sector to have a deeper appreciation for the performing arts. It starts with every individual to understand that quality is important.

***This article first appeared in Focus Malaysia Issue 263.***

---

Home (../) | About (/Page/about-us) | BUBAwards (/FMBUBAwards.aspx) | Where to buy (/Page/where-to-buy) |  
Contact (/Page/contact-us) | Terms of use (/Page/terms-of-use) | Privacy Policy (/Page/privacy-policy) |

Follow us  (<https://www.facebook.com/focusmalaysia.my/>)

© Copyright 2018 Focus Malaysia All Rights Reserved.