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《泉死后台》——焦点剧场

正在筹备的这部剧目，在场的人却发出了声。在表演艺术的舞台上，演员和演奏家无疑是聚光灯下的主角。而这这部剧以嬉笑喜剧的形式，把后台默默无名的角色搬演到台前，原型却是太多现实的无奈与心酸。



唐绍伟说，任何剧团都希望拥有自己的舞台制作班底。（受访者提供）

“疫情期我和一个舞替（舞台美术）和几个舞替（舞台美术），现在很多工作都要自己完成或者外包给制作公司。”唐绍伟说，“任何剧团都梦寐以求能有一套自己的舞台制作班底，不仅仅是合作默契，更重要的是契合的美学体系。”

故事需要美学表达

唐绍伟指出，一部舞台作品的诞生需要很多创意设计层面的合作。“焦点剧场的每部戏都是原创，前期工作包括市场调研，根据当下的社会议题，再结合剧场自身的风格定调，进行创作。”

故事有了剧本之后，最重要的就是为舞台美术设计，包括布景、服装、道具、灯光等等。这些专业的设计师要和导演深入探讨，根据导演抽象的表达，给出视觉美学上的呈现效果。”

曾联2019年青年艺术家奖的获得者、灯光设计领域的佼佼者，活跃于世界各地戏剧、音乐会和活动的舞台。他说：“灯光师走进剧场时面对的是一个空荡荡的舞台，每个角落都有自己的灯光设备，但水电也不齐，如何通过创意设计，利用有限的条件烘托强烈的表达，才考验灯光师的功力。”



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根据导演的意图，灯光师要依照情节、台词或者音乐进展设计灯光效果，以提示（cue）的形式记录下来。演出时，坐在监控室的舞台监督根据提示单实时发出指令，执行打灯光，换景等作业。唐绍伟说，一场制作下来几个cue提示（cue）单的记录下来。

唐绍伟说：“在那时候做这行不容易，市场小，很多人做了一段时间就会转行，因为自由职业收入不稳定，还十分辛苦。2017年，我们好不容易有了自己的舞美师，是李美光出身的，对舞台美术有一股热忱和理想。但疫情期间没有戏演，终究抵不过现实，选择了回中国发展。我们的团队从疫情前的40人，缩水近一半。”

“焦点剧场从2010年成立以来，很长时间都在换不同的合作伙伴，包括设计师和舞台监督。”唐绍伟说：“在那时候做这行不容易，市场小，很多人做了一段时间就会转行，因为自由职业收入不稳定，还十分辛苦。2017年，我们好不容易有了自己的舞美师，是李美光出身的，对舞台美术有一股热忱和理想。但疫情期间没有戏演，终究抵不过现实，选择了回中国发展。我们的团队从疫情前的40人，缩水近一半。”

唐绍伟夫妇还搞了一段插曲：疫情期间，靠卖肉类的唐绍伟和太太在社交媒体网站上开设知识分享频道，经营得不错，已经有经纪公司邀约成为签约艺人。正当两人准备转行时，国家艺术理事会的一通电话让他们终究没能告别舞台。

“艺理会的人打电话来问我们过得如何，我心中无处发泄的委屈当下一般一股脑地都倾吐出来。”唐绍伟说：“艺理会的工作人员刚好也是南洋艺术学院毕业的。”

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幕布之后，身穿着支撑舞台的人，一部舞台作品的诞生需要很多创意设计层面的合作以及专业执行团队。灯光师、舞美师等创设人员根据导演编创的意图，设计舞台视觉效果，更需要舞台监督在幕后运筹帷幄，把梦想变成现实，呈现给观众。

陈伟文为湘灵音乐社设计的舞台灯光效果，让音乐表演增色不少。（湘灵音乐社提供）



业的学徒，理解我们的难处。她发现我们说政府会尽力帮我们度过难关……可能换艺术家的就是有这么一般倔强，我们最后还付了网最后经纪公司违约金。2021年，我们和已经转行的几个兄弟联手制作了《这疫年，我们在一起说脱口秀》这台戏，就是为了证明我们还存在。”

不过已经转行的人，却很难再回头。唐绍伟的太太，也是焦点剧场的场务总监张曼雅说：“有人做了销售，有人做了职员。从事收入稳定的工作，就难得再回剧场。尤其是舞台监督这样的职位，要在争分夺秒的高强度下工作，很辛苦。”

张曼雅指出，舞台监督的工作压力巨大，节奏快。（受访者提供）

陈伟文的太太苏嘉瑜也是经验丰富的舞台监督，和实践剧场、九年剧场、综艺团、爱乐管弦乐团等都合作过。她指出，舞台监督大部分的工作是与人沟通，包括导演、设计师、舞台制作的承包商、视觉灯光设备设备的场工等等。此外还要有决断的能力。在舞台上任何意外都可能发生。导演此时无法插手，全靠舞台监督临时应变的能力。

除了转行的原因，疫情后物价上涨，剧组预算相对缩水也让剧场人更难做。”苏嘉瑜说：“不过随着跨界舞台合作成为趋势，专业的舞台监督就更为稀缺的人才。比如在乐团和舞团的联合制作中，需要一个专业的舞台监督统筹调度灯光、布景、音响、投影、字幕等等舞台元素。”

机遇与挑战总是如影随形，曾在英国皇家莎士比亚剧院担任舞台监督，目前在拉萨尔艺术学院领导戏剧制作与管理专业英文项目的布德玛尼（Michael Budmani）说，疫情过去，本专业的学生在行业内供不应求。

“我们每年会招收20多名学生，因为我们的制作车间就这么大，出于安全考量不能有太多人。”布德玛尼说：“更重要的是，我们培养的不是工人，（培养工人）那很容易。我们要培养的是对剧场有热情，会思考，愿意协作的人才。”

布德玛尼介绍说，第一年的课程让学生充分接触后台的各类行当，包括灯光、音响、服装、电脑绘图、道具制作、舞台监督、制作经理等。第二年，学生要从舞台监督、舞台技术和舞台管理三个方向中选择两个深入学习。几乎每周，学生都要和音乐、戏剧等其他专业的同学合作完成一部制作。

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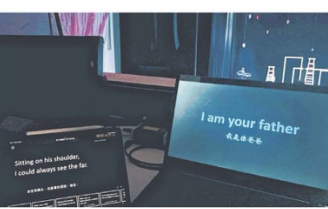


焦点剧场《我是你爸爸》的后台角度。（焦点剧场提供）

创造新机遇打造创意经济

在今年9月由国家艺术理事会宣布的“新加坡艺术拓展蓝图”（2023-2027）中，有一项聚焦剧场制作的举措，这是由艺理会、精深技能发展局、业界伙伴和高等学府合作推出的艺术技能框架（舞台技术与制作）（The Skills Framework for Arts (Technical Theatre & Production)），旨在提升本地艺术工作者的核心技能与就业机会，以迎合不断演变的文化生态与日益增长的文化市场。

该框架在创意、制作和技术三个方向下细分了36个工作岗位，如创意方向下的道具设计师、声音设计师、布景设计师；制作方向下的制作经理、舞



焦点剧场剧目《我是你爸爸》的舞台监视区，舞台监督需要负责布景、灯光、音响、投影等全面调度。（焦点剧场提供）

台监督、服装协调；技术方向下的灯光技工、自动化技工、化妆师等等。框架为每个岗位职位提供描述，以及所需的专业能力与其他核心能力（如沟通、协作力等等）。

该框架能帮助有兴趣在剧场后台工作的人了解行业内的工作机会，方向明确地学习相关技能，为艺术团体提供参与找到匹配人才，也为技能培训学校提供参与、设计课程。

艺理会的陈嘉娟司长（艺术教育与拓展）说：“我们希望让从业者具备相关技能，为未来做好准备，形成强大的创意人才储备，为该行业创造新机遇，打造蓬勃创意经济。”

相较于赛车夜间赛、滨海湾灯光秀等直接促进旅游业的产业应用，艺术领域的创意经济需要长时间的铺陈和培养。陈伟文说：“本地人可能会对《歌剧魅影》等著名的外国制作一掷千金，却犹豫要不要花二三十元购票欣赏本地戏剧。这是可以理解的现象。”

陈伟文指出，一方面国外的著名制作有豪华的制作团队精打细算多年，也有强大的宣传团队，另一方面在本地走进剧场欣赏表演的文化氛围还有培养的空间。相较于10年前，本地的文化生态已经长足发展。

“我是在华中中学念高中时参加华文戏剧社，走进戏剧的世界。”陈伟文说：“当时实践剧场的导师为我们办工作坊，带我们去看实践话剧的彩排，是在白幕下的排演。但在舞台上有了灯光效果后，让我深感震撼，想要从事这个事业。不过这在当时是个疯狂的想法，那时候的表演市场不像现在这样繁荣，现在有很多专业团体深耕多年，整个生态有很多工作机会。”

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The Backstage Crew Out of the Limelight

“Bone Tired Backstage Crew”—the title of this production had everyone at the scene bursting into peals of laughter when we were coming up with a title, shared Focus Theatre’s Artistic Director Tang Shao Wei .

Whenever art is performed on stage, the actors and performers are undoubtedly the focus. However, the said play employs a comedic approach to bring the stories of the unknown backstage crew from the shadows onto the stage, whereby the reality of their woes are highlighted.

Tang said, “During the pandemic, I lost a stage designer and a stage manager. Now, I need to do a lot of the tasks myself or outsource it to a production company. Every theatre wishes to have their own stage production team—not just for the sake of a cohesive working relationship, but more importantly for a harmonious aesthetic.”

Stories Require Aesthetic Expression

Tang said that the creation of a stage production requires multiple forms of collaboration involving creative design. “Every play produced by Focus Theatre is an original production. In the preliminary stage, we survey the market before embarking on the creation process that is based on current social issues and interweaved with the style and tone of the play. Once there is a script, it is crucial to work on the artistic stage design, including scenery, costumes, props, and lighting. Professional designers need to engage in extensive discussions with the director to bring the director’s abstract descriptions to life in a visually aesthetic manner.”

2019 Young Artist Award recipient Gabriel Chan is an outstanding local lighting designer who is actively involved in theatre, music and event performances around the world. He shared, “When a lighting designer walks into a theatre, he sees an empty stage. While each venue has its own lighting equipment, they are of varying standards. The test of a lighting designer is how he enhances the aesthetic expression of a play through employing creative designs under certain limitations.”

Based on the intentions of the director, the lighting designer needs to design lighting effects according to the plot, script lines or music progression, and record them on cue sheets. During the performance, the stage manager sitting in the control room issues real-time instructions based on the cue sheets for lighting effects and scenery changes. Chan said that it is very common to have hundreds of cues for a single production. Some cues are written next to the script lines, some are written next to the description of the stage actions, and some are written next to the music score. For concert lighting designers and stage managers, the ability to read music scores is a requisite skill.

Tang said, “Ever since its establishment in 2010, Focus Theatre has been undergoing partnership changes for the longest time, including changes in designers and stage managers. It really isn’t easy to be in this industry in Singapore—the market is small, and many people tend to move on to different industries after a while because of unstable freelancing income and work-related challenges. In 2017, after much difficulty, we managed to get our own

choreographer who had studied art and was passionate about stage design. However, reality hit when we could not perform during the pandemic, and the choreographer chose to return to China to continue working there. Pre-pandemic, we had 40 people in our team. It has since shrunk to about half the number.

Initially Planned a Career Switch During the Pandemic

Tang's wife also brought up an event that happened during the pandemic. As avid book lovers, Tang and his wife started a knowledge-sharing channel on a social media site back then. The channel did rather well, which led to them being approached by an artiste management company that offered them jobs as contracted artistes. While they both were preparing for an industry switch, a call from the National Arts Council (NAC) stopped them in their tracks.

Tang shared, "When the NAC officer called us to ask how we were doing, we just poured out our woes and hardships over the phone. She happened to be a fellow alumni of Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) and understood our plight, assuring us that the government would try its best to help us tide over. Maybe those of us in the arts scene are stubborn that way—in the end, we paid the liquidated damages to the influencer management company. In 2021, together with some of our comrades who had switched industries, we produced the play entitled 'Talk Show of the Pandemic' to tell the world, 'Hey, we are still here.'"

However, it wasn't easy for those who had switched careers to return to the industry again. Tang's wife, Zhang Man Xi, who is also the Focus Theatre Director, said, "Some of them went into sales roles, and some took on office jobs. Once they had worked in jobs with stable incomes, it was hard for them to return to the theatre scene. This is especially the case for stage manager positions, as the job is highly stressful and involves constantly working against the clock."

The Backstage Crew Out of the Limelight

Behind the scenes are people who support the action that goes on on-stage. The creation of a stage production requires multiple forms of collaboration involving creative design and a professional team to execute it.

Creative practitioners such as lighting designers and stage designers produce visual stage effects based on the intentions of the director and screenwriter. More importantly, a stage manager is needed to handle the coordination behind the scenes to turn dreams into reality and present the different elements to the audience.

Lack of Talent for Stage Managers

Chan's wife, Tennie Su, is a highly experienced stage manager who has worked with The Theater Practice, Nine Years Theatre, Ding Yi Music Company, and Philharmonic Orchestra. She said that the stage manager's job is primarily to communicate with people, including directors, designers, stage production contractors and on-site workers for lighting and scenery equipment. In addition, a stage manager must be able to make decisions as anything could happen on stage. As the director is unable to intervene when unexpected situations take place

on stage, everything hinges on the stage manager's ability to adapt to and handle sudden changes.

Su said, "Besides theatre professionals switching industries, the increased cost of goods post-pandemic has also shrunk the production team budget, making it even harder for theatre professionals. However, as cross-domain partnerships become a trend, there will be an even more severe shortage of talent for professional stage managers. For example, in a joint production between an orchestra and a dance company, a professional stage manager is needed to manage and coordinate stage elements such as lighting, scenery, sound, projection, subtitles, and other elements."

Opportunities and challenges come hand-in-hand. Former Stage Manager for the Royal Shakespeare Company Michael Budmani, who is currently the Programme Leader for the Diploma in Theatre Production and Management programme at LASALLE College of the Arts, said that the post-pandemic demand for students from his programme exceeds the supply of such talent.

Budmani said, "Every year, we only take in 20-odd students due to the space constraints of our workshop, as we do not wish to overcrowd the workshop due to safety considerations. More importantly, we are not developing workers—that is easy. Instead, we want to develop talents who are passionate about theatre. We want to develop thinkers and collaborators."

Budmani said in the first year of the programme, students will be fully exposed to various backstage jobs, including lighting, sound, costumes, computer graphics, prop production, stage management and production management jobs. In the second year, students will choose to embark on the in-depth study of two of three modules, namely stage scenery, stage technology and stage management. Almost every week, students collaborate with students from other majors such as music and drama to create a production.

Lighting design lecturer Terence Lau Kah Wai said, "Stage drama production is a career that can be pursued over the long term. Internationally-renowned lighting designers and stage designers travel around the world upon being commissioned for work. Even beyond the sphere of theatre, there are many other avenues for lighting and stage designers. The fingerprints of our alumni extend across various areas such as the National Day Celebration, Chingay Parade, Formula One (F1) Night Race, Gardens by the Bay and Night Safari."

Creating New Opportunities; Building a Creative Economy

In the "SG Arts Plan" (2023-2027) announced by the NAC in September this year, an initiative known as "The Skills Framework for Arts (Technical Theatre & Production)" was introduced. Jointly launched by the NAC, SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), industry partners and Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs), the said initiative which focuses on theatre production aims to enhance the core skills and employment opportunities of local arts professionals. Thereby, the initiative serves as a measure to adapt to the evolving ecology of the arts scene and growing entertainment market.

The said framework details 36 jobs under the creative, production and technical tracks. For example, jobs such as prop designer, sound designer and set designer fall under the creative

track; production manager, stage manager and costume coordinator fall under the production track; and lighting technician, automation technician and makeup artist fall under the technical track. The framework provides a detailed description of each position, as well as the required professional skills and other core skills (such as communication, collaboration skills, etc.).

This framework helps people who are interested in backstage theatre jobs to learn about job opportunities within the industry and master relevant skills with a clear direction. It also serves as a reference for arts groups to find matching talents and skills training institutions to design courses.

NAC Director (Education and Development) May Tan said, “We hope to equip practitioners with relevant skills to prepare for the future, establish a strong reserve of creative talents, create new opportunities for the industry, and build a thriving creative economy.”

Unlike industrial applications that directly promote tourism such as motorsport light races and Marina Bay light shows, the creative economy in the arts scene requires an extensive period of preparation and development. Chan said, “Locals may fork out a lot of money to watch well-known foreign productions such as ‘The Phantom of the Opera’, but they are hesitant to spend 20 or 30 dollars on tickets to watch local plays. This is understandable.”

Chan shared that on the one hand, well-known foreign productions have sophisticated production teams that have carefully honed their craft over many years, and they also have strong marketing and promotion teams. On the other hand, there is still room to develop an appreciation for theatre performances among locals. Compared to 10 years ago, the local arts scene has developed considerably.

Chan said, “My first foray into performing arts is when I joined the Chinese Performing Arts Society of Hwa Chong Institution. At that time, the instructor of The Theatre Practice held a workshop for us and took us to watch a rehearsal of The Theatre Practice, which took place against a white curtain. Upon seeing the lighting effects on the stage, I was deeply fascinated and wanted to pursue lighting as a career. However, this was a crazy idea at the time. The performing arts market back then was not as flourishing as it is now. Thanks to professional groups that have been working tirelessly to develop the industry over many years, there are now abundant job opportunities within the arts scene.”