

Award-winning suspenseful theatre work “Atonement” by MUKA Space from Malaysia to make Hong Kong debut (with photos)

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department has invited Malaysian theatre company MUKA Space to present the Hong Kong premiere of its theatre work, "Atonement", from November 29 to December 1 (Friday to Sunday). Through a multilayered storyline, versatile performances of various roles by the actors and a unique stage design, the play will guide audiences to reflect deeply on the complexity of humanity and social phenomena nowadays with an uncertain and tense atmosphere. The play is one of the programmes of the second Asia+ Festival.

"Atonement" is adapted from the Danish movie "Den Skyldige", which won Best Film at the Robert Awards, Denmark's equivalent of the Oscars. The story begins with a distress call to a police station, which leads to a series of intriguing cases within a case. Operator Ira, determined to save the kidnapped female caller Scelus, goes beyond protocol to search for clues and eventually uncovers hidden and unexpected truths behind the victim's struggle and fear. The production made its premiere in Malaysia in 2022, and won five major awards at the prestigious ADA Drama Awards in its home country, including Best Drama, Best Director and Best Music and Sound Design, while main cast member Xu Xu won Best Supporting Actress and Best Newcomer.

In a society where information is rapidly disseminated and dominated by social media, the truth is often obscured by partial information. Inspired by these social phenomena, the director of "Atonement", Easee Gan, uses the theatre play to create a space of imagination in an arena stage design, and places hints in the characters' names, dialogues as well as in the props used. While watching the play, the audience can look for clues to reconstruct the plot and interpret the inner world of the characters through their unique lens. As each audience may see different details and interpret them in different ways, the process allows the audience to reflect on how they can avoid being misled and to make well-considered judgements in the midst of overwhelming information.

There are 19 characters in the play. Apart from male lead Tan Li-yang, a Malaysian film, television drama and stage play actor who plays the role of Ira, the other 18 roles will be portrayed by three actors, including Ruby Yap, a multitalented artist who has earned wide recognition for her performances in singing, films and television dramas, and up-and-coming actors Xu Xu and Desmond Ngooi. Through changes in voice, movement and facial expressions, the three actors will demonstrate the personalities and emotional tensions of each character.

Founded in 2013 by Easee Gan and Dr Deric Gan, MUKA Space is a Malaysian cultural company specialising in drama productions, theatre performances, talent training, and arts publishing. Their recent theatre productions such as "Atonement", "The Ring of the Nibelung" and "Peking Man" won ADA Drama Awards in Malaysia and the BOH Cameronian Arts Awards, thus establishing MUKA Space as a highly acclaimed theatre brand.

Asia+ Festival 2024: "Atonement" by MUKA Space (Malaysia) will be held at 8pm on November 29 and 30 (Friday and Saturday), and at 3pm on November 30 and December 1 (Saturday and Sunday) at the Studio Theatre of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. The programme will be conducted in Putonghua with Chinese and English surtitles. Tickets priced at \$280 and \$350 are now available at URB TIX (www.urbtix.hk). For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288. Discount schemes are available for the programmes under the second Asia+ Festival. The programme contains strong lighting, haze effects and adult content. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2268 7325 or visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/theatre/programs_1769.html.

The programme will feature a sharing session and post-performance meet-the-artist sessions conducted in Putonghua. The sharing session, entitled "The Status of Contemporary Chinese Theatre in Malaysia", will be held at 11am on November 30 at AC2, Level 4, Administration Building, Hong Kong Cultural Centre. Speakers include Easee Gan and Deric Gan. Admission is free and online registration is required (www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/Programme/en/theatre/programs_1769.html#tab_6_0). Limited seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis. The meet-the-artist sessions will be held after the performances on November 29 and December 1. Members of the audience are welcome to stay behind to join.

The second Asia+ Festival is running from September to November, highlighting the arts and culture of nearly 30 countries from Asia, the Middle East and Belt and Road regions. Apart from stage programmes, there are also thematic exhibitions, an outdoor carnival, film screenings, outreach activities and more, numbering over 100 in total. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2370 1044 or visit asiaplus.gov.hk/2024/tc.

