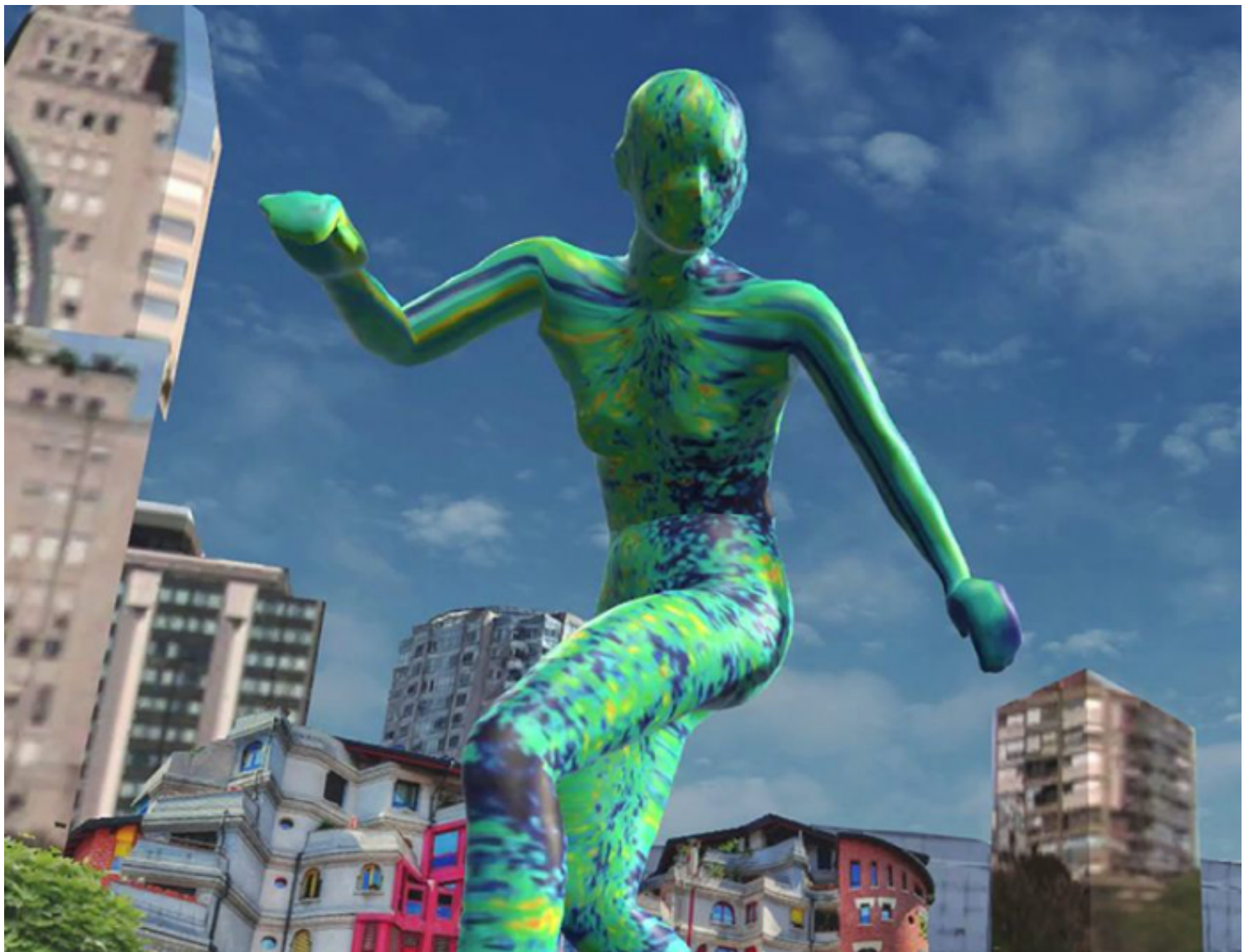


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THE BUSINESS TIMES





Travel the world through the arts

Amid a pandemic, the Singapore International Festival of Arts will showcase various countries.

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by

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BECAUSE of travel restrictions, famous American choreographer Pam Tanowitz is choreographing a new dance for Singapore Dance Theatre via video conferencing. Communication will be hard - imagine dancers learning routines through a screen while the choreographer squints into hers and relays instructions. But neither side are saying "no" to the opportunity, which promises milestones for both.

Firstly, it is a chance for SDT to create a new work for its repertoire with Tanowitz after Tanowitz, who's dubbed "the busiest woman in dance" by The New York Times. Secondly, SDT will perform the work with live music by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, marking the first collaboration ever between the two giants of arts. Thirdly, the collaboration titled *The Rhythm Of Us* will debut at the Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA) at the Esplanade - albeit to a much reduced audience due to the Covid-related restrictions.

audience capacity mandated by Covid-related regulations.

"But the arts must go on," says SIFA's festival director Gaurav Kripalani. "S intend to bring you the best from around the world - especially at a time can't travel."

While other festivals around the world are going fully online or shrinking programmes, SIFA is determined to carry on as if Singapore had already t coronavirus. There are over 60 shows and 300 performances taking place virtual and live venues over 16 days in May. Several of them are new cor for Singapore and foreign artists.

Mr Kripalani says: "We hope SIFA becomes a example for other festivals a world of how to carry on during a pandemic . . . Certainly, our adoption of models and digital technology is a turning point for the festival itself, cre blueprint for our future."

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The fact that even the live shows will be video-recorded and shown digit week later (to compensate for the fact that live audience capacities are r means that the rest of the world can, in fact, witness exactly how SIFA is

the constraints of travel restrictions and safety measures.

Many artists are agreeing to virtual collaborations where once it would have been deemed too impersonal or clumsy. Others have sped up their adoption of technologies such as Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality.

Still others are joining hands across continents as never before to help the arts community get through the pandemic.

In Singapore alone, SDT is partnering with SSO for the first time. The artistic directors of three rival theatre companies - Ivan Heng of Wild Rice, Adrienne Pangdemonium, and Kripalani of Singapore Repertory Theatre - are teaming up for a stage comedy called *The Commission*. ("We're BFFs now," jokes Kripalani). The entire jazz community of Singapore is coming together to celebrate the life and music of jazz icon and Cultural Medallion recipient Louis Soliano.

But while many attempts are being made to overcome the destruction wrought by Covid-19, the artists themselves can't help but create works that reflect the tragedies inflicted by it: Artist collective Zeugma draws inspiration from the lives of delivery men and women to create *_T0701_* (pronounced "Toyol"). The Stage looks at climate change and the coronavirus in *The Year Of No Return*. 600 Highwaymen examines our need for connection and community in a crisis in *A Thousand Ways*.

Here are our Top 12 picks of the festival:

1. Cosmogony

By Cie Gilles Jobin

SINCE Swiss dance company Cie Gilles Jobin can't come to Singapore, it's

motion capture technology to capture its dancers' movements in Geneva simultaneously reconstructing them as digital avatars in an open public space in Singapore. (Venue to be confirmed later.) The immersive work is a world premiere and a coup for the festival.

2. Gardens Speak

By Tania El Khoury

HERE'S a heart-wrenching experience: In Gardens Speak, you're made to wear a clear plastic coat and dig into a graveyard to uncover the stories of people who died during the Syrian uprising against the Assad regime. You're asked to lie in the grave and imagine you were a corpse yourself - and listen to the histories of the deceased, and those who loved and lost them.

3. The Journey

By Scott Silven

SILVEN is an artist, mentalist and illusionist. Promising an experience unlike any other - no, really - The Journey transports you from a village in Glasgow, where Silven was born, into the corners of your own mind. The entire show takes place online, with Silven interacting with you and 29 other participants virtually, guiding you through the mind-bending adventure.

4. The Rhythm Of Us

By Singapore Dance Theatre and Singapore Symphony Orchestra

IT'S hard to believe that SDT and SSO have never collaborated before. The bill begins with dancer Chihiro Uchida performing with cellist Ng Pei Sia and ends with a rousing ensemble of musicians and dancers. Celebrated American choreographer Pam Tanowitz choreographs the middle piece.

5. The Year Of No Return

By The Necessary Stage

TNS was supposed to stage this pan-Asian play about climate change last year, but the cancellation of the 2020 festival pushed it to this year. No matter. Playwrights Haresh Sharma and Rody Vera have since reworked the text to include the coronavirus pandemic as well, making *The Year Of No Return* more relevant than ever.

6. A Thousand Ways Part II and III

By 600 Highwaymen

LAST year, 600 Highwaymen staged the memorable *A Thousand Ways Part I*, which you were guided to engage in an intimate sharing session with an audience member - a complete stranger - on the phone. This year, the company returns with new extensions of the micro-theatre concept: In *Part II*, you interact face-to-face with another audience member. In *Part III*, you meet them. The works centre on our need for intimacy, connection and community.

7. Three Sisters

By Nine Years Theatre

SINGAPORE'S NYT has successfully adapted one canonical text after another, and it's re-imagining Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, a profoundly bittersweet play about isolation and longing. What's unique this time is that it's collaborating with New York's famed experimental company SIT1 and Anne Bogart. And while the actors cannot travel to Singapore, they're devising ways to bridge the gap.

8. As Far As Isolation Goes

By The Necessary Stage

By Tania El Khoury and Basel Zaraq

WHAT is it like to be an asylum seeker? Tania El Khoury and Basel Zaraq have created a moving piece of microtheatre, in which you alone interact with an actor on Zoom to understand his plight. You need to have a black marker pen, paper, water and tissues with you, because the actor will instruct you to draw in your arm.

9. A Song For Louis

By various artists

JAZZ drummer Louis Saliano was awarded the Cultural Medallion in 2018 for five decades worth of contributions to Singapore music. Many jazz musicians have worked with him and been inspired by his sheer talent and generosity. Musicians are coming together for this one-night-only concert to perform for and with him.

10. The Commission

By Singapore Repertory Pangdewildium

LAST year, the artistic directors of three theatre companies - Ivan Heng of Pangdemonium, Adrian Pang of Pangdemonium, and Gaurav Kripalani of Singapore Repertory Theatre - teamed up for Ken Kwek's hilarious short film *The Pitch*, which explored their rivalry, while highlighting the crushing impact of Covid-19 on the theatre scene. They're now back for *The Commission*, a "Singapore Repertory Pangdewildium" live play that once again satirises theatre-making in Singapore. Expect side-splitting humour.

11. The Invisible Opera

By Sophia Brous

IMAGINE being in a room where you're being observed every minute that

IMAGINE being in a room where you're being observed every minute, and not know by whom. Through sound design and live vocals, *The Invisible* (amps up your low-grade paranoia to fever-pitch levels to highlight the is modern surveillance states. Indeed, the artists won't even be in Singapore of travel restrictions - they'll be manipulating you from another city.

12. *Satantango*

By Bela Tarr

BASED on a novel by Laszlo Krasznahorkai, this epic Hungarian film by Bela classic of arthouse cinema. It runs for 7½ hours, telling the story of a gro villagers struggling to pick up the pieces after the fall of Communism. Th long, slow, bleak and not for the weak of spirit. But it may also be one of moving and powerful cinematic experiences you'll have in your life.

- **SIFA 2021 runs from May 14 to 31.**

For more information and tickets, visit sifa.sg.

Note that, for a few titles, the tickets and information have not yet been released.

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