



Dr. Chua Soo Pong, Senior Specialist in Performing Arts.

On 3 January 1989, the SPAFA Regional Centre welcomed Dr Chua Soo Pong as its first Senior Specialist in Performing Arts. Prior to his current appointment at SPAFA, the forty year old Singaporean had been teaching at the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. He obtained his Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from the Queen's University in Belfast.

The bespectacled Dr Chua has behind him numerous trophies and plaques attesting his artistic talent. In 1962, at age 13, he first attracted public attention when he came out first in a Chinese Calligraphy Contest.



Ramayana, the famous Indian epic, was rewritten by Dr. Chua Soo Pong and Staged by Arts & Acts in 1988.

Welcome to SPAFA, Dr Chua

Since then he had constantly been in the limelight with his yearly triumphs in various national art competitions from 1962 to 1988.

Dr Chua was appointed as the Chairman of the Dance Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Culture in 1980. Later, he also became a member of the Singapore Arts Council, a committee member of the Singapore Arts Festival and the Singapore Dance Festival. Since 1980, he has been the Chairman of the National Dance Theatre Dance Circle, the Pan Singapore Dance Organization for choreographers and dance teachers.

In 1986 he formed Arts & Acts and became the group's Artistic Director. Arts & Acts is Singapore's first and most dynamic bilingual drama group. Simultaneously, he was Artistic Adviser for the Singapore Phoenix Dance Company and the Chairman of the editorial committee

for the National Theatre Trust's magazine entitled Performing Arts.

This versatile artist is also a prolific writer. Aside from writing several books on dance and the theatre, Dr Chua also wrote extensively for the written mass media.

He maintained, until his appointment at SPAFA, a weekly column on dance and art reviews at the Lianhe Zaobao, Singapore's leading Chinese newspaper. He has also written frequently for the Straits Times newspaper. For six years, until 1986, Dr Chua was the Secretary of the Singapore Association of Writers.

"I learned painting before I was involved in any performing arts," says Dr Chua who informed that he considers visual effects as extremely important in all the plays and dances he had directed.

"I see theatre or dances as moving pictures; they are moving sculptures. I think my training in visual arts helped me a lot in my form of theatre, particularly in the perceptions of colour and aesthetic values."

Among his international experiences, Dr Chua Soo Pong could pride himself for participating in the first, second, third and fifth ASEAN Festivals of Performing Arts and as the Government of Singapore's Deputy Leader for the National Dance Company's series of dance performances in Denver, U.S.A.

On his plans for the SPAFA Regional Centre, he says:

"I would like to promote projects which will contribute more to community development... To achieve this purpose, we should be able to launch more training programmes, publish more books on the cultural heritage, and set an information network for greater cultural cooperation in the Southeast Asian region." ■

- Wynette Puntuna



Training Course in the Technique of Labanotation

Laban, is the system of recording movement originated by Rudolf Laban in 1920's. It provides a universal understanding of movement and hence serves as a "common Language" through which choreographers, dancers and scholars in the fields of anthropology, athletics and physiotherapy can communicate. The system has been tested in many countries and been successfully applied. In the west, numerous libraries with special interest in dance had collected all kinds of dances notated in Labanotation.

The Dancing Signs of Laban in Solo

by Dr. Chua Soo Pong

"Aren't you sleepy?" asked Priscilla Legaspi.

"Yes. But if you are going to do something, do it. And, do it the best you can". Mama Som said, the "largest" and eldest in the class.

"Usa, could you come and check my leg," screamed Ketut. What he really meant was asking Usa to double check whether or not the notation he did on the paper reflect accurately.

It was 11.00 p.m. and the "classroom" converted from the restaurant of the Indah Jaya Hotel, Solo was still full of life.

"I am not going to sleep until I get this done" Azanin enunciated crisply. Then she lighted a cigarette.

This was not the first time this

group of enthusiastic choreographers having a late night coping with their notation, to be precise, Labanotation.

For three weeks, this ten choreographers, namely Miss Dewi Hafianti (Indonesia), Mr I Ketut Darsana (Indonesia), Mrs Azanin Ahmad (Malaysia), Mr Abdul Rahim Mokhtar (Malaysia), Miss Priscilla Legaspi (Philippines), Mr Larry Gabao (Philippines), Mrs Som Mohamad Said (Singapore), Mrs Low Mei Yoke (Singapore), Mrs Chommanad Sobhon (Thailand) and Mrs Usa Sobrerk (Thailand) were here in Solo, attending SPAFA's Training Course in the Technique of Labanotation and Its Implementation for Teachers of the Performing Arts (S-T191a).

Labanotation, or Kinetography

Abdul Rahim confessed that he had no idea how complicated Labanotation was before he attended the course. He was naturally worried after the first session, having seen the numerous signs dancing in the text book. However, his anxiety dispersed on the second day when the doyen of Indonesia dance, Dr. Soedarsono came to give a lecture. He illustrated, with the help of Tri Nardona, how intricate hand movements and leg gestures of the Srimpi, female court dance dating from the sixteenth century, before the Yogyakarta Sultanate was established in 1755, could be accurately notated. Dr. Soedarsono is indeed a wonderful teacher. He used tact and gentleness to persuade and convince the participants of the training course.

With his magical lesson, not only Rahim but the whole class then fully realized the usefulness of Labanotation and began their zealous quest for the systematic way of recording dance.

The training course was jointly organized by the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts and the Directorate of Arts, Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, from 14th May to 2nd June. The participants of the course, apart from learning the demanding system of notation, also managed to sample several outstanding performances of students at the Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia in Surakarta and the Indonesia Institute of Arts in Yogyakarta. Low Mei Yoke from Singapore even ventured to see a Ramayana performance at the Prambanam Temple. The participants of the training course were also taken to the "Art Village" of Bagong Kusudiardjos in Yogyakarta.

"Although it was a pity that we could not meet the legendary figure of Indonesian dance, Pak Bagong, everybody was deeply impressed by the versatile dancers he trained. The rigorous training exercises, the spectacular painting exhibition as well as the beautiful surrounding of the art village were indeed memorable" said Chommanad Sobhon, a dance instructress from the Suansununtha Teachers's College in Bangkok.

On the 22nd May, Suwarsidi Trisapto came to join the teacher's team. A renowned dancer, Trisapto had also become an expert in Labanotation at the Jakarta Arts Institute. His humour and laughter

had brightened the classroom and encouraged the participants to try out fresh ideas in their notation.

"It was not an easy course, but I am so pleased that I was given the opportunity to come. The subject requires a high level of concentration and one gets very tired at the end of the day. But it is an extremely useful introductory course as it provides the basic knowledge towards fulfilling the need for documentation of dances in our countries. However, I hope that SPAFA will conduct the training course on a continued basis from elementary to intermediate and finally advance level. Although, we all worked very hard, at this stage the knowledge we had acquired is nevertheless enough to notate complicated dances. We really hope that we could further our studies in this field in the future so that one day

we could properly disseminate the knowledge of Kinetography Laban to our Students", said Larry Gabao.

F. X. Widaryanto, the most patient teacher had this to say, "It is very encouraging to teach such a group of dedicated choreographers and dance teachers. We will be too happy to teach Labanotation at a more advanced level. I hope that one day SPAFA could even establish a communication network for Labanotation in the SEAMEO (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation) Member Countries".

"There is a will, there is a way. I am sure that in the not too distant future, we could set up this network and we will be able to stage and teach dances of our neighbouring countries from the scores of Labanotation", said Azanin, with a big smile. ■



Teacher Widaryanto helps Priscilla Legaspi (Philippines) in her notation exercise while Rahim Mokhtar (Malaysia) looks on.