

Arts Centre Melbourne presents

## Asia TOPA: Asia-Pacific Triennial of Performing Arts 2020 Program Announcement – Part 1



À Ố Làng Phố, Vietnamese Bamboo Circus. Image Credit: Nguyen The Duong

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, 21 OCTOBER 2019** – In its second iteration, [Asia TOPA: Asia-Pacific Triennial of Performing Arts](#) will return from January – March 2020 to celebrate the creative imagination of artists and cultures in the Asia-Pacific region. The stunning and multi-art form collection of works over the three-month long festival of Asian, Australian and Pacific performing arts and public programming will explore the connections between contemporary Australia and its growing diaspora.

Led by **Arts Centre Melbourne**, with presenting partner **Singapore Airlines**, Asia TOPA 2020 is a joint initiative with the **Sidney Myer Fund** and will feature 30 new works created for Asia TOPA, many resulting from new and provocative collaborations between artists and arts organisations in Victoria, and from across Asia.

**Arts Centre Melbourne CEO Claire Spencer** says the joint initiative between Arts Centre Melbourne and the Sidney Myer Fund is a chance to celebrate, create and nurture Asian-focused performance from across the region.

*“The program has been built from a truly innovative approach to collaboration, the culmination of continued relationship building with cultural institutions, partners and artists in the region. It reflects our approach to programming that has at its heart genuine collaboration, cross-cultural inquiry and investigation of some of the most urgent issues and experiences of artists and their communities across our region. We are proud to have commissioned and seeded a number of new works through our Creative Labs in an effort to support, develop and commission original works. It’s exciting to continue this journey.”*

With major seed funding from the Sidney Myer Fund, Arts Centre Melbourne has initiated a landmark collaboration with Melbourne’s community of culture makers and national arts leaders to introduce powerful new voices from Asia to our stages, and reached out to wider cultural communities throughout Victoria.

14 Asia TOPA Consortium partners and more than 20 Victorian Program Partners have committed to simultaneously program and present contemporary Asian arts and culture across the festival. Their shared vision is to create a change in the Australian performing arts sector and play a critical role in shifting the conservative model of programming on all major stages, both locally and nationally.

Bringing together local and state cultural institutions, bodies and individuals to collaborate and connect with artists from Australia, and the broader region, has further deepened Australia's relationship with Asian communities. It continues to celebrate Victoria and Australia more broadly as a sophisticated, Asia-literate community with a strong appreciation of, and connection to, contemporary Asian culture and societies.

**Asia TOPA Creative Director Stephen Armstrong** says that he and his team are proud to be curating with the next generation of cultural and art form specialists to bring to the stage the most profoundly talented and original voices needing to be heard today.

*"The Asia TOPA 2020 program is a compelling show of just how integral – and dynamic – relationships between Asian and Australian contemporary artists are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So too are the relationships between producers, presenters and new audiences as they reach out to harness this incredible new energy and originality. As a festival which focuses on new work creation alongside presentations of iconic and legendary artists, the sense of anticipation is palpable."*

Asia TOPA celebrates Melbourne's identity as a global leader of arts and culture with vital and dynamic connections throughout the Asia-Pacific region, with some of the most anticipated contemporary performance makers and thought-leaders creating a culture and platform for collaborative practise and shared objectives.

A contemporary and mature Australian performing arts landscape must reflect the cultural diversity within the Asia-Pacific region, and it must provide Australian and international audiences alike with an understanding of contemporary Australia. Asian performing arts are a rare treat for audiences despite Asia's deep influence on Western art and more Asian-Australians becoming involved in the arts.

The 2020 Asia TOPA program reflects the contemporary imagination and lived experience of artists from the entire Asia-Pacific region with new work developments by Australian artists, groups and companies connecting with the cultures of 17 Asia-Pacific countries, offering Australian audiences the opportunity to experience the best in Asian performing arts. These collaborations and intercultural works span music, dance, theatre, contemporary performance, film, digital, visual art, public talks and more. Part 1 of the 2020 program includes icons and legends of the Asia-Pacific region.

Below is a taste of what is to come from Asia TOPA 2020 with the full program to be announced at 9am on Tuesday 12 November.

## **Asia TOPA: Asia-Pacific Triennial of Performing Arts 2020 Program Part 1 – ICONS & LEGENDS**

In an Asia TOPA world premiere season, **ILBIJERRI Theatre Company** (Australia) and **Te Rēhia Theatre** (Aotearoa/New Zealand) present **[BLACK TIES](#)** from 21 – 29 February 2020, a hilarious and heart-warming immersive theatre experience that reimagines the wedding rom-com from a distinctively First Nations perspective when two families and two cultures come together. This ground-breaking collaboration between major First Nations performing arts companies was made possible by the **Asia TOPA Creative Labs** and subsequently commissioned by the Major Festivals Initiative (MFI).

In an Asia TOPA exclusive from 12 – 15 March 2020, the deeply moving family saga of exile and longing, **[SAIGON](#)** is both epic in scale and heart-rending in its intimacy. This is a rare work of universal theatre that speaks across cultures where French-Vietnamese director, **Caroline Guiela Nguyen**, spent two years gathering stories in Paris and Saigon to create this compelling drama. Performed in French and Vietnamese with English surtitles, the story swings between Saigon in 1956, as

French colonialists prepare to leave Vietnam, and Paris in 1996, when Vietnamese exiles are allowed to return to the country for the first time.

Few works can claim to have pioneered a new art form, but [À Ó Làng Phố](#) has left audiences the world over enthralled by the extraordinary possibilities conjured when bamboo and circus meet. The title translates as “from village to city”, and over the course of this magical performance an expanding metropolis is constructed from bamboo poles, woven boats and baskets. Directed by former **Cirque du Soleil** choreographer **Tuấn Lê** and set to a live score featuring traditional Vietnamese music and modern sounds, this vibrant portrait of a world in motion will leave audiences of all ages spellbound from 27 – 29 February 2020.

The vast histories, philosophies and cultures of China and India meet in a breathtaking work of dance and storytelling commissioned by Asia TOPA. Created and performed by international dance artists **Aakash Odedra** (UK/India) and **Hu Shenyan** (China), [Samsara](#) merges mythological storytelling with personal experience and will mesmerise audiences from 5 – 7 March 2020. Inspired by the historical events recounted in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Chinese classic *Journey to the West*, this epic world premiere is an unprecedented expression of cultural exchange through the language of dance, drawing upon the diverse disciplines of ballet, contemporary dance, Chinese folk dance and the classical Indian dance form Kathak.

Following four sold-out performances with the **Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO)** in April 2018, legendary composer-conductor **Joe Hisaishi** returns with an even bigger encore performance of [Music from the Studio Ghibli Films of Hayao Miyazaki](#) in the Sidney Myer Music Bowl on 29 February 2020. This mega event, exclusive to Melbourne, will see Hisaishi lead the MSO, multiple choirs, special guest soloists and a marching band in an evening of film nostalgia featuring some of the most beloved Ghibli scenes.

Prior to this, on 26 February 2020 [Joe Hisaishi](#) will perform a special, Australian exclusive concert at Hamer Hall in an evening celebrating his contributions to contemporary symphonic repertoire and orchestral works. This will include symphonic fantasy ‘The Tale of the Princess Kaguya’ and the Australian premiere of ‘The East Land Symphony’. Audiences will experience the range and depth of this prolific composer as performed by MSO.

For one night only on 27 February 2020, pioneering Japanese electronic composer and visual artist **Ryoji Ikeda** will present [datamatics \[ver. 2.0\] live in a double bill at Hamer Hall](#) with the Australian premiere of **Shiro** by visual art and musical duo **NONOTAK** (illustrator **Noemi Schipfer**, architect and musician **Takami Nakamoto**). *datamatics [ver. 2.0]* takes the seemingly mundane – data – and uses it as a source for breath-taking sounds and visuals, while *Shiro* is an ethereal, immersive, audio-visual performance reaching transcendent states of illumination and sound.

Celebrated TV writer, **Benjamin Law** is one of this country’s brightest literary stars. From 8 February – 21 March 2020, his hysterically funny and moving stage premiere [Torch the Place](#) will show his effortless self-deprecating wit to spark joy in the clutter, and find truth in those crazy moments that bring families closer together. This work was commissioned through **MTC’s NEXT STAGE Writers’ Program**.

Further to Asia TOPA’s icons and legends programming announcement, presented as part of Asia TOPA is [Meeting Points Series: Hand to Earth](#) a collaboration between Arts Centre Melbourne and the **Australian Art Orchestra**. On 23 February 2020, one of Korea’s most sought after jazz vocalists **Sunny Kim**, Yolngu song-man from North East Arnhem Land **Daniel Wilfred** and multidisciplinary musician **Peter Knight** will sing of the stars, fire and cooling rain against Knight’s floating trumpet notes and electronic crackles. Their effortless collaboration spans continents and cultures, expressing a deeply human commonality.

Now in its seventh year, [MSO’s Chinese New Year](#) concert has become one of Australia’s major cultural highlights. On 31 January 2020, eminent Chinese conductor **Yi Zhang** leads the MSO in a performance starring young Chinese pianist **Jieni Wan**. Artistic Director of the National Ballet of China Symphony Orchestra, Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra and Zhejiang Philharmonic Orchestra, Zhang makes his MSO debut in this unique musical celebration featuring one of the most important Chinese compositions in the world today.



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## **Quote attributable to Martin Foley, MP, Minister for Creative Industries**

“The Victorian Government is extremely proud to support the second Asia TOPA festival – the best of contemporary performing arts from across Asia. This innovative program builds on the extraordinary success of the inaugural 2017 festival, continuing to break down cultural barriers and set new benchmarks for creative partnerships, and building Victoria’s profile in the region as a hub for world-class performing arts. Congratulations to Arts Centre Melbourne and the Sidney Myer Fund for another fantastic festival, showing the magic that can be created through collaboration, diversity and intercultural understanding.”

## **Quote attributable to Chairman of the Sidney Myer Fund Carrillo Gantner AC**

“In 2020 we are building upon the incredible success of the inaugural festival in 2017, where many of the commissioned works went on to be presented across the world. The innovative, dynamic and diverse performances you will experience during Asia TOPA 2020 showcase the enormous richness to be found in the many cultures in our region, and the Sidney Myer Fund is proud to be working with Arts Centre Melbourne once again to create the opportunity for such an extraordinary program to exist. Art plays a critical role in opening our minds to new cultures and understanding our place in the Asia Pacific, where our future lies. Asia TOPA is a window into the myriad diverse cultures that surround us geographically, and holds a mirror to the enormous richness of our own contemporary society.”

## **Notes to Editors**

The founding Asia TOPA Consortium consists of Arts Centre Melbourne, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Chunky Move, Federation Square, Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne Recital Centre, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Theatre Company, Museums Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria, State Library of Victoria, The Australian Ballet, Victorian College of the Arts and the Victorian Opera.

Asia TOPA is a joint initiative of the Sidney Myer Fund and Arts Centre Melbourne with support from the Australian and Victorian governments. With major seed funding from the Sidney Myer Fund, Arts Centre Melbourne has initiated a landmark collaboration with Melbourne’s community of culture makers and national arts leaders to introduce powerful new voices from Asia to our stages. Asia TOPA takes place from January to March 2020.

Images can be found [here](#).

**Arts Centre Melbourne presents**  
***Asia TOPA: Asia-Pacific Triennial of Performing Arts 2020***  
**January – March 2020**  
**Bookings at [asiatopa.com.au](http://asiatopa.com.au)**

For more information about Arts Centre Melbourne, please visit [www.artscentremelbourne.com.au](http://www.artscentremelbourne.com.au) or phone 1300 182 183. Become a fan of [Arts Centre Melbourne on Facebook](#) or follow [@artscentremelb](#) on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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