

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1 The Importance of Culture and the Arts

1.1 Culture and the arts mould the way of life, the customs and the psyche of a people. They give a nation its unique character. Culture and the arts benefit us in important ways. They:

- (a) broaden our minds and deepen our sensitivities
- (b) improve the general quality of life
- (c) strengthen our social bond
- (d) contribute to our tourist and entertainment sectors

## 2 Overview

### 2.1 *Present State*

#### 2.1.1 *Cultural Policy*

The Government's cultural policy is to promote widespread interest and excellence in the pursuit of the arts in our multi-cultural society, and to encourage cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

#### 2.1.2 *Agencies*

The Ministry of Community Development formulates cultural policy and co-ordinates its implementation. It organises a wide range of programmes, administers art assistance schemes and manages theatres.

The Singapore Cultural Foundation, an endowment fund set up in 1978 under the

aegis of the Ministry of Community Development, promotes private sponsorship for the arts. The National Theatre Trust manages the Kallang Theatre and organises cultural activities.

The National Museum conserves artefacts reflecting our history and cultures. The National Archives houses public records, while the Oral History Department documents personal recollections which have a bearing on our history.

The National Library promotes reading through its network of nine libraries.

There are currently about 170 registered societies which organise cultural events.

#### 2.1.3 *Activities*

About 1,700 cultural events were staged in 1988 including 488 events in the Singapore Festival of Arts which is our premiere event. Other major ones include the Dance Festival, Drama Festival, Young People's Theatre, National Day Art Fair, the National Short Story Writing Competition, the Short Play Writing Competition, Singapore Heritage Week, the Book Fair and the National Reading Campaign.

In 1987, attendance at performing arts events was about 410,000. In 1988, visitors to the National Museum numbered around 320,000. In early 1989, the National Library membership was almost 470,000.

#### 2.1.4 *Facilities*

The principal performing venues are the Victoria Theatre, Victoria Concert Hall, Kallang Theatre and the Drama Centre. They are well used, but have inherent technical deficiencies.

In 1985 the Ministry of Community Development initiated an Arts Housing Scheme. Since then it has provided homes for 23 arts organisations in four vacant schools.

The National Library in Stamford Road houses its Central Lending Branch and Reference Library. It has eight branches in the new towns.

All the exhibition galleries of the National Museum are housed at its building on Stamford Road.

### 2.2 *Review*

Cultural development in Singapore is impeded by the lack of:—

#### 2.2.1 *Funds*

In 1987 the combined budget for the Cultural Affairs Division, National Library & heritage departments was only \$22m or 0.2% of the National Budget. Lack of funds is a major factor limiting the growth of cultural activities and the art and heritage collections.

In 1987 Government provided only 38% or \$3.5m of the \$9.4m spent on the arts by the Ministry of Community Development's Cultural Affairs Division, National Theatre Trust and Singapore Cultural Foundation. The rest of the funds came from sponsors and other sources. Of the \$3.7m spent on the 1988 Singapore Festival of Arts, less than 10% was borne by Government.

Neither the National Theatre Trust nor the Singapore Cultural Foundation receives Government grants.

#### 2.2.2 *Knowledge*

Not enough Singaporeans are showing a sustained interest in culture and the arts. They have not had the benefit of a systematic introduction to the arts and their lack of knowledge probably explains the small number of arts supporters in Singapore.

#### 2.2.3 *Qualified Professionals*

We have an inadequate pool of artistes, arts administrators, arts entrepreneurs and other professionals needed to support greater cultural development in Singapore.

#### 2.2.4 *Publicity*

Many cultural events lack visibility because of inadequate publicity. This adversely affects attendances and makes it difficult to attract sponsors.

#### 2.2.5 *Cultural Facilities*

The inadequacy of the performing arts venues limits the number and quality of performances. The National Art Collection lacks a permanent home. The National Museum's displays tend to be unimaginative because of space constraints. Its storage and conservation facilities are inadequate. The National Library has outgrown its present premises.

Many cultural groups are less active because they have no rehearsal space. Specialised facilities are needed to house arts activities.

### 2.2.6 *Educational Opportunities*

There are no degree courses for the arts in Singapore. The facilities of the non-profit private art schools offering diploma level studies are inadequate.

### 2.2.7 *Streamlined Licensing Procedures*

The private sectors's efforts at organising shows are hampered by complicated licensing procedures.

### 2.2.8 *Co-ordination on Heritage Matters*

There is inadequate co-ordination at the decision-making level among the heritage agencies in different Ministries.

## 3 **Vision and Strategies**

### 3.1 *Vision*

The thrust of Singapore's cultural development is to realise the vision of a culturally-vibrant society by 1999.

#### 3.1.1 *A Culturally Vibrant Society*

A culturally-vibrant society is one whose people are well-informed, creative, sensitive and gracious.

#### 3.1.2 *Multi-cultural Heritage*

Our multi-cultural heritage makes us unique. We should promote excellence in our multi-lingual, multi-cultural collective art-forms.

#### 3.1.3 *International Centre for the Arts*

Singapore can be an international exhibition centre and a market for works of art and a regular performing venue for world-class troupes.

### 3.2 *Strategies*

In order to realise our Vision, we should:—

3.2.1 Encourage more people to develop an interest in culture and the arts.

3.2.2 Encourage more people to take part in art activities as amateurs or as professionals.

3.2.3 Build up a pool of good artistes, arts administrators, arts entrepreneurs and other related professionals.

3.2.4 Develop more modern purpose-built performing, working and exhibition facilities for the arts, libraries and specialised museums/galleries.

3.2.5 Step up the level and tempo of cultural activities and have more works of art in public places.

3.2.6 Encourage and promote more original Singapore works.

## 4 **Recommendations**

To support the strategies, our key recommendations are:

### 4.1 *Organisational Improvements*

4.1.1 Government establishes a Singapore National Arts Council (The Arts Council). This Council should spearhead the development of the arts in Singapore and take over the functions of the Ministry of Community Development's Cultural Affairs Division, National Theatre Trust and the Singapore Cultural Foundation. To enjoy

maximum flexibility in operations, it should preferably be a non-profit company.

4.1.2 Government establishes a Literature Board to raise the tempo of literary activities in Singapore and to develop our four literatures.

4.1.3 Government establishes a National Heritage Trust in the long term as the sole authority on heritage matters to co-ordinate the preservation of the different dimensions of our heritage.

#### 4.2 *Improvements in our Educational System*

Government sets up a comprehensive arts education system similar to that for academic and technical education.

4.2.1 Government improves the quality of arts education in the schools and implements an Arts-in-Education programme to allow students to participate in and appreciate performances/exhibitions.

4.2.2 Government develops a tertiary arts education system. Government and the private sector provide more overseas scholarships for talented Singaporeans aspiring towards careers in the fields of arts and heritage.

#### 4.3 *Improvement of Cultural Facilities*

4.3.1 Government constructs a new performing arts centre at Marina Centre and upgrades the existing theatres. Government should also encourage private developers to incorporate staging facilities in their auditoria.

4.3.2 Government proceeds with the development plans of the National Museum which provide for a:

- fine arts gallery in the former St Joseph's Institution. Part of the playing field facing it should be reserved for future extensions to the Gallery
- children's museum in the former Tao Nan School
- history of Singapore museum
- Southeast Asian/natural history/ethnology museum
- people's gallery and.
- upgraded storage and conservation facilities.

4.3.3 Government builds a modern National Library on Queen Street and four additional branch libraries in Hougang, Tampines, Yishun and Woodlands.

4.3.4 Government assists more arts groups to obtain rehearsal and working facilities.

#### 4.4 *Greater Promotional Efforts*

4.4.1 Government steps up the tempo and level of cultural activities. To encourage private efforts at organising shows, entertainment licensing procedures should be simplified. Government and the private sector should work towards installing more works of art in public places.

4.4.2 Community centres, clan associations and other civic groups help make the arts more accessible to Singaporeans by organising a wider range of activities and courses.

4.4.3 Government continues to nurture deserving cultural groups through grants and other appropriate assistance schemes to increase opportunities for Singaporeans to pursue arts and heritage activities.

4.4.4 The Singapore Broadcasting Corporation and the newspapers increase and improve their coverage on Singapore arts and culture. They should especially attempt to give balanced coverage to all forms of the arts that comprise our collective heritage.

4.4.5 Government implements a sustained programme for the commissioning, documentation and promotion of original Singapore works.

4.4.6 Government, through the Urban Redevelopment Authority and other relevant authorities, continues its efforts in preserving our man-made environment and our natural environment.

## 4.5 *Other Recommendations*

### 4.5.1 *Heritage*

- Government strengthens the national heritage collection in all media.
- Government, but eventually the National Heritage Trust, maintains an updated inventory of our heritage resources.
- Government extends tax rebates on gifts and donations to the heritage collections.
- Government sets up a system to recognise organisations and individuals who help in heritage preservation.

### 4.5.2 *Literature and Reading*

- The Ministry of Education sets up a division to promote creative writing and associated activities in the schools and junior colleges.
- Government gives appropriate support, including publishing grants, to outstanding Singapore writers.
- Government strengthens the book collections of the public libraries, schools and colleges.
- Government enlarges the book translation programme.
- Government enlivens the literary scene through promoting literary events more visibly.
- Book publishers and distributors work towards reducing book prices to promote book ownership among Singaporeans.
- Tertiary institutions take further steps to promote the literary arts.

### 4.5.3 *Visual Arts*

- Government increases the budgets for the acquisition of works of art for the National Museum and for public buildings.
- The Public Works Department enhances its capability in supervising the conservation of works of art in public places.
- Collectors and business corporations be encouraged to contribute works of art to the National Museum.

## 4.6 *Reports of Committees*

More details of the Council's recommendations are found in the Reports of its four Committees. These

Reports also contain other recommendations which should be studied by the relevant agencies.

#### 4.7 *Conclusion*

To effectively carry out the recommendations to achieve the Vision.

there should be a whole-hearted commitment to the Vision, which must mean a change in the fundamental attitude of our people to culture and the arts. The Government must take the lead, but ultimately, the ingredients for success must rest on the joint efforts of the Government, corporate and civic organisations and the public.