

## An Interview with Ms. Natalie Hennedige

*Festival Director, Singapore International Festival of Arts and Artistic Director, Cake Theatrical Productions*



Natalie Hennedige

Image Credit: Tuckys Photography

<p><b>Culture Academy</b></p>	<p>Hi Natalie, could you introduce yourself and what you do as the Festival Director for the Singapore International Festival of Arts?</p>
<p>Natalie Hennedige</p>	<p>As Festival Director, I set the artistic direction and curatorial trajectory for SIFA. I spend a great deal of time compressing and expanding ideas in my mind gathered from study and research, then allowing my imagination to take over, until something crystalizes and I'm able to articulate a concept in writing.</p> <p>My role as Festival Director is to provide curatorial framing and clarity, develop artistic briefs, initiate conversations with artists, enable vibrant collaborative possibility, keep a pulse on artistic process and progress, offer feedback and pivotally, allow breathing space for commissioned artists to develop and create.</p>
<p><b>Culture Academy</b></p>	<p>Could you tell us more about how you and your team developed this year's theme for SIFA, "The Anatomy of Performance – Ritual"?</p>
<p>Natalie Hennedige</p>	<p>SIFA is propelled by a very vibrant and dynamic team. Festival making is demanding work with many moving parts. All of us behind the festival become custodians of a beloved performing arts festival first launched as the Singapore Festival of Arts in 1977. It's important to shape and make shifts to the festival, responding to the shifting tides of contemporary complexities in the world, aiming for progressive artistic vibrancy, rooted in Singapore's distinct cultural richness and engaged globally, positioning and projecting the festival to ensure the festival remains relevant, stays fresh and innovative, and continues to inspire generations of festival goers and practitioners.</p> <p>I defined a three-year arc intended to bring focus to performance &amp; creation in the physical and online space. A recurring title, 'The Anatomy of Performance', is accompanied by a subtitle that changes each year to further focus the curation. In 2022, the focus is on <i>Ritual</i>. The complete title reads, <i>SIFA 2022 The Anatomy of</i></p>

*Performance – Ritual.*

I believe it's important that SIFA be a platform for originality, propelling artists and performance creation coming from Singapore, while imagining what a meaningful international dynamic looks like within our city's pinnacle performing arts festival.

You will notice that there are several festival commissions in SIFA 2022's line up. Festival commissions are original creations nurtured and supported as the festival builds conversations with artists at nascent stages, engaging in dialogue and supporting their process to create artistically robust new works that are realized, birthed so to speak, during the time of the festival and it's quite wonderful to witness and be part of this as an audience. A work finds completion when it first encounters an audience.

**Culture Academy**

The last two years have been challenging for Singapore and the arts and culture sector. How have you and your team reinvented SIFA amidst this period of great change?

Natalie  
Hennedige

Situated in Southeast Asia, within a richly diverse region, Singapore is positioned to bring an inspired focus from within Asia into the international performing arts arena. As the pinnacle arts festival, coming editions of SIFA will focus on commissioned works and outstanding international invitations. Moving forward, it is also important for us to essentialize a new imagination for SIFA's online presence, mining the digital space creatively.

SIFA 2022 will see the inclusion of *Life Profusion* – SIFA's virtual space and creation platform. *Life Profusion* is a new imagination of SIFA's online presence related to the creation of artistic content with wider reaching potential considering its presence in the digital domain. With this platform there is potential for a steadier, more constant presence for the festival, connecting artists, ideas, and festival attendees locally and internationally.

*Life Profusion*, SIFA's virtual platform runs parallel to the festival and beyond with five unique content portals: +DREAM, +EAT, +READ, +GROW and +DISCUSS, designed to expand, organize, and deepen the profusion of ideas and artistry radiating from the festival.

Premiering on +DREAM is Lucy McRae's astounding performance film *Delicate Spells of Mind*, marking SIFA's foray into high-profile commissioning in the digital arena and emphasizing SIFA's commitment to the virtual space as a *stage* for inspired artistic creation. Lucy is a renowned British-born Australian science fiction artist, body architect and filmmaker whose experimentation in technology and experimental approaches uncover beautiful insight that we can all be moved by.

+EAT are seasonal digital capsules curated by arts and music label Syndicate, featuring an exciting array of digital creations by artists experimenting at the intersection of multidisciplinary practice and technology and responding to *Ritual*

	<p>within the nuances of digital language and expressiveness. +EAT capsules released regularly from February 2022 onwards include a hybrid digital art exhibition, new media artists, an imagined world filled with digital artefacts, questions about internet life and a video NFT and solo dancer’s exploration of gestures and rituals in a post-pandemic space.</p>
<p>Culture Academy</p>	<p>What are the opportunities in the present that you feel would continue to shape arts and cultural festivals in the future?</p>
<p>Natalie Hennedige</p>	<p>In a changing world, the performing arts becomes an arena to reflect diversity, collaboration and meaningful interaction between artists, creatives, and cultural practitioners globally. SIFA 2022 reflects a dissolution of boundaries by gathering multiple nationalities, a range of artistic practices and practitioners of vivid cultural hues within individual creations, embracing a blending of genres, artistic disciplines, and internationality.</p> <p>This echoes the ways in which contemporary performance is being made in the world. Also importantly, it reflects how our dialogue with each other on a human level requires nuance because we live in systems of such complexity, within a world having gone through serious bouts of illness and faced with pertinent social and political movements that continue to test our passions and challenge us. The performing arts, therefore, needs to be upheld as space for reflection, openness, and nuanced creative articulation to be freely expressed.</p> <p>Moving forward, we also need to mine the digital space creatively because the possibilities are almost as vast as the physical universe. It’s important to remember that the most enduring artistic creation is both timeless and of the moment, at once. Art carries a kind of prophetic quality. It can embody and tell us things about the past, present, and future.</p> <p>Arts &amp; culture institutions need to be bold and progressive entities enabling diverse, committed, passionate artists and creatives to unleash creative potential whether their medium is the human body or robotics. Some artists have dedicated a lifetime to honing their vocal instrument, others have been experimenting in computational art, gaming technology and artificial intelligence for years, way before the pandemic. It’s about creating platforms for creative energies to meet and break new ground in the poly-dynamic and universal language of art.</p>