

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

*For immediate release*

### **FOUR PRACTITIONERS RECOGNISED FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AT NHB'S *THE STEWARDS OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARD 2022***

*Each recipient will receive a \$5,000 cash award, be eligible for a project grant of up to \$20,000,  
and enjoy opportunities to participate in NHB's festivals and programmes.*



*The four award recipients (from top left, clockwise): Mr Balakrishnan s/o Veerasamy Ramasamy, Mr Syed Yusof Alsagoff, Singapore Wushu Dragon and Lion Dance Federation, and Gunong Sayang Association.*

**Singapore, 21 March 2023** – Four intangible cultural heritage (ICH) practitioners have been awarded the National Heritage Board's (NHB) ***The Stewards of Intangible Cultural Heritage Award***, which recognises the dedication and commitment of practitioners to promote and transmit their respective ICH elements to the wider community and younger generations. Launched by NHB in 2019, the award is part of NHB's ongoing efforts to document, safeguard and promote ICH with community stakeholders.

2. The four award recipients were selected for their contributions in enlivening and sustaining Singapore's rich and vibrant ICH landscape, through their practice of and dedication to their ICH practices. In addition to their experience and expertise, the award recipients are recognised for their efforts in passing down their skills and knowledge by nurturing youth

practitioners; reaching out to contemporary audiences and the wider public; and bringing practitioners and communities together. The four practitioners were recognised for their contributions during an award ceremony on 21 March 2023, which was graced by Mr Edwin Tong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth.

### **Reflecting the richness and diversity of Singapore's intangible cultural heritage**

3. The four award recipients for 2022 comprise two individuals and two organisations, all of whom have extensively contributed to Singapore's ICH landscape across different forms and media. This showcases how our cultural heritage can be expressed, embodied and experienced in diverse forms.

4. **Mr Balakrishnan s/o Veerasamy Ramasamy**, a veteran in *karagam*<sup>1</sup> tying, has more than three decades years of experience under his belt. A devout volunteer at Sri Mariamman Temple, Mr Balakrishnan was mentored by temple volunteers in the craft of *karagam* tying, and has since become a *karagam* leader for the *Theemithi* (Firewalking) festivities in Sri Mariamman Temple from 2008 to 2018. He has also gone on to mentor and guide the younger generation of temple volunteers in *karagam* tying, and shares his knowledge with other local Hindu temples. Mr Balakrishnan has also conducted cultural workshops, to spread greater awareness about *karagam* and its craft techniques with the wider public, including Singaporeans from other ethnic and religious communities.

5. **Mr Syed Yusof Alsagoff** has contributed to the field of orchid cultivation in Singapore for over six decades, having served on the Executive Committee of Orchid Society of Southeast Asia (OSSEA) from 1964 to 1997, including 14 years as President. He has also been involved with the Singapore Botanic Gardens' orchid programme since the 1960s, and played an instrumental role in the development of the National Orchid Garden. To date, he has registered over 200 orchid hybrids, including *Aranda Zahela Alsagoff* which was named after his wife and the first orchid hybrid to ever receive a First-Class Certificate from OSSEA. He continues to share his knowledge with the local orchid growing community through OSSEA's monthly meetings, and often provides advice to younger and budding orchid breeders.

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<sup>1</sup>The *karagam* is believed to symbolise the Hindu goddess Mariamman. It is a vessel of water filled with sacred offerings, and intricately tied and decorated with flowers. It is later balanced on the head of a priest or performer, depending on the event, with an accompanying ritualistic dance.

6. Performing arts group **Gunong Sayang Association** has played a major role in keeping the tradition of *wayang peranakan* (a theatre form traditionally performed in Baba Malay) alive in Singapore. It has staged *wayang peranakan* performances on a near-annual basis since 1985 and has produced 29 productions till date. Steadfast in retaining the use of Baba Malay in its productions, the association has conducted Baba Malay language classes for its younger members. To reach out to contemporary audiences, the association added English subtitles to its productions, and staged plays addressing contemporary issues such as dementia. It has also been involving and training younger actors to be part of their production cast.

7. The **Singapore Wushu Dragon and Lion Dance Federation** has played a pivotal role as the national organisation for *wushu* (Chinese martial arts), dragon dance and lion dance, providing guidance and support for hundreds of member groups. The federation has organised several major national, sporting and community events for practitioners and the public, including National Wushu Championships and Ngee Ann City National Lion Dance Championship. The federation has also managed the training and development of the national *wushu* team, which represented Singapore on the regional and international stage and achieved considerable sporting success. At the same time, the federation also coordinates and supports its member groups to raise awareness of and encourage public participation in *wushu*, dragon dance and lion dance, including through community performances during festive occasions such as Lunar New Year.

8. Ms Yeoh Chee Yan, Chairman, NHB, who is also Chair of the award evaluation panel, said: “The Panel is delighted to recognise the 4 Stewards of our ICH for long-term contributions in their respective fields. Their ICH practices cover a diverse range of elements, which greatly enrich Singapore’s ICH landscape. Their dedication in transmitting the skills and knowledge related to their craft is an inspiration to us all.”

### **Keeping our intangible cultural heritage alive and thriving**

9. In recognition of the award recipients’ contributions in their respective ICH fields, NHB will award each recipient with a S\$5,000 cash award. The award recipients will also be eligible for a Project Grant of up to S\$20,000 for initiatives that support the transmission and promotion

of ICH knowledge and skills. These include the organising and conducting of public education programmes, internship or apprenticeship training programmes, and research and documentation projects relating to the understanding and transmission of ICH traditions, skills, practices and customs. The award recipients will also have the opportunity to showcase and promote their ICH-related skills and knowledge at NHB's exhibitions, festivals and/or programmes.

10. Mr Yeo Kirk Siang, Senior Director, Heritage Policy, at NHB and a member of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Evaluation Body, said: "Our ICH unifies Singaporeans through mutual understanding and appreciation of our diverse cultures and communities. As much as it is an anchor for our national identity, ICH is also part of our living, everyday heritage. It is dynamic and reflects the evolving character of our society. NHB will continue to work closely with the Stewards and the wider community to safeguard our ICH, and ensure that our heritage remains accessible, relevant and compelling to future generations of Singaporeans."

11. The four recipients are the third cohort of ICH practitioners and organisations to receive the award, bringing the total number of individuals and organisations who have been recognised as Stewards of our ICH to 14.

12. Please refer to **Annex A** for more information on the award, and **Annex B** for completed projects supported by the Stewards Project Grant.

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**About the National Heritage Board**

The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993, and turns 30 this year. As the custodian of Singapore's heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit.



NHB's mission is to preserve and celebrate the shared heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding. It manages the national museums and heritage institutions, and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the national collection. Through the national collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit [www.nhb.gov.sg](http://www.nhb.gov.sg) for more information.

## ABOUT THE STEWARDS OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARD

### Eligibility

The *Stewards of Intangible Cultural Heritage Award* recognises Singapore's ICH practitioners, and only Singapore citizens or Permanent Residents are eligible for the award.

The scheme is open to individuals as well as groups or organisations. The eligibility conditions are summarised as follows:

- a) Individuals;
- b) Groups or Organisations;  
The group or organisation must be based in Singapore and be headed by a Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident.
- c) The practitioner or group/organisation must possess a minimum of 10 years in the vocation and be well-respected by the practising community;
- d) The practitioner or group/organisation must display a level of excellence in the application of skills, practices and knowledge;
- e) The practitioner or group/organisation must demonstrate a long-term commitment to the continuation of the practice or craft, as well as consistent efforts to transmit skills and knowledge; and
- f) Practitioners or groups/organisations accorded accolades from other industries or statutory boards may also apply or be nominated.

### Award and Other Forms of Support

Award recipients will be given a plaque/trophy and certificate of award, as well as a one-time Cash Award of S\$5,000.

In addition to the Cash Award, award recipients will be given the option to tap on a Project Grant of up to S\$20,000 to be used within five years from the point of award for the transmission and promotion of ICH knowledge and skills. This grant is part of the awards' aim of encouraging the continued transmission of the ICH element. Examples of projects that could be supported by the Project Grant include:

- a. Organising programmes such as talks and seminars for the public as well as demonstrations and training sessions for interested parties;
- b. Introducing an internship or apprentice-training programme, that excludes in-house training of existing employees;
- c. Conducting and/or commissioning additional research and documentation of ICH knowledge and skills; and
- d. Embarking on projects to improve their knowledge, enhance their skills, introduce innovation and ensure sustainability.

NHB will also work with the recipient on the transmission of ICH knowledge and skills through the following:

- a. Documentation and promotion of the practice.



- b. Participation in NHB events/programmes to share skills and knowledge.
- c. Use of the award label by the practitioners to support their transmission and promotional efforts.

Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria is as such:

<b>Active Transmission of Skills and Knowledge</b>
Displays outstanding efforts to transmit skills and knowledge to the next generation
Regular engagement with the wider community to raise awareness of the practice
<b>Mastery of Skills and Knowledge</b>
Displays excellence in the application of both knowledge and skills
<b>Long-Term Dedication to the Practice</b>
Long-term commitment to sustaining knowledge and skills of the practice
<b>Positive Impact and Influence</b>
Displays efforts to serve the wider community through the practice
Serves as a positive example by encouraging cultural exchange

**COMPLETED PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE STEWARDS PROJECT GRANT**

<p><b>Michael Ker</b> <b>(2020 Recipient)</b></p>	<p><u>Popiah-making workshops for various communities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Series of 50 popiah-making workshops from 2020 to 2022, catered to various communities, including elderly homes, social welfare and special needs organisations, and CCs and RCs</li> <li>• Each workshop included a sharing on the history and traditions of popiah, live demonstrations of popiah-making and hands-on popiah wrapping activities for participants</li> </ul>
<p><b>Nam Hwa Opera</b> <b>(2020 Recipient)</b></p>	<p><u>Exploring the World of Chinese Opera school handbook</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and printing of an illustrated handbook, in English and Mandarin, introducing the basics of Chinese opera to students</li> <li>• Emphasis on presenting informative content through vibrant and colourful illustrations to cater specifically to students</li> <li>• Copies of the handbook were printed and distributed to student participants of Nam Hwa’s in-house workshops, school workshops, and community programmes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts</b> <b>(2020 Recipient)</b></p>	<p><u>Semarak Warisan (Vibrant Heritage) dance production</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Malay dance documentary-production on 5 Dec 2020, based on Mdm. Som Said’s book, tracing the evolution of Malay dance styles in Singapore from the 1950s to contemporary times</li> <li>• Performance was held at Our Tampines Hub and featured more than 80 Sri Warisan dancers, spanning across three generations of Malay dancers (from age 4 to 67)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Thow Kwang Pottery Jungle</b> <b>(2020 Recipient)</b></p>	<p><u>Dragon kiln virtual tour and video</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed a virtual tour of the dragon kiln, which includes documentation of the interior and exterior of the kiln, as well as presenting information on the kiln and the craft of wood-firing</li> <li>• Produced a video documenting the wood-firing process in 2021, which has been incorporated into Thow Kwang’s educational workshops and programmes</li> </ul>



<p><b>Bhaskar's Arts</b>  (2021 Recipient)</p>	<p><u><i>Bala Nrityam / Ilayar Nadanam performances and Kathak workshop</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two Indian dance performances by approximately 80 – 100 Nrityalaya Aesthetics Society (the Academy's training wing) students on 16 and 17 Jul 2022 at Alliance Francaise Theatre;</li> <li>• Partnered with the Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) to re-stage select performances on 6 and 7 Aug 2022 for the public, as part of IHC's National Day programmes</li> <li>• Delivered an <i>Kathak</i> performance and workshop at IHC on 26 Nov 2022, for parent-child pairs to learn about Kathak</li> </ul>
<p><b>Siong Leng Musical Association</b>  (2021 Recipient)</p>	<p><u><i>Germination production</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional <i>nanyin</i> performance staged by 17 of Siong Leng's youth practitioners (including their Association and Apprentice artists, ranging from age 9 to 33)</li> <li>• Held at the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre on 30 Dec 2021, as the first public platform for Siong Leng's Apprentice artists to practice and showcase their skills and acquire experience with performing <i>nanyin</i> at a professional production</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tan Poh Choo</b>  (2021 Recipient)</p>	<p><u>Digitalisation of sauce-making workshops</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed an online version of Nanyang Sauce's soya sauce-making workshops, including educational videos to document and demonstrate the steps of sauce-making</li> <li>• Produced accompanying sauce-making kits for at-home participants, and launched a web app for participants to share progress and seek guidance from Mdm Tan and the Nanyang Sauce team during the post-workshop fermentation phase</li> </ul>