

**MEDIA RELEASE**

*For immediate release*

**CELEBRATING OUR PRACTITIONERS WHO PROMOTE SINGAPORE'S VIBRANT LIVING  
HERITAGE AT *THE STEWARDS OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARD 2023***

*Three practitioners are recognised for their dedication and commitment to upholding Singapore's intangible cultural heritage and promoting these elements to the wider community and younger generation.*



*The three award recipients (from left to right): Ms Cai Bixia, Mr Osman Abdul Hamid and Mr Raymond Wong.*

**Singapore, 1 April 2024** – The National Heritage Board (NHB) honoured three individual heritage practitioners at ***The Stewards of Intangible Cultural Heritage Award 2023*** today. Launched by NHB in 2019, the award is part of NHB's ongoing efforts to document, safeguard and promote Singapore's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) together with community stakeholders. Each award recipient will receive a S\$5,000 cash award, be eligible for a Project Grant of up to S\$20,000, and enjoy opportunities to showcase and promote their ICH elements at NHB's festivals and programmes.

2 The three award recipients were recognised for their outstanding contributions in the following areas of crafts and practices – “Chinese Opera”, “Malay Dance” as well as “Peranakan beadwork, embroidery and *kebaya* making”. These individuals have demonstrated dedication to and mastery of their respective ICH crafts and practices, actively promoting and transmitting them to both the community and the younger generation. The award recipients were recognised at an award ceremony on 1 April 2024, which was hosted by Mr Edwin Tong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth.

## Celebrating Singapore's living heritage through promotion and transmission of crafts and practices

3 The three award recipients are celebrated as practitioners who have shaped Singapore's living heritage, which embodies our cultures, traditions and values.

4 **Ms Cai Bixia** has championed the traditional art form of Chinese Opera for more than three decades. Since 1997, she has been serving as a Chinese Opera teacher and regularly organises classes and workshops in schools. She subsequently founded the Traditional Arts Centre in 2012 to offer free weekly Chinese Opera classes for children and youth learners, and it has since become a key node for training and development opportunities for Chinese Opera practitioners in Singapore. Beyond teaching, Ms Cai also actively promotes and transmits Chinese Opera by nurturing interest among young Singaporeans and facilitating skill and knowledge exchange within the Chinese Opera community through productions and masterclasses.

5 **Mr Osman Abdul Hamid** has dedicated over four decades to the practice of Malay Dance, assuming multiple roles including dancer, choreographer, director and educator. He has mentored generations of Malay dance enthusiasts in schools, including the Malay Dance troupe Ilsa Tari from National University of Singapore for more than two decades, and worked with the People's Association (PA) as the lead choreographer of PA Talents Malay Dance Ensemble to craft performances for prestigious national events such as the Chingay Parade and the National Day Parade. In 2011, Mr Osman founded Era Dance Theatre, an institution that provides training and development opportunities for younger generations of Malay dancers. Last year, he was also awarded the Cultural Medallion for his achievements and contributions to Singapore's arts scene.

6 **Mr Raymond Wong** is a practitioner in Peranakan beadwork and embroidery with nearly two decades of expertise. As one of the few remaining Peranakan *kebaya* makers in Singapore, he has actively shared his craft through workshops and teaching at LASALLE for more than 10 years. To ensure that his craft remains accessible while maintaining its cultural essence, he also explores new methods and techniques like machine embroidery and digital prints. Most recently, he participated in NHB's *Craft x Design* programme where he teamed up with designers from Aller Row to reimagine traditional Peranakan embroidery into contemporary fashion — bridging the past with the present.

## Recognising the importance of ICH in our everyday lives

7 The three recipients are the fourth 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 17.

8 Ms Melissa Tan, Director, Heritage Policy & Research, NHB, said: “Our living heritage serves as an important anchor of our identity. By celebrating the *Stewards of our ICH*, we want to honour traditions of the past as well as recognise the vibrant cultural heritage that continues to be practised and passed on within our communities today. Each year, we see our recipients incorporate innovative ways to promote and sustain their craft, enabling such cultural traditions to continue to be relevant to younger Singaporeans. We look forward to collaborating with our Stewards to enrich our cultural landscape, and nurture a deep sense of pride in our intangible heritage among Singaporeans, so that more will step forward to support our heritage practitioners.”

9 Ms Cai said: “Chinese Opera is a focal part of my life. It contains good traditional values that are important for us in the Chinese community. Through my own efforts, I strive to elevate my artistic standards to better transmit this form of intangible cultural heritage to the next generation of young audiences. I hope that the Traditional Arts Centre can be a node to harness the strengths of our local Chinese Opera troupes, to strengthen and further Singapore’s brand of Chinese Opera.”

10 Mr Osman said: “I hold a profound conviction that Malay dance culture must not remain stagnant. It should evolve through time, but at the same time, preserve its roots and values. Malay dance is strongly linked to one’s own culture and practices at home, and hence, it is important to nurture the younger generation to understand Malay culture and values.”

11 Mr Wong said: “I love the peranakan *kebaya* and *kasut manek* (beaded shoes) because they are good examples of fusion fashion, which is very much like Singapore’s multiracial and multicultural identity. For me, getting this award not only means that I’ve been recognised for my efforts, but it also means that I have to work harder to document the knowledge which I have gathered for the past 20 years, so that it can be further transmitted to the younger generation.”

12 Please refer to:

- **Annex A** for more information on the award
- **Annex B** for the list of Stewards of ICH award recipients to date
- **Annex C** for projects by past recipients 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. 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, safeguards and promotes intangible cultural heritage, 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

**LIST OF STEWARDS OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARD RECIPIENTS**

<b>Year of Award</b>	<b>Award recipient</b>	<b>ICH practice</b>
2020	Apsaras Arts Ltd	Indian Dance Forms
	Mr GT Lye	<i>Wayang Peranakan</i> and <i>Dondang Sayang</i>
	Mr Michael Ker	Making of <i>Popiah</i>
	Nam Hwa Opera	Teochew Opera and Music
	Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts Ltd	Malay Dance Forms, <i>Dikir Barat</i> , <i>Wayang Kulit</i> , <i>Bangsawan</i>
	Thow Kwang Industry Pte Ltd	Making of Wood-fired Pottery
2021	Mr Almahdi Al-Haj Ibrahim	<i>Bangsawan</i> and Malay Poetic Forms
	Bhaskar's Arts Academy	Indian Dance Forms
	Siong Leng Musical Association	<i>Nanyin</i>
	Mdm Tan Poh Choo	Making of Soya Sauce
2022	Mr Balakrishnan s/o Veerasamy Ramasamy	Craft and Practices related to <i>Karagam</i>
	Mr Syed Yusof Alsagoff	Orchid Cultivation
	Gunong Sayang Association	<i>Wayang Peranakan</i>
	Singapore Wushu Dragon and Lion Dance Federation	<i>Wushu</i> , Dragon Dance and Lion Dance
2023	Ms Cai Bixia	Chinese Opera
	Mr Osman Abdul Hamid	Malay Dance Forms
	Mr Raymond Wong	<i>Peranakan</i> beadwork and embroidery; and Craft and Practices related to the <i>Peranakan Kebaya</i>

**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><u>The Legacy in Me Chinese Opera Training &amp; Performing Programme</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed a new Chinese Opera training programme for young children from age 4 – 12. The training programme comprises of a series of classes and workshops on Chinese Opera fundamentals and culminates in a final performance by the children</li> <li>• In addition to this training programme, Nam Hwa Opera has conducted Culture Fun Camps, a secondary enrichment programme which aims to introduce related elements of Chinese culture and traditions to the children</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>  (2020 Recipient)</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>Apsaras Arts</b>  (2020 Recipient)</p>	<p><u>"Aham" from the Creative Mind to Stage publication</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and printing of a publication that documents a repertoire of past productions staged and performed by Apsaras Arts</li> <li>• Publication includes introductory essays on the dance company's methods and artistic processes in conceptualising and staging Indian dance productions; and commentaries and images that are specific to each production</li> </ul>
<p><b>GT Lye</b>  (2020 Recipient)</p>	<p><u>Wayang Peranakan Podcasts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed a series of 24 <i>wayang peranakan</i> podcast episodes, 10 – 25 minutes each, featuring a range of storylines incorporating <i>Peranakan</i> culture and practices</li> <li>• Each episode also contains English commentary by GT Lye, explaining each scene and providing the cultural background and context</li> <li>• Characters in the podcasts were voiced by GT Lye as well as two other voice actors, which the Award recipient trained and mentored in the art of <i>wayang peranakan</i></li> </ul> <p><u>Online photo-essay on the matriarch character in <i>wayang peranakan</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documented GT Lye's techniques, methods, and thought processes in his transformation into the matriarch, a principal character archetype in many <i>wayang peranakan</i> plays</li> <li>• Featured artistic collaborators of the Award recipient, including stage actors, a baju panjang maker and his long-time hairstylist for <i>wayang peranakan</i> performances</li> <li>• The photo essay was presented with accompanying explanations in text, based on research and interviews</li> </ul>

	<p>conducted with the Award recipient, and subsequently published and shared online</p>
<p><b>Bhaskar's Arts</b> <b>(2021 Recipient)</b></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> <b>(2021 Recipient)</b></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> <b>(2021 Recipient)</b></p>	<p><u><i>Digitalisation of sauce-making workshops</i></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>

*\*Projects for 2021 and 2022 recipients are in the works.*