



THE KUALA LUMPUR  
PERFORMING  
ARTS CENTRE  
*Pentas Seni KL*

# The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre

In 1995, two individuals created history by building the first privately owned and operated theatre in Malaysia below the historic Dataran Merdeka. The individuals were Faridah Merican and Joe Hasham. The theatre was the The Actors Studio @ Plaza Putra.

Then in 2003, flash floods inundated KL and destroyed The Actors Studio's underground complex entirely. It was out of this tragedy that the The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (klpac) was born.

The arts community needed a new home. And history was made yet again. The Actors Studio, YTL Corporation and Yayasan Budi Penyayang joined hands to establish the country's first fully-integrated arts centre. klpac, a non-profit organisation, opened its doors in May 2005.

It has not only been a home to the arts community and a foster home for foreign troupes but it has become the very lifeline that keeps the arts and cultural life in Malaysia alive.

An arts and cultural icon. Historical landmark. Award-winning architectural design.

There is nothing like klpac, really.

# building history

## 1800s

Began as a woodcrafting workshop and sawmill

## 1906

Became part of *Sentul Works*, region's most important railway depot & workshop

## 1940

Bombed during tail end of WWII but was re-built in mid 1940s

## Late 1960s

Converted into a make-shift golf clubhouse but abandoned in early 1990s



The railway depot & workshop in the 1900s

# an icon and home for the arts

A 4-storey building with 7,614 sq metres of space housing facilities that include:

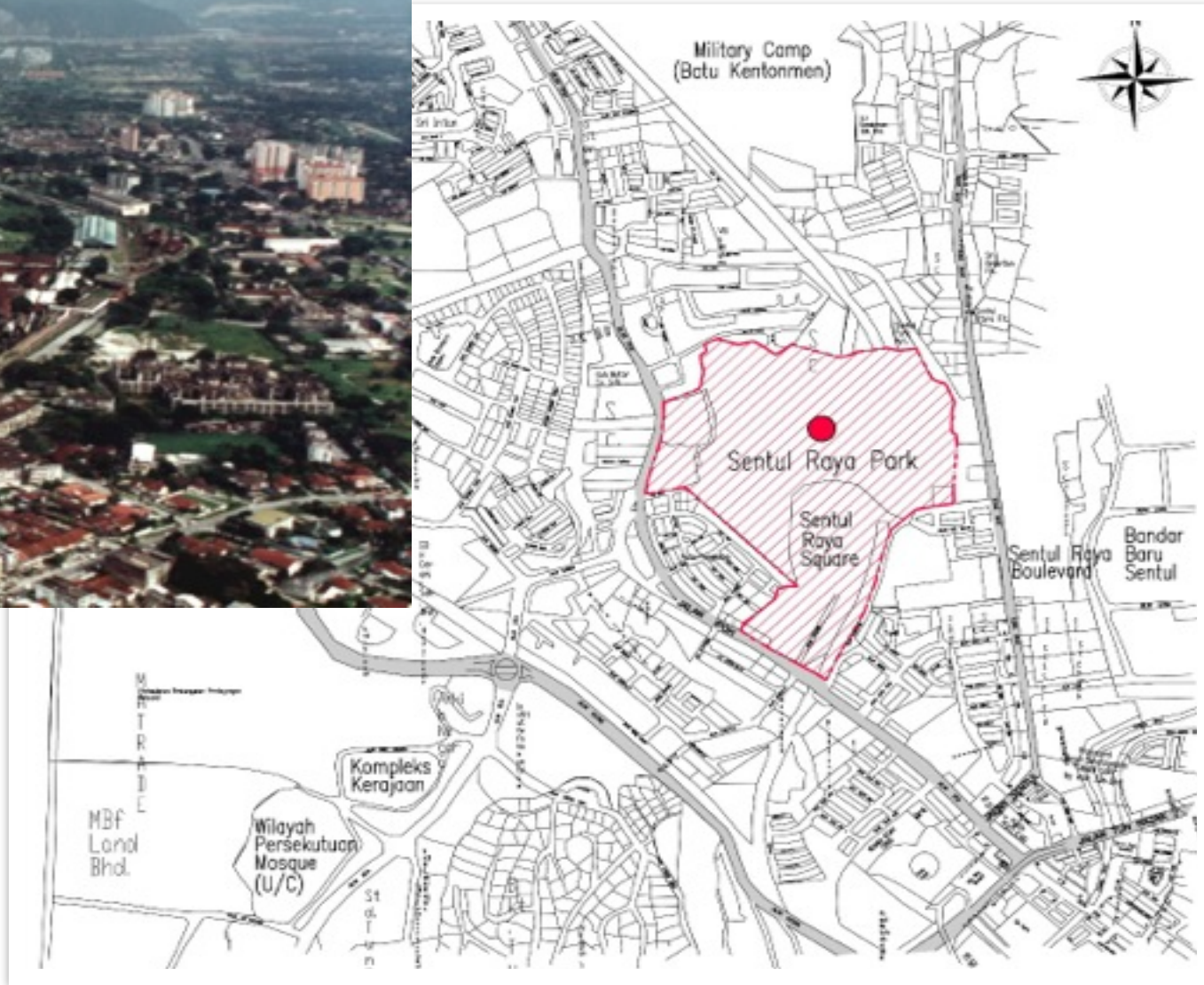
- 504-seater main theatre
- 200-seater experimental theatre
- 10 studios
- IndiCine for independent film
- Set construction workshop
- Café & bar



A shimmering reflection of klpac from the adjacent lake



An aerial view of klpac within a 35-acre park of Sentul West



# architecture & design

- Won the Malaysian Architect Association award in the Adaptive Reuse category.
- Adaptive Reuse – is a process that changes a disused or ineffective item into a new item that can be used for a different purpose. Sometimes, nothing changes but the item's use.
- Retention of historic buildings via adaptive reuse has an “embodied energy” that ensures its survival in a sustainable environment for years to come and be appreciated.



- The external façade of a former train workshop built in the 1900s by the British Army was preserved, and collided with a modern, four-storey glass & steel structure.



Drop-off area, simple & unassuming with The Box Office located outside from the main entrance to avoid long queues and congestion from the lobby area. (above)

Timeworn railway sleepers reused as part of the landscaping to harmonize the old and new. (below)





A green façade of climbing plants growing around stainless steel support that provide environmental aesthetics and a functional purpose as a natural sunscreen.





Inner-illumination emitting through glass walls provides a stunning peek from the outside world.



- Open and airy spaces allowing for flexibility of usage.
- Production and admin office fully exposed from the main lobby – making it easy to interact with the public audience & provide a holistic customer experience.





Set production workshop – located at front by the lobby area for all to see art at work.

Studios are transparent to the outside – designed intentionally to increase awareness and create curiosity of the study & training of the performing arts.



# pentas 1

- Proscenium theatre with 504 colourful seats lends a sense of spatial orientation.
- Wooden blocks on the black wall – black to reflect the building's mysterious past.
- Asymmetrical side walls with pipe composition & timber blocks to enhance acoustics and adds aesthetics of the theatre space.
- Old zinc sheets from the old roof positioned to form the proscenium header.



# pentas 2

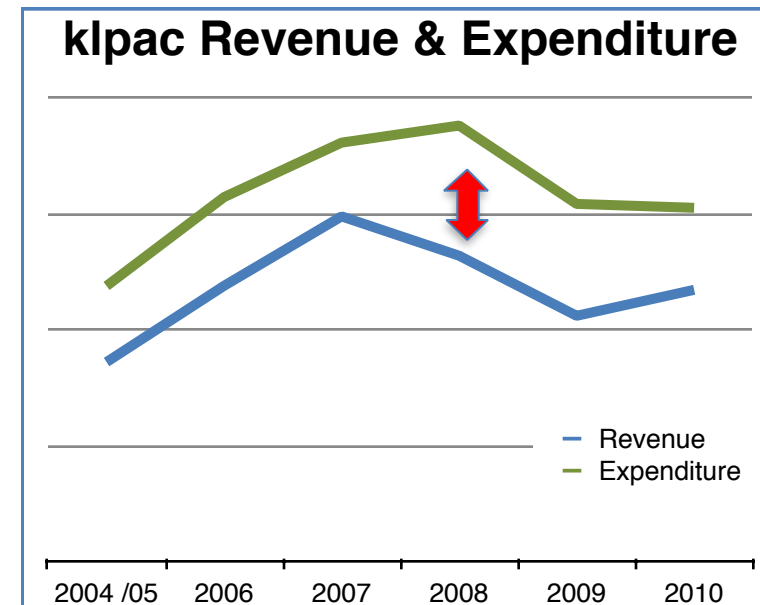
- Experimental black box theatre with 200 seats (modular seating).
- Equipped with a dual-level continuous walkway around the space.
- Flexible lighting and rigging system for optimum design and creative design planning.



# funding challenge

- Why can't arts be self sustainable?

Fixed seating & capacity  
+  
'Live' aspect of performance means little economies of scale unlike cinemas  
+  
Limited productivity improvement (same no. of performers & time)  
+  
Continual rise in cost of goods  
↓  
**Continual Income-Expenditure Gap**



# funding challenge

- Why can't arts be self sustainable?



RM 1,750,000/year  
= USD\$ 534,515/year

20% of Sydney Opera House's funding from endowment

35% of Royal National Theatre's funding from Arts Council England

100% of klpac funding from private corporations

0% from Foundations / Government

# funding challenge

- Theatre Group vs. Centre (klpac) Funding

- Size of klpac's funding requirement unprecedented: Operational Cost RM3m, Funding / Sponsorship Requirement RM1.5m
- Committed to run 365 days / year, unable to cut back like theatre groups
- While groups can keep their operational costs to min & focus on raising money for programme, klpac cannot. Operational costs (tech, manpower, facilities) are of equal importance to programming. Little avenues to fund operational costs as most corporations are unwilling to give to that component



# funding challenge

- A Piece of the Pie

- Arts industry is growing fast but financial support from corporations and government bodies is not growing fast enough
- More arts organisations fighting for a piece of the arts funding pie
- Arts is fighting for a piece of the philanthropy pie against education, sports & community development...arts being the lowest priority in all cases



# implications to personal development

- Funding-worry takes away time / effort on actual work i.e. creating, nurturing, educating
- Insufficient funding limits real growth – not the best talents can be secured, technology used etc
- Value of work, talents & creativity does not increase & appreciated





# cost saving measures

- › Measures implemented over the years
  - **Profit sharing** policy to control production losses
  - Cut back on big shows. Focused on **smaller**, lower-cost productions
  - Did away with staff **overtime**
  - Less collaborations & offered **less subsidies**
  - Reviewed long-term maintenance contracts and opted for **pay-per-use**
  - Do **less with less** e.g. most productions are encouraged to recycle set materials from our workshop or elsewhere
  - **Energy-saving drive** e.g. office lights not switched on until evening, fans used over air con

NET DEFICIT &  
TOTAL EXPENDITURE  
2006 vs. 2010  
↓ DECREASED ↓

# reflections:challenges faced from 2005 -2014 & the creative solutions utilised

## 2005-2007: Introducing klpac to the public

An exciting challenge in the early inception of an arts space in the middle of the city included the main task of introducing its function to its surrounding society.

Why does Kuala Lumpur need another arts space?

The answer came in Dato Faridah and Joe Hasham's vision of introducing and inculcating a form of arts in the lives of the young urban Malaysian. If The National Theatre was famous for its importation of lavish Broadway musicals, klpac shall be the humble vicinity where the young can come to create, express, and perform. In about two years, through popular plays and musicals created, performed, and targeted at the young, klpac has begun its journey as a hub for hip and new creations.



# reflections:challenges faced from 2005 -2014 & the creative solutions utilised

## **2007-2009: Sustaining an arts space in times of economic crisis**

In about 4-5 years, the toll of sustaining a multilevel arts space would come in the form of technical equipment wear and tear, maintenance bills to be paid, and escalating production costs. All these came at a time when the economy was heading towards a slump, and sponsors were pulling out.

How would klpac continue producing art, without closing down its doors?

Dato Faridah and Joe Hasham understood at that time, how in the past, personal sacrifices had to be made for their art to continue; what if we make each and every individual in a production, a stakeholder?

Hence, a profit sharing system was introduced as a temporary mechanism to cope with the crisis. This meant that the director, actor, and even the technical crew would be paid based on the tickets sales; if the production makes money, each cast and crew would earn more. It has to be said though, that this was only a temporary system, and was abolished once financial stability was gained.



# reflections:challenges faced from 2005 -2014 & the creative solutions utilised

## 2009- 2014: Intercultural theatre

In recent years, klpac has found Intercultural collaborations beneficial and important for not only the creative growth of the company but its financial sustenance also.

For example, in the 2010 workshop performance of Irish playwrights conducted by the Ourobos Theatre Company through a collaboration between the Irish Embassy and klpac saw the Malaysian thespians learn from the Irish theatremakers. The project in turn benefitted the Irish Embassy's vision of introducing and celebrating their arts in Malaysia.

The same can be said for 2014's *A Streecar Named Desire*, which saw a collaboration between Japanese and Malaysian dancers.



dato' faridah merican  
executive producer & co-founder



Known as the First Lady of Malaysian Theatre, Faridah's early acting credits include such plays as 'Lela Mayang', 'Tok Perak', 'Uda dan Dara' and 'Alang Rentak Seribu', works that defined the Malaysian theatre in the 60s and 70s, and determined the direction that theatre would take in the next few decades. In the early 60s, she joined Radio and TV Malaysia. Simultaneously, she was involved in the formative years of Malaysian Advertising, and is today, a member of the board of directors of Ogilvy & Mather. She also sits on the board of several other institutions.

In 1989, Faridah co-founded The Actors Studio with her husband Joe Hasham OAM. In June of 2003, floods destroyed the entire complex of The Actors Studio in Plaza Putra, Dataran Merdeka. Out of that devastation, Faridah's 'nothing is impossible' attitude generated yet another ground-breaking event – the birth of The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre, set up by the YTL Group, Yayasan Budi Penyayang and The Actors Studio.

Faridah Merican was awarded the BOH Cameronian Lifetime Achievement Award for 2004. In July 2005, Faridah was conferred the 'Darjah Dato' Paduka Tuanku Ja'afar by the Yang Di-Pertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan on the occasion of His Highness' 83rd Birthday. August 2006, she received an Honorary Master of Letters at University Sains Malaysia's 35th Convocation. Faridah now sits on The Laureate Advisory Board. Faridah is also the Executive Producer and co-founder of the Performing Arts Centre of Penang (penangpac).

joe hasham OAM  
artistic director & co-founder



Joe was born in Tripoli, Lebanon, did his schooling in Sydney, Australia, moved to Malaysia in 1984 and is now a proud permanent resident of his adopted country. Joe is Artistic Director and Co-Founder of The Actors Studio, klpac and penangpac, which he set up with his wife Faridah in 1989. Joe is a graduate of NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Art) at the University of NSW, Sydney, Australia. Before he made the decision to come to Malaysia, he was one of the most sought after actors in Australia. Joe is a multi-award winning film director, actor, writer and recording artist.

Joe was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM), within the Australian Honours System "For Service to the performing arts through The Actors Studio (Malaysia) and The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre; and, as an actor, writer, producer and director".

# Cam on ban!

