

ADVERTORIAL

Taking rice from field to stage

Apsaras Arts artistic director Aravindh Kumarasamy had always wanted to create a dance work that raised awareness on a global issue.

So last year, he started work on a production centring on food security.

"My father N. Kumarasamy had an illustrious career as an irrigation engineer, enabling farmers in Sri Lanka and Indonesia to have access to water for their crops, and this piqued my interest in the tedious work that goes into agriculture," Aravindh told tabla!.

"I realised that rice was not just a staple but had a lot of significance in Asian cultures. This sparked the idea of telling stories about rice and rice culture through dance and music."

ARISI: Rice, a 90-minute dance-music production by Apsaras Arts and Esplanade, will debut on Nov 25 and 26 at the Esplanade Theatre as part of the Indian arts festival Kalaa Utsavam.

"Working on this production was an interesting learning journey, as the universe started to reveal a lot of details – legends, facts, folklore, traditions and more," said Aravindh.

"I had the good fortune of working with Dr Nanditha Krishna, a Chennai-based historian, environmentalist and writer, who shared many different facets of rice and rice culture."

"Her inputs helped me form the content structure for the story. My collaborators from Singapore, India and Indonesia added their thoughts and details, which contributed to the



ARISI: Rice is a musical production by artistic director Aravindh Kumarasamy (left).
PHOTOS: APSARAS ARTS

stage script."

Using the techniques of dramaturgy, which is considered unique in the Indian traditional dance sphere, Aravindh and dramaturge Lim How Ngean brought together elements of choreography, music, set design and

written text to tell the story.

ARISI: Rice has a segment that illustrates the origin of the rice grain as celebrated in Balinese legends and other interesting stories that talk about the cultivation of rice and rice cultures.

Aravindh also worked with Singapore filmmaker K. Rajagopal – a first in Apsaras multi-disciplinary art making – to tell the stories of youth from South Indian farming communities leaving their rice fields to work in urban in cities like Singapore.

"This raises thought-provoking questions on the sustainability of rice cultivation for our future generations," said Aravindh.

Inspired by his mentor Padma Subrahmaniam's philosophy of "hear dance and see music", Aravindh used the music score as the cornerstone in

visualising the production.

"Composer Rajkumar Bharathi created an inspiring music score," he said.

"And music producer Sai Shrivani combined music elements from South and North India, Bali, China and Singapore to create a marvellous musical platform on which we have created the production."

In another first, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra will be performing for an Indian dance production.

Leading principal soloists of key instruments such as the gucheng, yangqin, er hu, dizi and pipa breathe Chinese soundscapes into a music score based on Carnatic and Hindustani melodies.

"Apsaras resident choreographer Mohanapriyan Thavarajah, with whom I've collaborated for over 10 years, has imagined the body movements of everyday farming life and stylised Bharatanatyam vocabularies to create the dance ensemble," said Aravindh.

"His working experience with Prof I Wayan Dibia from Bali also helped him create a cross-cultural collaborative choreography with an interplay of Indian and Balinese classical dances."

"As the costume designer, Mohanapriyan also injected depth into the visual aesthetics by inserting elements reflective of the rice cultures. Wong Chee Wai has interpreted our imaginations into a set design that will enhance the audience's experience."

V.K. Santosh Kumar

Understanding AI and its impact on humanity

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes an integral part of our daily lives, it is important to know how it works and benefits society.

Dr Anton Ravindran, who has been in the information technology industry for more than 30 years and worked for IT leaders such as IBM and Sun Microsystems before becoming an entrepreneur, gives an insight with his book *Will AI Dictate The Future?*

The book talks about how AI is shaping the future of humanity across nearly every industry. It is already the main driver of emerging technologies like big data, robotics and Internet of Things (IoT), and will continue to act as a technological innovator for the foreseeable future.

"AI is probably the most impactful technology in human history," said Dr Ravindran, founder of legaltech firm SmartLaw, founder CEO of GICT, and adviser and practice lead (AI and cloud computing) at Digital Insights Ventures.

"But until five years ago, half of the people didn't know when they were using or experiencing AI. A study also revealed that 70 per cent of consumers have an innate fear of AI."

"AI is already changing our lives and it motivated me to write this book."

AI has been around for 60 years but progressed exponentially only in the last five years.

Dr Ravindran, who was awarded



PHOTO: ANTON RAVINDRAN

Entrepreneur of the Year in 2005 and 2006, wrote that AI in recent years developed three distinct capabilities that are fast becoming pervasive: the ability to recognise objects and images, speech recognition and language translation.

"We are at the last stages of Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI). AI is vast and fast developing with several subsets. It touches all facets of industry, society and life."

The book focuses on the impact of AI on healthcare, manufacturing, law, mobility, financial services, cyber security, higher education, space research and satellite systems.

"AI can search through voluminous amounts of real-time data in different formats, including images, and provide insights on a real-time basis," said

Dr Ravindran.

"It can perform tasks with much more precision than a surgeon or physician, function without burnout and has no emotions."

Singapore's national AI initiative – AI Singapore (AISG) – aims to boost the country's AI capabilities to power the future digital economy. AI is increasingly becoming part of industries such as finance, transportation, education and manufacturing.

Accenture research reported that by leveraging AI, Singapore's manufacturing will grow by 40 per cent to US\$101 billion (\$143b) by 2035, compared to US\$71 billion without AI.

But advances in technology come with both challenges and opportunities. The great promise of AI for humanity, if not managed well, can

also be an existential threat and potential peril.

"AI has become a revolutionary national security technology and it permeates all systems including finance, healthcare, supply chain and even military surveillance, reconnaissance and weapon systems," said Dr Ravindran.

"When managed wisely, AI can change the world for the better."

AI is also becoming smarter and has begun to augment human intelligence.

Amazon has more than 500,000 robots working alongside humans in its warehouses. But this deployment has led to fears that humans will soon be redundant.

"Routine jobs are likely to be replaced by AI because it can exceed human performance, has zero fatigue and is capable of learning to optimise itself," said Dr Ravindran.

"This transformation and consequent disruptions are inevitable. The workforce will have to develop new skill sets. There is no other option."

"According to the World Economic Forum, closing the growing skills gap of the workforce can add US\$11.5 trillion to the global GDP by 2028."

Will AI Dictate the Future? (\$35) is available at major bookstores and online (Amazon, Book Depository, Google and Kinokuniya). All author's proceeds from the sales will be donated to the Singapore Cancer Society.