

3rd Toronto Singapore Film Festival Report



**April 4 -6 2008
Innis Town Hall
2 Sussex Ave, Toronto, Ontario**

INTRODUCTION

The 3rd TSFF is the brainchild of Yeow Tong Chia, a Singaporean currently a PhD candidate at the University of Toronto. He is the film festival founder and director and led a team of volunteers, both in Singapore and Toronto for the 3rd annual film festival.

The Singapore team comprised of 3 members: Kristin Saw, Film Festival Programmer; Vernon Chan, Film Festival Programmer and Cheong Kok Hwee, Film Festival Coordinator.

The Toronto team comprised of 19 Singaporeans, 2 native Canadians, 2 Koreans and 3 Chinese Nationals. Most of the team comprise of students currently studying at the University of Toronto, with a few working professionals.

FESTIVAL PREPARATION

Incorporation of TSFF

TSFF was incorporated as a non profit organization on 15 February 2008, with four directors. The legal status served to establish a legitimate presence and accounting transparency.

TSFF also opened an official bank account with one of Canada's leading bank, TD Canada Trust.

Marketing & Sales Effort

The marketing and sales team comprised primarily of 4 members, of which 2 were full time working professionals and 2 full time student at York University.

Challenge

Time was a big challenge as the team was only introduced in January, three months before the film festival with each member juggling a full time work/study commitment.

Strategy

However, with an existing database culled from the last two years, the team quickly contacted past supporters (mostly from the Malaysia Singapore Association, University of Toronto and Canadian Malaysian radio media Kampung Ku), and also targeted a new list of sponsors.

They include the following industries:

Singapore government agencies, banks, charitable foundations, cultural and student associations, F & B, hotels and printing services.

Achievements

With the short time frame, TSFF managed to secure funding from the Singapore Embassy, various associations and groups from University of Toronto, the Malaysia Singapore Association in Canada and also full sponsorship of printing services.

TSFF acknowledged the following organizations and companies as official sponsors:

Singapore International Foundation

Tourism Toronto

Alfra Dot Ca

The official sponsors were acknowledged with full page color advertisements in the film festival program book, logos on publicity posters and TSFF website, special mention before each screening as well as receiving complimentary tickets to all 7 screenings.

Ticketing and box office

The prices of the tickets were

Single Tickets (includes GST)

Adult \$10
Students & Seniors \$8

Festival Pass (includes GST)	3 Screenings	5 Screenings	7 Screenings
Adults	\$27	\$45	\$42
Students and Seniors	\$21	\$35	\$56



To boost publicity and ticket sales, TSFF undertook several strategies to reach the audience:

- **Online Box Office**

TSFF partnered with Hart House box office, located within the University of Toronto to offer online sales. The advantage of going with Hart house was that it offered the lowest rates to set up an online box office and also had one of the lowest premiums on customers. The charges were as follows:

\$125 for box office set up fee

\$0.15 for every ticket that as printed and collected by TSFF

2% processing fee for tickets paid by Visa/ MasterCard

Sales through Hart House box office accounted for close to 25% (\$555.00) of the total ticket sales.

- **Consignment**

TSFF also distributed tickets to a popular video shop (The Little Video Shop), located close to the University of Toronto, to help sell tickets. The response this year however was not as expected partly due to the fact that publicity materials were given to them only 2 weeks before the actual event. The Little Video Shop sold 3 tickets.

TSFF also distributed tickets to the East Asian Studies Student Association who in turned sold the tickets to its members at a discount (\$1 off)

- **Door Sales**

This accounted for close to 70% (\$1372) of the total ticket sales.

- Complimentary tickets

TSFF extended complimentary festival passes (adult price) to media, sponsors and supporters.

Tickets	No. of passes given	No. of passes claimed
Single Tickets	18	8
3 Screenings	94	16
5 Screenings	16	10
7 screenings	49	24

In addition, TSFF gave away 100 single tickets for the opening film to Cinema Studies Student Union (Cinssu) of University of Toronto, in return for the sponsorship of the theatre rental worth \$900.

Public Relations and Hospitality

Canadian filmmaker Rebecca Hu led the team with strategic initiatives and reached out to extensive Canadian media. Her team comprised of five full time students at the University of Toronto.

PR Success

TSFF was covered this year by radio, television, print and internet media. The event itself was reported in the evening news of two of the biggest ethnic channels in Toronto – Fairchild TV and OMNI television. Festival Director and Founder Yeow-Tong Chia was invited along with filmmaker Jacen Tan as guests to *In Toronto*, a daytime variety program by one of the largest communications network in Canada – Rogers Communications.

TSFF was also covered by some of the highest circulated print media including METRO which has a daily Canadian readership of 950 000, and is the 2nd most read newspaper in Toronto for adults 18 and older. Amongst a slew of other festivals running concurrently, TSFF was the only festival featured by NOW magazine in their coveted festival spotlight.

Furthermore, film critics such as Movie Moxie, after covering the whole festival lineup of TSFF has provided this comment on her online website:

“Short and sweet it leaves us with memories that will last and last. The good news is next year will bring us a new festival. I'm sure it will continue to bring excellent films to choose from and enjoy.”

Volunteers

Two full time Singaporean students studying at the University of Toronto pushed the festival forward with an impressive recruitment drive and training of the volunteers.

Volunteers were recruited through a variety of avenues, but most extensively through mailing lists of university groups and other film festivals. The response was greater than we expected and TSFF had a solid group of around 50 volunteers for the festival. The majority of these volunteers were involved in Front of House activities such as ushering, but volunteers were also involved in hospitality, ticketing and photography.

Volunteers received complimentary tickets to the screenings, depending on the number of hours they volunteered. Based on an evaluation conducted after the festival, most of the volunteers enjoyed themselves greatly and would help out again for the next TSFF.

Film Selections

Singapore team, Kristin Saw (formerly program manager at The Substation, currently with Singapore Film Commission) and Vernon Chan (freelance journalist) selected the films for TSFF. 23 films were screened, of which 7 were feature films and 16 short films.

ACTUAL EVENT



Opening and closing night of TSFF April 6 2008

Film Festival Location

TSFF was held at Innis Town Hall theatre, which is located within Innis College at University of Toronto Campus. The central downtown theatre is easily accessible by subway and is a staple choice screening theatre among film festivals in Toronto such as the Toronto International Film Festival, Toronto Reel Asian Film Festival, HotDocs among many others.

Attendance



Innis Town Hall holds a seating maximum capacity of 250 audiences for each screening.

There were 7 screenings held over the 3 days event.

The opening and closing films both enjoyed close to 80% attendance, while other screenings averaged between 35% -50% attendances.

Audience Demographics

About 80% of the audience was Singaporeans, while 20% made up native Canadians and other nationalities. Out of this, about 85% of the audience was University students, while the rest comprised of University professors and working adults



Large size posters were posted all over the theatre premise to acknowledge TSFF sponsors and supporters

Film Festival Highlights



Q & A with filmmakers

4 Singaporean filmmakers attended the event and held a Q & A session after the screening of their films. They are Kelvin Sng (*Kichiro*), Lee Chee Tian (*Colors*), Elgin Ho (*19/20s*) and Jacen Tan (*Zogang*).

Juan Foo the producer of *Perth* connected with the audience via a live MSN chat Q & A.



Kelvin Sng takes questions from the floor

Singaporean/Malaysian cuisine

TSFF invited a caterer specializing in Singaporean/Malaysian cuisine to set up booth at the film festival venue.

The local delights such as Mee siam, satay, curry puffs, yam cake, and kueh kueh among others were a hit with both Singaporean and Canadian audience.



E snacks catering

Appendix A : 3rd TSFF Sponsors and Supporters

Official Sponsors

Singapore International Foundation (Pending)
Tourism Toronto
Alfra Dot Ca

Festival Sponsors

Singapore High Commission to Canada
Cinema Studies Student Union (Cinssu)
York University

- Asia Business and Management Programme, York University
- Urban Studies Program, Division of Social Science, York University
- City Institute at York University

Dr David Chu Program in Asia Pacific Studies Font to be similar to the word “Asian Institute” in the attached logo

Singapore Malaysia Association of Ontario (SMA)
Firefish Design
Derek Leung (Graphic design)
Nelson Wei Tan (Graphic design)

Hospitality Sponsors

Annex Quest House
Revival Bar

Supporters

Industry Partners

HotDocs
Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival
Toronto After Dark Film Festival
The Substation
Singapore Film Commission

Media

Rogers Television
Omni Media
Kampong Ku Radio
Sun TV
Full Moon CKLN-88.1 fm
Metro
Now Magazine
The Indian Express & Divya Bhaskar

Appendix A: 3rd TSFF Sponsors and Supporters (cont'd)

Media

The National Post
Fairchild TV
Media Moxie.com
TIFF Reviews.com
Blog T.O

Box Office

UofTtix Box Office
Little Video Shop

Others

Consulate-General of the Republic of Singapore in Vancouver.
Munk Centre for International Studies
Asian Institute
East Asian Studies Student Union
University of Toronto International Student Union
U of T Chinese Students and Scholars Association

Special Thanks

Junaidah Mohtar, Singapore Film Commission
Professor Tania Li, Asian Institute, University of Toronto
Eileen Lam, Asian Institute, University of Toronto
Dr. Petro Giordan, York University
Colin Geddes, Ultra 8 Pictures
Alice Shih, Fairchild Radio
Alicia Filipowich, York Centre for Asian Research (YCAR), York University
Xiang Rong Hong, Bluerain Studios
Neil Lim, Studios MB
Xianwei Wu, Chocolate Addict
Mr Albert Lee, Vancouver Singapore Club
Zhang Wenjie
Jasmine Ong
Gloria Kim
Eva Ziemsen
Angela Xu Sha
Innis Café
Restoran Malaysia
rOCKERpOET
LIFT Liaison of Independent Filmmakers in Toronto

Appendix: 3rd TSFF Sponsors and Supporters (cont'd)

Toronto International Film Festival

Canadian Film Centre

Black Cat Event Planning

Appendix B: Committee bio

Yeow Tong Chia Festival Founder/Director

Yeow Tong Chia is the Founder and Festival Director of the *Toronto Singapore Film Festival* (TSFF). This festival is the first of its kind to showcase Singaporean films to audiences in Canada. The idea for a festival first came about in 2005 when Yeow Tong produced his first short film, and instead of waiting for a film festival to happen, decided to start one to get his film noticed. The TSFF has achieved tremendous success since its inception in February 2006, playing to full house audiences for the past two years at the popular Toronto downtown theatre, the Innis Town Hall.

Prior to organizing the TSFF, Yeow Tong organised several poetry readings in Singapore in 2004 and 2005 as well as a film screening in the University of British Columbia (UBC) in October 2005. For the successes generated by TSFF, Yeow Tong was interviewed and featured in numerous media, such as the *Singapore Magazine* in its October – December 2007 issue, the *Straits Times* (Singapore) in June 2007, Rogers TV in March 2007 and OMNI TV in February 2006.

Yeow Tong's vision for TSFF is for it to become a one-stop resource centre in North America for Singaporean film, and to inspire other foreign Singaporean communities all over the world to organize their own Singaporean film festivals. Yeow Tong graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History from the National University of Singapore in 1999. He went on to be trained as a teacher with the National Institute of Education in 1999/2000 and began his teaching career in mid 2000. While teaching, Yeow Tong obtained a Master of Educational Management from the University of Western Australia. Currently, he is a full-time PhD candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto.

Appendix B: Committee Bio (cont'd)

May Ho Co-director of Development

As co-director of development, May's main role in the TSFF is developing and fine-tuning its marketing and publicity strategies.

May is an experienced television producer and has worked with several leading production companies in Singapore. Besides having expertise in concept development, May has produced and directed many primetime lifestyle and children's programmes. Her experience also extends to event planning and management. One of her significant accolades is the successful publicity launch of a well-known children's reality series in Singapore.

May recently relocated to Toronto, and is excited to be part of the TSFF. Her skills and experience as a television producer strengthens the TSFF in the areas of marketing and publicity in particular.

With her media background, May has a keen sensitivity to the organizational aspects of film festivals, a solid grasp of creative marketing, and has gained access to valuable industry contacts in Singapore, all of whom have made the success of TSFF a reality.

Virata Gamany Director of Development

Virata Gamany is the President and co-founder of VSM Investments. His areas of expertise include capital acquisition and financial modeling. Prior to opening VSM Investments, Virata served with PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, within their Advisory and Corporate Finance division. While in PWC, Virata practiced accounting and financial advisory and was involved with some of North America's largest commercial real estate investment firms, namely Oxford Properties Group and Realstar Properties Limited.

Born in Malaysia, Virata left home at the age of 15 after winning the Association of South East Nations Scholarship. Always excelling in academia, Virata graduated at the top of his class and came in 2nd at the Rotman MBA School's financial investments competition. Virata also holds a bachelors degree in finance and accounting from the University of Toronto. He currently serves on the board of the Canadian Association of Independent Consultants as Vice President.

Appendix B: Committee Bio (cont'd)

In addition to his financial training and experience, Virata's connection with the Malayan region and North America makes him an excellent contributor to a specifically 'Toronto-Singapore' film festival. His main role in the TSFF involves raising the profile of the festival, implementing new development and marketing strategies, and bolstering sponsorship and publicity.

Rebecca Hu Public Relations and Hospitality Director

Rebecca Hu graduated from the University of Toronto with Distinctions and Honours in the B.Sc program along with double majors in English Literature and Cinema Studies, the latter program in which Hu received the Canadian Scholars' Press Award for her outstanding achievement. It was this love for film that propelled Rebecca Hu to implement herself into the film industry and fulfill a diverse range of positions including Producer, Writer, Director, Assistant Director and Editor. Rebecca Hu has since participated in over 50 productions spanning various countries – productions involving National Broadcasters, high-profile Canadian directors, multi-million budgets and high-profile stars. In 2005, Rebecca Hu was also the recipient of the prestigious Diversity in Broadcasting Award presented by WIFT (Women In Film & Television).

As one of the only 2 Canadians on the Board Committee, she considers it a great honour to be able to celebrate with Singaporeans and Canadians an event that embraces the qualities of multiculturalism, qualities of which Toronto has long prided itself in. Her role as Hospitality Director allowed her to share with the visiting Singaporean filmmakers a slice of what Toronto has to offer, thus furthering Canadian-Singaporean cultural exchange opportunities. And the warm reception and support received from the Canadian media during TSFF is the best testament to the friendly rapport that had been established between these two communities.

Tracy Qin Finance Director

Tracy Qin is the financial director of the TSFF. She is currently working at Forbes Andersen LLP, which provides accounting and consultation services to a wide range of companies. Her professional responsibilities include accounting and coordinating operational audits, preparing tax returns and overseeing the company's financial statements. Several of her clients are companies registered in the Toronto Stock Exchange.

Tracy holds a Bachelor of Business Administration Honours degree from York University (Canada) and is currently reading for a Chartered Accountant diploma. Her three years of accounting and taxation experience in Forbes Andersen places her in good stead as TSFF's finance director.

Emile Dirks
Festival Coordinator

Emile Dirks is a fourth year student at the University of Toronto pursuing a double major in East Asian Studies and Political Science. As a gifted student, Emile has won numerous academic awards and will soon graduate in the spring of 2008. His interest in cinema traces back to the influence of his father, who used to bring movies home from the library for the family to watch over the weekends. These movies were variegated – in Emile’s own words “anything from Toshiro Mifune, Humphrey Bogart, Bruce Lee, Charlie Chaplin, to some swash-buckling Sinbad-esque figure.”

Over the years, Emile’s interest in East Asia had caused him to gravitate towards Asian-directed films. These films were to cover the spectrum -- from Tsai Ming-Liang art house fare on one hand to Wong Jing's wonderful commercial garbage on the other, to all other “interesting stuff” in between.

But after discovering Cinematheque, Robarts Library's film collection, discount VHS cassettes at Queen and Suspect video, along with a slew of cinephiles who directed him towards more diverse crops, Emile’s tastes expanded to arenas beyond East Asia. Nonetheless, the cinema of *Asia*, in particular, those that reflect its history and socio-political culture remain for this festival coordinator a personal touchstone, something which Emile considers “a point of reference as well as a constant point of return”.