EKAMATRA

EKAMATRA ANNOUNCES SHAZA ISHAK AS INCOMING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

SINGAPORE, 1 March 2023 – Teater Ekamatra, one of the longest running ethnic minority theatre companies, is thrilled to announce that Managing Director, Shaza Ishak, will assume the role of Artistic Director, succeeding Mohd Fared Jainal who will step down after a decade in this position.

With this new appointment, Shaza will assume this role with effect from 1 April 2023.

“It is with the utmost pleasure that I welcome Shaza as Ekamatra’s new Artistic Director. Since she came aboard as Company Manager in 2011, Shaza has been tireless in her commitment to uplift Ekamatra’s prominence within our local performing arts landscape. Under her leadership, the company was able to successfully weather the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, even as it pushes the boundaries of creative storytelling with a line-up of critically acclaimed productions with broad appeal. I am very much looking forward to working even more closely with her as we mark this new milestone.” said Ekamatra’s Board Chairperson, Shameen Akbar.

She adds: “As Artistic Director, Shaza will build on this success by exploring new and innovative ways to continue engaging with a rapidly evolving audience, while fulfilling Ekamatra’s aim of championing ethnic minority theatre in Singapore and across the region.”

“Ekamatra has been the mainstay in Singapore’s ethnic minority theatre scene for decades, and I am deeply honoured and humbled to have been entrusted with this role, in an organisation that I have long respected and loved,” said Shaza. “To me, the role of Artistic Director is about being of service to two communities. First, our audiences. As a theatre company, programming high quality works that comfort and challenge our audiences is crucial, and I am looking forward to further strengthening Ekamatra’s offerings in this respect. Second, I am also deeply invested in finding ways to help ethnic minority artists and arts managers thrive, to ensure longevity within the industry. With my experience as a creative producer, I’d like to explore innovative ways to better help Singapore’s artistic community maximise their potential and hone their creative expertise, so that we continue pushing the boundaries of our art as we grow and engage more deeply with our audiences.”

Fared, who leaves Ekamatra to focus on his role as an educator, will continue to serve on the company’s Board of Directors. He shares, “Ekamatra has long been like a second home to me. Over the years since I embarked on this career in the arts as a teenager, Ekamatra has been a shelter, companion, nourisher, and incubator for many a wild, crazy journey of thoughtful exploration. I’ve spent my decade as Artistic Director exploring and enriching the way in which we speak to our audiences, our approach to storytelling, and how we present ourselves in the most arrestingly authentic manner, to the wider world. I am looking forward to my new role on Ekamatra’s Board, and I leave with full knowledge that Shaza will continue to build upon our work and take it to even greater heights.”

Graduating with an MA in Creative Producing from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (London), Shaza was also a participant in Ekamatra's youth development programme, Pesta Peti Putih (White Box Festival) which further fuelled her passion for theatre thereby
leading to greater involvement in the company. From starting out as production crew and surtitlist in 2007, Shaza rose through the ranks to become company manager in 2011, general manager in 2013, and eventually assuming the role of Managing Director in 2020.

As Managing Director, Shaza was instrumental in formulating a new management approach for the company, focused on 2 key areas: artistic development, and organisational resilience.
Seeing the need to ensure the arts continues in its creative development, given limited resources, Shaza introduced new ideas and models of festival and programme management through the Eklectic series and Projek Suitcase which she curated with Fared. She also works to guide and mentor up-and-coming young talents through initiatives such as the Playwrights Development Programme and the upcoming Ethnic Minority Arts Management Programme.

Understanding the need for arts groups to be well supported and resilient – especially during the pandemic – Shaza's motivation to ensure organisational resilience for Ekamatra led to a new grassroots-driven approach and the introduction of a fundraising initiative, "Amboi!" Under its auspices, Ekamatra was able to increase funds raised tenfold within the span of a year, thereby enabling it to better support its artistic development ambitions. She is also embarking on a research project looking at Arts Philanthropy in Ethnic Minority Communities vis a vis Fundraising in Ethnic Minority Arts Companies. The research is expected to have a far- reaching impact on the sustainability of ethnic minority arts companies.

With Shaza's departure as Managing Director, day-to-day management of the company will rest on a restructured leadership team.
Company Manager, Khairina Khalid, will take the helm as General Manager. No stranger to the arts, Khairina brings with her almost a decade of experience, having been with the company since 2014. As General Manager, Khairina will be in charge of managing the company's overall operations and looking into expanding the company's efforts in theatre for young audiences. The company is also excited to welcome another LASALLE alumnus, Anais Adjani, into her new role as Business Development Executive, responsible for supporting the company as it works towards growing its visibility and expanding its audience base through marketing, media, and public outreach.

In the coming year, we can expect the company to roll out reinvented and new initiatives such as the Scripts Development Programme, Ethnic Minority Actors Development Programme, and the Ethnic Minority Arts Management Programme, which will enable the company to focus on creating platforms for both creatives and arts managers, thus furthering its intent on strengthening the ethnic minority performing arts scene in Singapore.