

Love & Other Objects

Directed by Jayampathi Guruge



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RESOURCE PACK
Love and Other Objects

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Love & Other Objects

We at Stages wanted to share our practical and theoretical knowledge gained over the years with young aspiring artists, and with this in mind, initiated the Stages Senior Ensemble workshop in 2017 - a fifteen-week actor-training workshop for students and other young aspiring artists ages 18 and above.

'Love and Other Objects' was the final production devised by students of batch 2019 of the Senior Ensemble workshop. It is the young artists' endeavour to bring what they learnt, over the course of the workshop, into practice.

In a nutshell...

As a group, we decided on the theme of love. This can be deemed as an effort in which we collected from those around us their memories of love and relationships in the form of letters. We felt that this was what best brought forth the truth in their personal experiences in front of an audience.

It's been an year to date, as I unfold these memories of the production. This is my humble attempt to unfold to you, to the best of my abilities, our creative process in this production...

Jayampathi Guruge

Director, 'Love and Other Objects'

First Production

08-09| November | 2018

7:30 p.m.

Goethe Institut Colombo 07



**STAGES ENSEMBLE
WORKSHOP**

Workshops will be conducted by Ruwanthie De Chickera and the artists at Stages Theater Group
For everyone **18 YEARS** and above

AUDITIONS will be held on **12th MAY** between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. at the **WESTERN PROVINCE AESTHETICAL RESORT(NADA)**

WORKSHOPS START on the **18th OF MAY**
9.00 a.m. to 5 p.m. every Friday
A course lasting 15 weeks (120 hours)

COURSE FEE RS. 20,000/=
AT THE WESTERN PROVINCE AESTHETICAL RESORT

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For more information visit:
www.stages.lk

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How it all began...

Before we begin I would like to introduce the artists of the Stages Senior Ensemble Workshop who initiated this show and the guest artists who generously contributed to take this show further...



Rajitha Madubhasha
Architect



Pasindu Hiranya
Prospective Management Student



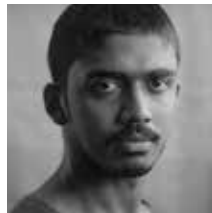
Ashan Lakshan
Model



Gimantha Welagedara
Contemporary Dancer



Dulanjaya Dilshan
Actor



Pathum Dharmarathna
Contemporary Dancer



Kanchana Malshani
Contemporary Dancer

Guest artists in final production...



Palitha Abeyrathne
Musician



Dilrukshi Fonseka
Actor



Nipuni Sharada
Artist, Stages Theatre Group



Piumi Wijesundara
Artist, Stages Theatre Group



Akalanka Prabhashwara
Artist, Stages Theatre Group

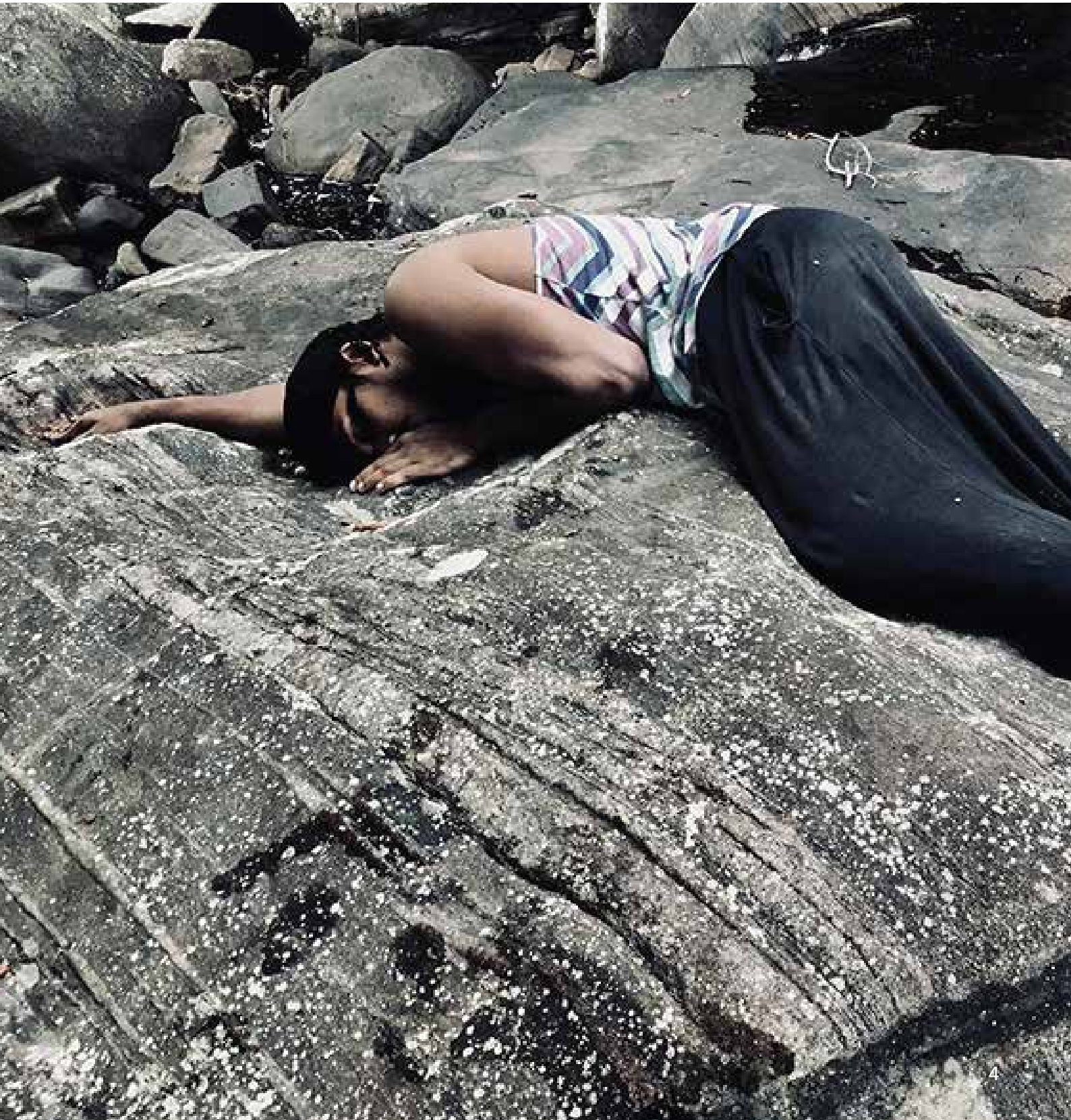
Towards the end of our fifteen weeks ensemble training workshop, I asked the group for ideas and suggestions on a theme they would like to explore as a final creative production where they could present a culmination of their accumulated skills. There was still no agreement on what topic we would settle on. Several ensemble members chipped in with suggestions. One such suggestion was to work around the notion of history. Not many jumped on that bandwagon. Rajitha put forward an idea to work on the quickly-changing landscapes of the city. His reason for the choice being that the workshop had incorporated a lot of work on public spaces. “What if we could go to a place like Slave Island and create a site specific theatre piece?” he suggested enthusiastically.



“Hang on... let’s see what the team wants right now... let’s go on our outbound nature training... work some more... mull over it and see if we come up with something as a group.” I responded.

During the course of the workshop, we had shared different exercises and techniques with the actors, such as: interpretation; body and space; the Alexander Technique; animal studies; breathing exercises; body massages. We aimed to train the actors' bodies and minds with the afore-mentioned techniques. The nature training module of the workshop was the final step of the training process. This involved camping out in nature for three days to share, live and learn from nature.

Workshop syllabus
www.stages.lk



Our location for this training was a quaint and beautiful little village at the bottom of Manigala, a mountain in Matale district, was our location. We got there on a poya day.

We decided to light a bonfire... the starry night... the open fields... and us at the bottom of Manigala staring at the night sky awaiting the arrival of the full moon... With the light winds blowing in our ears... we initiated our discussion. So... what next? What would our play be? What could our theme be? Amid the chitter chatter I distinctly remember Gimantha suggesting “How about we talk about love?” Everyone’s ears perked up. For the first time since we started our discussions around what the play could be, everyone agreed on something. So what needed to be done when something this rare occurred? Clearly we need to create the space for everyone to share their stories of love...



And so it began... one by one the actors released their stories of love into the night sky... What was that first feeling of love? Everyone attempted to translate that feeling into words... The sighs... laughter... cries... embraces... songs...

I felt then that this kind of place and this kind of night would be most ideal to stage this show on love... but.. ah well... one must be practical. We couldn’t transport our audiences to such a romantic space... but what we could do ... was try and recreate this space – in our performance.

And so our creative process had begun... with lots... and lots...

...of love.



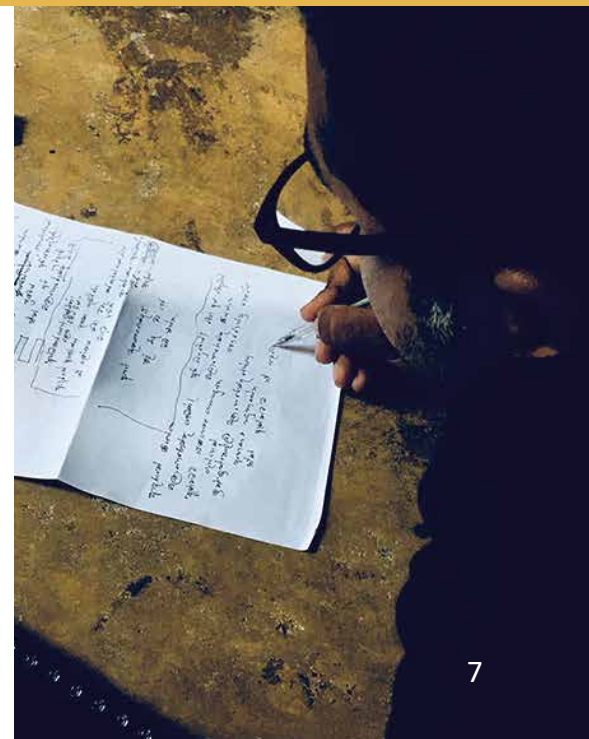
Research, Devising and Rehearsal



Day one... Colombo... Western Province Aesthetical resort (NADA): we had to venture into the great sea that is our theme of love. **Where did this whole idea of letters come from?** Everyone started collecting data. The idea of love letters had been looming in our heads for quite a while now. Alongside this was a discussion that came up about love letters hardly existing, or not being written anymore in this day and age. We asked the older generation what they felt about love letters:

“Back in the day we said everything in a letter. And after having written a letter we would wait days in anticipation for a reply. Sometimes when we’ve written about a problem in a letter, by the time we hear back through post the problem has dissipated. Now you have much swifter ways to type out your words and send them in the instant. Oh the speed at which time changes things.”

Day one, activity one: A letter to our ex-lover. Everyone took some time on their own to dive into this writing task. Two letters that were written here went on to be part of the final performance. Gimantha’s letter to his ex-girlfriend was used as an audiotrack to accompany Kanchana and Pathum’s performance; and the very first letter with which Madubhasha opened the floor of the final production was also one written by him during this exercise.



Inside Stories:

dipping into our pockets we decided to read these letters over a couple of beers we bought. We started retelling stories that we found hard to translate into letters. Everyone tried as best as they could to share their experiences.

We had to shift rehearsal locations. The reason was quite simple, we had run out of money. In fact, we had no money to begin with. So for the most part early days of rehearsal hall booking costs were borne by the group as they could. Finally, the group decided to shift the rehearsals altogether to the Stages Artists' Home in Maharagama. It had sufficient space to accommodate the initial rehearsals. By this time I had already felt that perhaps NADA wasn't the most fitting location for this performance.

For one, there was far too much hustle and bustle at NADA. We thought perhaps a quieter place would have been better suited. From this day to the final day, rehearsals were done at the Stages Artists Home. This became the best decision we took.



Friday was set out as the weekly rehearsal day. We had no stage manager per se. Everyone clearly discussed the dates they could attend rehearsals and the schedule was made accordingly. We continued into the rehearsal true to our theme of love. We faced all practical problems that came our way as a team. And everyone who occasionally dropped by at the Stages Artists Home grew accustomed to sitting in at our rehearsals.

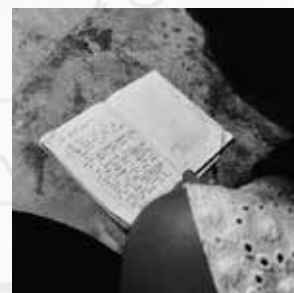
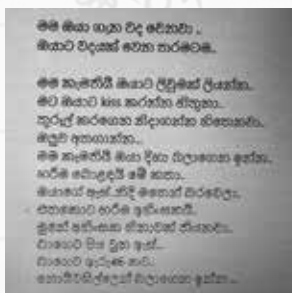


Most of the time rehearsals happened through the night. This meant we couldn't be too loud. This also meant the atmosphere around us was silent. The silence fed the sessions. It helped create a silence through which our words could cut through. While reading our own letters we were also listening into everyone else's letters. Pali's guitar always serenaded the sessions. We all eased into the tempo of this production. All we knew for certain by this point was that we were creating a performance on love. And that we were not going to perform this in a conventional proscenium stage.

We were all in pursuit of a novel form and structure to this performance on love.

Let's refresh our memory on the inception of our love letters...

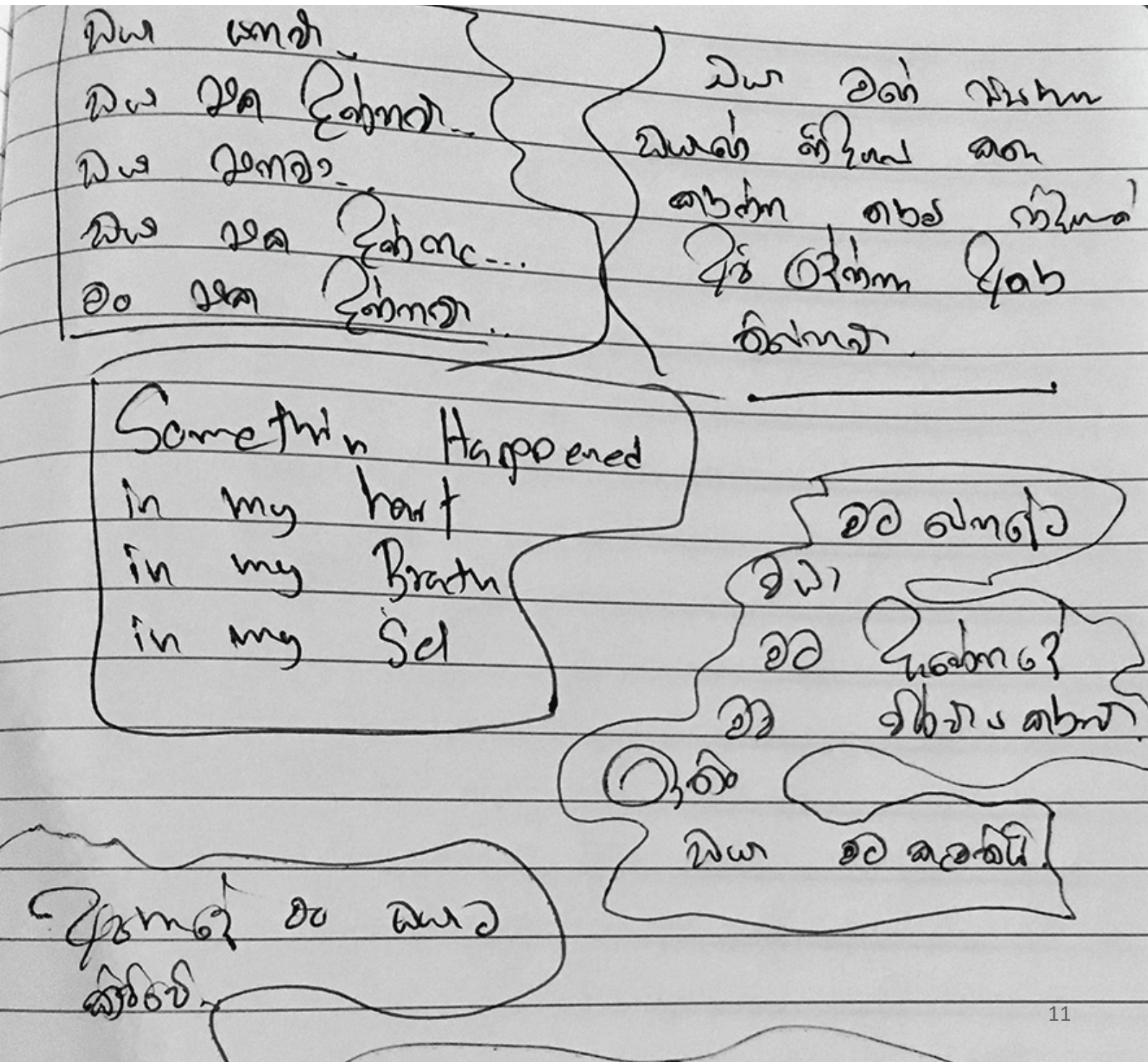
- First, everyone collected actual love letters they had written or received in the past.
- Then in small groups, the team started writing letters under different topics/ circumstances.
- These letters on a single topic were then collected and edited into one condensed letter. This was done in small teams.
- We also wrote stories told to us by our closest friends in the form of letters.
- Everyone kept a notebook throughout this period to scribble down any ideas they thought up, or heard on the topic of love, in their daily life.
- We attempted to write gender neutral letters so that any listener would be able to relate to it to their own life.
- An online questionnaire was created to obtain opinions on the theme of love from external parties.
- We attempted to create a database of letters according to age, geographical location, circumstances. (this final task was not successful).



Through these various methods of writing we felt we were able to cover many bases, and bring in many perspectives to the performance. What we were doing also broadened the literary content of the scripts. While some of the ideas that were brought forward looked impractical to stage, we spent time on figuring out our scope and practical possibilities.

In this manner we kept a regular pace of work and kept writing. Decisions were yet to be made regarding who would read which letters. Decisions were also yet to be made about the form of the performance. The beauty of the process was that the letters slowly started evolving and being tailored organically. Each letter we read had its own beautiful inside story.

We believe these stories were worth relating...



Love and My Darling...

This letter was composed by Ashan during his Ordinary Level days. It was written to the first girl he loved. He brought this letter to a rehearsal one day. I believe this was the first time he realized how naive we could be in love. He couldn't help but laugh at his own writing. He slapped his palm on his forehead. We had first tried to get Ashan to read another letter. However, we had not been too successful in bringing out the true emotions in this attempt. With his own letter – and his first letter of love, we were more successful. The letter from his childhood would be the letter that Ashan would read. The highlight of this letter was just how many times the letter had reiterated the phrase 'mage raththaran' (my darling). And good lord was this letter a long one! I suppose that's how it is in love. It had to be Ashan who read it. It wouldn't be as engaging with someone else reading his letter. With him reading it we could laugh with him at its beautiful naivety while going down memory lane relating it to our own childhood loves.

'I'll be waiting my love... take care my darling... Bless you

I love you my love

I love you my darling

I love you too baby

mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmwah....

How are things at home now?'

Love and Pali...

We needed music. How did we approach this? We called on our friend Pali one day and explained our endeavour. To put it simply, we sat him down and read him a few of the letters. After a few letters, Pali began to tell us his own personal love stories. I remember absorbing the essence of his story and writing out a new letter including the things that he had talked to us about. Once this letter was done, I called Pali. I read the letter to him. I distinctly remember the conversation that came after..

Pali: You shouldn't do this to people...

Jam: Would you like to read this letter at the show?

Pali: I'll have to think about it... I'd have to ask my wife...

Jam: I would like if you would consider reading it...

Pali: I'd like to... I'll let you know.

I remember Pali calling me a day later. "Jaya... I will read that letter". What we actually wanted was to extract the stories of real experiences of love from people who were closest to us. We wanted to provide the space for it. And so Pali joined our team with no expectations whatsoever. As always.

Oh... I have to add this to the Pali story... Our entire performance had a running time of 120 minutes. 13 letters. Pali's letter filled a mere A4 sheet. And yet, it took him 30 minutes to read it. Because he spent more time looking at us in the audience than reading it. He would look us in the eye and communicate the difficulty of reading the contents of the letter. All the welling emotions in his mind were encapsulated in his pauses. All we could do was give him the time he needed to let his words roll off his tongue.

'Let us never again ask each other what we have done for each other. Quite frankly, we both did what we could to secure our relationship...whether it was easy or difficult... we did this. And that's all I know to be true...'



Love, Dil and Nipuni

When the workshop ended, there was only one girl remaining. We felt we needed more girls in the performance.

Piumi – who was not part of the Senior Ensemble workshop agreed to read a letter. But we still needed at least two more female performers. I spoke to a few, and finally Dil and Nipuni agreed to join us.

I remember asking Dil, “Dil, we are doing a new performance (I explained the gist)... Would you like to read one of the letters in our letter bank... or rather, perhaps even write your own and read it?”

Dil asked to refer to some of the letters we had written. A few days later she got back to us saying she would like to write a letter to her ex-lover. We met a few days later, and Dil had a letter she had produced. The letter was about the difficulty of beginning to write a letter to your ex. All we added in were a few ideas to progress the letter.

‘Problem one. How to address you in the letter? Hey there. Hello! My darling. Stop. Start. Stop.

Problem two. How to make the opening statements? How have you been? What’s new? Do you think about me sometimes? Do you miss me? Me, I’m fantastic. Yeah, I’m doing very well. I have good and bad days. Some days I don’t sleep. Sometimes it hurts so much that I can’t breathe. Stop. Start. Stop.’





I think Nipuni had the biggest challenge as a performer in her piece. The nature of the letter required a level of audience participation prompted by her. We wanted to explore what it would mean to overcome the cultural challenges of openly expressing love in terms of a homosexual relationship. We wanted to incorporate into this piece the difficulties and intricate complexities of how societies view a relationship of this nature. So Nipuni would have to select a female audience member who's hand she would hold throughout the entirety of her letter.

How does one overcome the difficulties of openly expressing their love in a same sex relationship? What levels of discomforts must one face due to how society views their relationship? It could only be felt by them. However, during a trial rehearsal Nipuni used contemporary dancer Venuri Perera as her trial participative audience member. Venuri's feedback was helpful for building up the performance as well as Nipuni's confidence to execute it. A significant issue that Venuri raised was that in a performance such as this, we as performers must be cautious and careful when selecting an audience member to interact with. The audience member must be able to trust the performer in the performance relationship he/ she builds. We must also be considerate of the audience member's feelings, and whichever way we make contact with the audience member it was necessary first and foremost to get their consent. A significant feature of this piece was that Nipuni had the opportunity to improvise certain parts of this performance in accordance to the audience member's reactions as well. She had the opportunity to feel out the energy of the audience member and build a relationship accordingly.

"I like you... I've been looking at you. I've watched you be all weird and crazy. I love it."

Inside Stories:

Nipuni and I gauged the audience members as they entered through the door to select which audience member she would interact with for each performance. Once we had figured out which audience member it would be we would pay attention to their certain quirks which could then be highlighted in her performance..

Untold Love

We had all sorts of categories in our bank of love letters. We were starting to sort them and find an order in which to perform them. We made lists. Childhood loves, suspicion, what have you done for me, sorry, a letter to my ex, enough...enough...enough... everything has happened... we started ordering the letters under such titles. And into these categories entered another one: untold love. We all have such stories. And so I collected a hoard of things I had been writing about a certain person and finally finished my letter of untold love. It was simply an emotion... a feeling... a hopeless feeling of hope.

'Everyone knows... Everyone feels... you know... you pretend not to know...'

*"If there was a section that said
An untold
Unwritten Love
That knows that one pretends to
Not know
I would have left that page blank for you

It's a shame
There is no such section
So
There's no such blank page'*

These were the writings we discovered in the midst of our process...



Love, Akalanka and the Bus...

Aka... that's what we all call him. Aka is a full-time artist at Stages. During the rehearsal phase there had been a few raised flags about Aka's discipline in general. Aka had fallen into a habit of lying during the time. I had discussed the issue with Ruwa in utter disappointment. Ruwa would then phrase her answer beautifully, 'Think of him as still young. Give it time. Whatever happens we know he's an incredible actor. People need time to change. But let him know that you are aware of the truth.' One day, out of the blue, Aka asked if he could read a letter. If people had no invested interest they would not ask such questions, and so I agreed. Everyone deserves a second chance.

Inside Stories

By the time he asked me, Aka had in fact already written a letter. He read it out loud to me. It was about the girl he had loved the most. Yet, it was a story he couldn't say out loud. The girl was already in another relationship. The girl reciprocated Aka's love for her. Their entire love story was located inside a bus. She lived 8 hours away from Colombo. Whenever she would travel from home to Colombo and vice versa they would meet. By this time their relationship had ended. "I can finally read this story out loud, after all... this is a play"

By the time he asked me, Aka had in fact already written a letter. He read it out loud to me. It was about the girl he had loved the most. Yet, it was a story he couldn't say out loud. The girl was already in another relationship. The girl reciprocated Aka's love for her. Their entire love story was located inside a bus. She lived 8 hours away from Colombo. Whenever she would travel from home to Colombo and vice versa they would meet. By this time their relationship had ended. "I can finally read this story out loud, after all... this is a play"

It was the third day of rehearsals. Aka read his letter. He finished, walked out of the room, and then broke down crying. All we could do was sit by him as he let it all go. We believed that this may have given him a sense of relief. We really do have to offer people second chances.

I'd almost forgotten to mention, Aka called this girl Suddi.

"People eye us with suspicion. I don't want to lie to anyone... but right now I'm lying to the rest of the world... except you."

Inside Stories:

Disciplinary action...

Final rehearsal. German Cultural Center Colombo. Aka wasn't there, and we had not received prior notice. Nothing to be done but barring him from performing on opening night. No one questioned my decision. I met Aka the same night. "You won't be in the show tomorrow". But by then Aka had already expected this outcome, and understood the consequence of his actions. He performed the following night though. Because, after all we must allow people the space and time to rectify their mistakes...

We might think at times that love is so naive. And yet one cannot love philosophically. Most people sincerely believe there exists such a thing as love in this universe. There are so many memories around the origins of these letters, and there are many stories behind that process. They were so subtly interlinked to our lives and shared experiences. Thus through this process, we went a step further to try and understand the lives of the people in this process. It was a tender journey together.

Love, food and drinks

During rehearsals the ensemble had become family. No one arrived at rehearsals empty handed. Pasindu would bring a large packet of homegrown rice and coconuts. Kanchana would collect everything from her household kitchen and dump them in the artists' residence kitchen. It was like the madwoman's duffel bag. Everyone brought something...sugar...biscuits...tea...everyone had fallen into the habit of bringing along some little bit of food. Everyone shared whatever they brought. Everyone found chores to do in the kitchen as lunch was cooked. Everyone took responsibility and looked out for each other. There were 10-12 plates beautifully lined up for everyone by noon, and whether it was one curry or ten, everyone shared and enjoyed the meals like they were the best they ever had.

Inside stories...

Kanchana started to learn cookery skills. The reason I highlight this is because she was an only child and had no experience of taking responsibility for shared chores, or a communal sense of sharing prior to this process. But with us, I saw her try and change her ways. It took her effort, but she put in her all. And sometimes more than the end production, there are things you learn in the process that you keep for a lifetime.

Drinks.. There is a notion that drinks are rather normal in a circle of artists. It is quite true. By dusk everyone would ask each other what they would like to drink. There were no inhibitions or restrictions in this regard. Sometimes the rehearsals would draw on till morning. Everything would happen in a way that did not hinder this process. Even as they shared a beer the discussion would revolve around the process and production under way. As we shared a night of drinks and light conversation, music would always be featured. A lot of the music that was incorporated in the production was decided on by this time. And due to this light-hearted time drinking being part of our process, we decided that at the performance we should create this very same mood by offering drinks to the audience. Everyone knows love and intoxication go very well hand in hand. So why not?



Love and Other Object....? How was the Title Coined?

to put it quite simply

Love Letters...

Love Poems...

Love Stories

Love Quotes...

Love Presents...

Love and Chocolate...

Love and Songs...

Love and Other Memories...

Love and Other Stories...

Of love and other objects... It was a combination of all the things we collected. As a result we ended up with the title 'Love and Other Objects'

Love and Language

As a theatre group we have attempted to be trilingual in our productions. This was one way we tried to address the language divide in our country. We tried our best to stick to the very same ethic even in this production. We were only able, however, to get halfway there in this production. One of our former decisions was to display subtitles in all languages on-screen. This was not the best idea as it would interrupt the ongoing performances as they were all quite intimate. All in all the performances had 9 letters performed in Sinhala and 4 letters performed in English. Due to the lack of Tamil language speaking actors in the ensemble we sadly did not have any letters in Tamil.



Love and Designing

We had already decided that this production would not be staged in a proscenium stage. We started thinking about the overall design of the production from the early days of devising.... what kind of space would it be? How would we present the pieces? We moved forward giving ourselves the time and space to think about the production design in the process. We had started observing how the whole thing was beginning to get more structural definition.

From the very outset, when we decided we would read the letters, we started improvising with the material we had at hand. As a result of these improvisations:

- some letters were read by two actors.
- one letter was read like it was actually being read out to someone.
- one letter was read by two people were reading it to each other in the presence of a third person.
- some letters were read alone, by individual actors.
- some letters were addressed the audience directly.

Naturally, the nature and format of performance kept changing over the first devising sessions. Through all this I was keen that we retain the believability of the truth in the letters that we had worked on.

One of our turning points came when when the artistic director of Stages – Ruwanthie, who had thus far not been involved in any way in the production - had the opportunity to watch a rehearsal. This was well into the process of devising and quite close to the actual performance. Ruwanthie questioned the inconsistency of performance within the show – for example – some letters were being ‘performed’ some were being ‘read’ some were being ‘shared’. There was also an imbalance of maturity of performance between the students of the workshop and the invited guest theatre artists. These things were leading to an inconsistency within the entire show. Her suggestion was that we evaluate the actual capacity of the entire time and decide on one style of performance which was accessible to everyone.

This was when we decided it would be best for each of us to read one letter individually to the audience. This decision truly made the rest of the decision-making far easier and smoother. This did, however, mean that the performers would now have to very carefully tread the fine line between 'acting' and 'being'.

I will now illustrate a particular acting exercise that delved into this.

The actors were set the task of approaching any unsuspecting stranger in public. We chose Independence Square at a time when it was populated with people exercising and relaxing. The task was for each actor to pick a stranger and then relate their love story to them. The challenge was to do this as naturally as possible so that the stranger does not feel that the actor is performing.

Dulanjaya reprimanded me as soon as his exercise was over:

How can you play with people's lives like this? The man that I told my story to, broke down into tears. He then started telling me his own story. He was convinced my story was real. A feeling of disgust overwhelmed me as I realized I was weaving a lie.

Ashan met three girls. They had listened to his story and then written to him a letter about love. The letter opens with this sentence, "Dear brother, you look like a genuine and honest person". They had also scribbled down Ashan's phone number and are in touch to date. The girls are still unaware that Ashan was engaging in an acting exercise.

The objective of this exercise was for the actors to experience what it would be like to keep up a narrative with a person for a long duration. For the whole duration of the exercise the actor was very self aware of the fact that a story is being fabricated. The exercise was also a way to identify our performance of the self in everyday life. It allowed actors to question their own selfhood. It questioned the boundaries between performativity and real life.

What this day and this experience taught us, however was that people were ready to share openly their experiences of love. They were also willing and keen to listen to other people's tales of love. Thus this experience greatly helped us define the style of our performances. At the end of the day, the scripts, or the letters were stories that belonged to real people, and it was the actors' job to maintain the truth of these pieces to the best of their abilities.

In this manner, the way we approached and read the letters evolved everyday. Yet we did not make this a problem that hindered our process, rather we explored what influenced these changes during the process.

TIONS
→
2000
2000
2000

Then he had "fear" to
perform and go back
- everyone get some feedback

→ As a third try they had
"Anger" to perform.

→ Pranita told he try
to do it in a different way
than real life

Love and Space

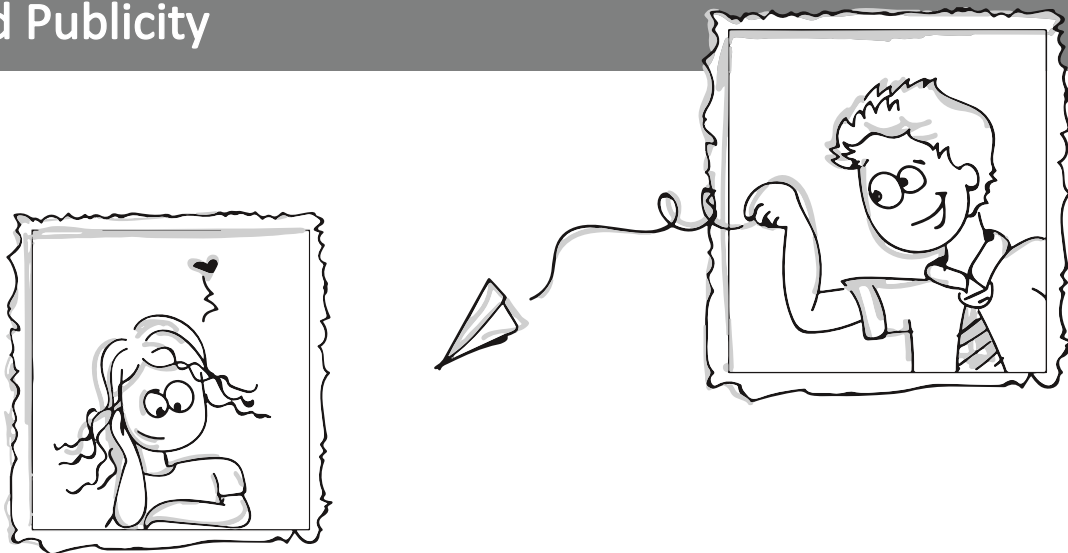
With love as our prime focus, the next big question was where would we perform this? As we rehearsed at different settings, different ideas and opinions began to formulate among us. One such idea was performing this aboard a bus. We get our audience all aboard a bus and take them on a trip around numerous sites in Colombo. We would have a map of the performance sites and times that the bus would arrive at. The locations we picked were Viharamahadevi Park, Independence Square, Galle Face green, etc. We had our eye on places proliferated by lovers. While this was a novel and interesting idea to explore, we simply did not have the infrastructure or the financial backing to go ahead with it.

What if we staged the performance at a bar? This was an idea that emerged as a result of a night out with Madubhasha when we were grabbing a drink at a local pub. Yet given that it was a public space and a bar at that, there could be incidents that could go out of the performers' control, and therefore due to safety concerns this idea was abandoned as well.

The next suggestion was a café. When mulling over this idea, we remembered the outdoor café space at the German Cultural Institute in Colombo. This is when we decided to reach out to Goethe. The Goethe Institut was up for the idea and we had the space. The final few rehearsals were scheduled at Goethe, and at this stage the performance moved from the Goethe café into the hall at the Goethe Institut. When rehearsing in the outdoor café area, something we noticed was the amount of effort we had to put to keep the audience focused on the performances. The weather was not in our favor either. Owing to these reasons we unanimously decided the performances should move into the hall indoors. We believe this last minute decision was one that ultimately worked in favor of the production.



Love and Publicity



Piumi and Madubhasha were in charge of publicity. Piumi had a knack for cartooning. Given the light-veined nature of the production we decided the publicity design would be based on cartooning. And through our publicity we emphasized the fact that this would not be a play, but rather a performance and reading of sorts. We highlighted the fact that we were dealing with letters.

We gave further thought to the kind of relationship we wanted to build with our audience. Most of our audience members were theatre goers and hence would walk in with the expectation of a play. But we wanted them to have a completely different experience. From the publicity design till we handed them their ticket (which was a letter sealed in an envelope) we tried to nuance at the nature of this performance.

Close friends of Stages helped us create the production trailer. Prauda came in on the videography. Venura, as always, did the editing. Given that the performance was only running for two nights, and that too for a limited audience, we did not have to go the extra mile for publicity. We were sold out on the day of the first night.





Love and Audience

We discussed who our audience would be. We had to know the audience we were addressing. Sometimes we addressed people in the audience on quite a personal level, because we knew that some contents of these letters were more than relatable to some of them. Our intent was not to jab or hurt them, but rather, allow audiences to feel and perhaps even realize some things through what they were viewing and listening to. The performances would be intimate and therefore, we decided the audience would comprise of no more than 60 people.

Prior to the show starting, everyone was given access to free wine and beer on the house. The German Cultural Institut was generous enough to completely take on board that responsibility.

Initially we had discussed that we would charge a certain ticketing fee, that would cover our basic costs and expenses of the production. Eventually the German Cultural Institut sponsored the production and covered our expenses. Following this, we decided that we would not charge our audiences for tickets but would allow entry by donation if they wished to.

In place of the conventional audience we wanted to create an active spectatorship, and to create this everyone banded to support us. Because in place of staging a conventional play, what we wanted was to create an intimate relationship with our audience and a space for relaxed sharing and openness.



Love and Music

During the devising and rehearsal process we experimented with music. There were many suggestions floating around. Pali asked everyone of a song that they were reminded of when they read their letter. This sped up the process of finding music for the pieces and the overall performance. We then found the opportunity to use some songs that Pali had composed for certain plays. Of course there were also moments where we thought audiences should be listening only to the words of the letters and hence not every piece came with its own musical accompaniment.

For the opening dance performance by Pathum and Kanchana we decided to use an English song. Pathum selected this song as the two improvised their act during rehearsals. Kanchana, who performed during this piece had little understanding of English. 'To date I am unaware of what the song really means, all I know is that song made me feel something.'

Love and Set

Madubhasha was active in making decisions with regards to the set. We had no elaborate ideas for set from the start. We only knew it would be simple. Firstly we thought perhaps we would leave crunched up letters lying around everywhere. Yet, once we moved into the space we realized there would be no need for this. We felt that the space and the shapes that it offered us were pushing us in a different direction. We figured that all we needed was to make this space intimate and comfortable for the duration of the performance. Once that decision was made the other production decisions flowed quite easily. We decided to use half of the main space as our playing area and to scatter pillows on the floor for people to sit and benches along the walls in the four corners. The objective was to create a space in which audiences were free to move about as they watched the pieces.

As they entered the space, given the audiences could not surmise which way (or end) the pieces would be performed. The actors walked into the space alongside the audience and sat down in places we had already earmarked for performance. The audience was unaware that the performers were among them. As the evening wore on, one by one the actors revealed themselves from within the audience. As each letter began to be read the audience adjusted themselves according to where the voices were coming from.



Love and Costume, Lights, Make up

Costume decisions were made by Dinu. We decided that we would use clothes that we already had instead of designing costumes from scratch. This was partly due to us wanting to camouflage the actors with the audience itself. Dinu decided on a colour scheme, and gave each actor a colour for their costumes. The actors brought in everyday costumes they owned that fit their colour and Dinu took the final decision on their costumes.

The performance space was the hall at the Goethe Institut Colombo. We only used available lighting in the hall. We used lighting that would blend both audience and performer together in the space. We sometimes created focus with the lights that were closer to whoever was performing their piece. This was all the effect that was needed and we saw that the performance did not demand elaborate lighting designs.

In terms of makeup, we decided to go with everyday basic makeup to simply look the way we would in everyday life. It was barely a decision, we knew we did not need elaborate makeup either. I was content at how easily we were able to agree on matters given the way we all felt about the performance.



Love and Feedback

I thought I'd share with you some feedback we got from audience members who participated...

Feedback from Senior Ensemble members who performed and were part of the devising process of 'Love and Other Objects'

"As actors most of us are trained to play on a proscenium stage. As soon as there is no proscenium, trained actors are faced with a challenge."

Rajitha Madubhasha

"I didn't feel it as much as I did on the second night of performance as I did on the opening night"

Pasindu Hiranya

"I thought we were going to do a conventional drama. A stage drama. But this was different. I didn't really get it at first. How could I go about this? Akalanka helped me in my process. Do it your way.... Read it the way you would. So first I started reading it as I normally would, and this is what actually eased me into the act."

Ashan Lakshan

"How would audiences accept this as a play? This was my struggle. This wasn't really a play. And it still was. The people who panicked most weren't the ones in the process but rather those who came in to watch rehearsals. I never thought what I did was exactly an act."

Dulanja Dilshan

"Jayampathi's sole piece of advise was don't act. I was new to performance and since I hadn't exactly acted before I felt this became an easier process for me. I could act without much effort.."

Kanchana Malshani

"Actors – Non Actors if both try to act, we were in trouble."

Palitha Abeylal

“My act did not depend on how much practise I had. I had to engage and interact with an audience member. So each time I did my act it would change according to the audience member’s reaction and I had to improvise. As a trained actor this was quite a challenge for me. On the first day an audience member said that I should not try too hard to act, I had forgotten this. On the second day I improvised and engaged rather than acting. This time around, it worked.”

Nipuni Sharada

“As we were all young and hotheaded we weren’t afraid to take risks and decisions. I think this was contagious.”

Akalanka Prabhashwara

Love and Other Objects Audience Feedback:

”If you stage this, no one would return to a Stages play”

Duminda Sandaruwan

It was tasteful

Daminda Prasad Nandarathne

“This is a brilliant mode of actor training. I could feel the energy that was between the actors themselves. However, we cannot call this a play in a conventional sense. It was a mode of performance. To be quite honest there were moments that I was in and out of the performance as an audience member.”

Kasun Ukwatte

One may wonder if we had no problem with the way things turned out. And this was how it was. We tried to not magnify any problems along the way and enjoy the process right uptill the end. And it was an intimate and beautiful journey for the group.

I am writing this reflection a year since our performance. And yet the loving memories are still etched in the mind of our team.

Love, after all, is a basket-full of loving memories.

Love and Gratitude

My gratitude goes out to

Everyone at Stages Theatre Group who share their love with us everyday.
All participants of the Senior Ensemble Workshop.
Everyone who helped us with no expectations.
Our beloved audience who supports us in our endeavours through the years
Everyone at the Goethe Institut.
Everyone who believes in love
That impulse to offer companionship to someone although we know its a
lonesome journey

.....



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Pathum Dharmarathne
Dulanja Dilshan
Pasindu Hiranya
Ashan Lakshana
Rajitha Madhubhasha
Kanchana Malshani
Gimantha Welagedara

Guest Artists

Palitha Abeyratne
Dilrukshi Fonseka
Akalanka Prabhashwara
Nipuni Sharada
Piumi Wijesundara

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Directed by Jayampathi Guruge

Assistant directed by Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha | Piumi Wijesundara

Music Palitha Abeyratne | Stefan Thirimanne

Costume Design Dinushika Seneviratne

Production Design Jayampathi Guruge | Rajitha Pavithra Madhubhasha |
Piumi Wijesundara

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Ruwanthie de Chickera - Stages Theater Group

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Peter De Almedida | Venuri Perera | Duminda Sandaruwan | Kasun Perera

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This resource pack was produced as part of the 'Artist Research, Archiving and Documentation Project' of Stages Theatre Group.

Through this project, practicing artists engaged in systematic and critical analysis of their own work, analysing a decade worth of theatre productions and processes of Stages Theatre Group. The decade spanned the immediate ten years after the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka (2009 to 2019).

Sixteen resource packs, such as this one, were created for publication in Sinhala, Tamil and English. Each resource pack, written and researched by artists, examines the surrounding socio-political context within which these productions were created and analyses the creative decisions taken within the process. Supporting video material was also created as part of this initiative. All material produced through this research project can be found at www.stages.lk

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DCS 7 Decades of Sri Lanka

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DCS Girls at Checkpoints

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DCS Monologues

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DCS Rwanda

Sri Lanka Collaboration

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Grease Yaka

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Kalumaali: a fairy tale for grown-ups

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Love and Other Objects

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Ovaryacting!

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Love & Other Objects