

STAGES THEATRE GROUP presents

PING!

Virtually
everything
is fine

Directed by

**RUWANTHIE DE CHICKERA
& LIHAN MENDIS**

Written & Devised by

THE STAGES YOUTH ENSEMBLE

* content may be inappropriate without internet internet access





X



Supported by

THE SUNETHRA BANDARANAIKE TRUST

and

THE YUMA FOUNDATION

PG - 16	CONTAINS STRONG LANGUAGE AND MATURE THEMES
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3.30PM

LKR 1000 | 600

7.30PM

LKR 2000 | 1300

BALCONY

LKR 800

SHOW TIMES

27
28 AT THE
29 LIONEL
WENDT
APRIL THEATRE

 **2HRS 10MINS (with an intermission)**

DIRECTORS' MESSAGE ON ***PING!*** AND ***#WATSS***

This play grew out of a question which never should have been asked of adults by children –

Why Are Teenagers So Sad? (WATSS)

Teenage years, throughout history, have always been tumultuous. We have all undergone the heartache, growing pains and challenge of transitioning from childhood to adulthood; but this question is not being put to us by individual teenagers who are undergoing personal hardship. This question is being put to us by an entire generation of children who are now beginning to identify for themselves, that they have been cheated, they have been let down and robbed of something which was their due - the option of growing up, like we did, in a world where they could have been connected to each other, connected to their own growing bodies, a world where the instinct and drive to explore, to challenge to feel invincible could have been at the heart of what it means to be a teenager, of what it means to be young.

By imposing on children and young people a culture of digital dependence, which pushes them to spend large amounts of time in a virtual existence, we have robbed this generation of this youthful drive and this all-important connection that they should be developing with the world around them, with the people in it and with themselves.

For our own convenience, out of our own ignorance or laziness or selfishness – none of which are acceptable excuses – we have allowed our children to be denied this very important rite of passage – from childhood to adulthood.

As a generation these young people are experiencing anxiety rather than

youthful confidence, stress in place of youthful exuberance, apathy in place of the desire to change the world, indifference rather than the drive to explore the unknown, disconnect in place of new, real and exciting relationships, cultural confusion in place of value systems that ground them.

These children/young people did not ask for any of this. They are the first generation to grow up in this manner and we are the first generation of adults to stand by and allow this to happen. We have not done much, definitely not done enough, to help our children, to understand them or to protect them.

And our children are now feeling the impact of all of this. They have identified that something is amiss and they are asking questions of themselves and of us. When they ask the question “Why Are Teenagers So Sad?” this should shame us to our very core, that young people are identifying ‘sadness’ as the quality that most defines their generation and their experience of youth.

The play ***PING!*** and the **#WATSS campaign** are both attempts by young people to address these injustices themselves. We are very proud of this group of young artists who have fought apathy and disconnect and constant distraction and stayed focussed on pursuing this question both creatively and collectively. They may not know it yet, but in their attempts to find answers to this question, they are forming relationships, they are finding purpose in life, they are experiencing what it means to feel invincible and young. They are already transforming.



As adults we would be well placed to listen to them, to encourage them and to work with them to solve these challenges. It is not an exaggeration when we say that the future of the very human race depends on young people having the **SKILLS** and the **MOTIVATION** to work together to address the challenges that face them.

Thank you for coming to watch this show.

Thank you for supporting art at a time of crisis.

We hope you enjoy the show.

**RUWANTHIE
DE CHICKERA**

and

**LIHAN
MENDIS**



Our interest is in you



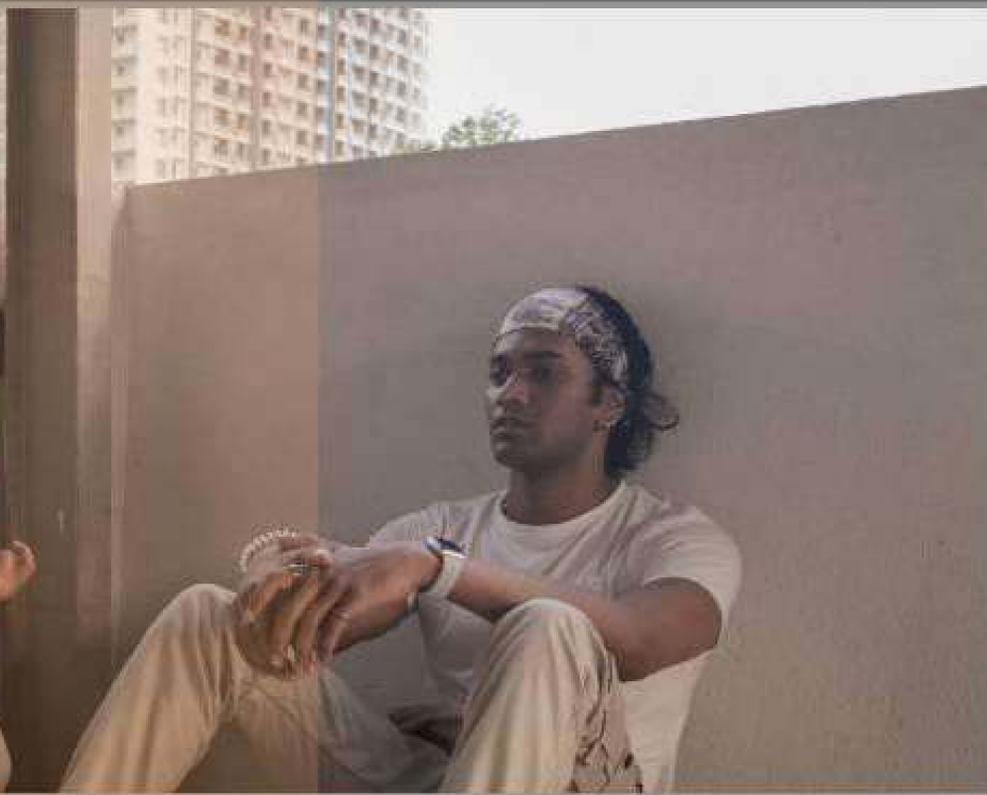
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24

YEARS

OF STAGES

1999 - 2023



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theatre
group

STAGES' PAST PRODUCTIONS

Two Times Two (2000, 2002)

Late Bus Eke Kathawa (2001)

Checkpoint: Three Strangely
Normal Plays (2001, 2006)

Filling the Blanks (2002)

The Mirror Making Factory (2003)

A Poet, a Puppet and a
Papadam (2005)

Cast as Mother (2012)

Kalumaali (2012)

Walking Path - A Play Without
Words (2014)

Dear Children Sincerely...
Seven Decades of Sri Lanka
(2016, 2017, 2019)

The Syrian Monologues (2016)

DCS Monologues (2016 - 2020)

The Certificate (2017)

Girls at Checkpoints (2017)

Thought Curfew (2018)

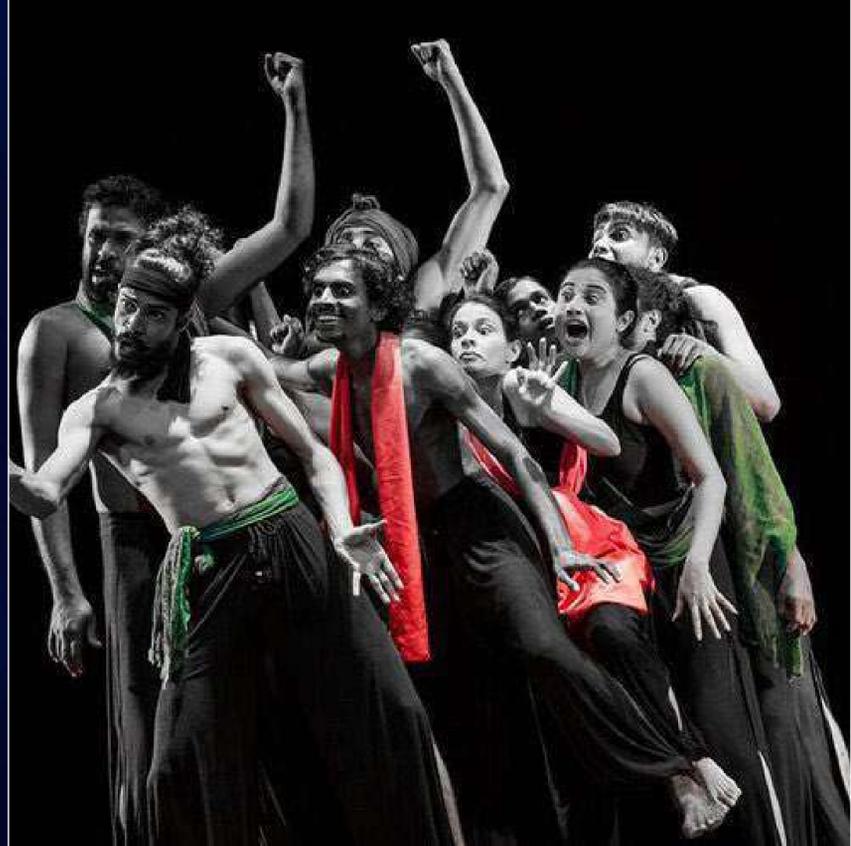
Love and Other Objects (2018)

Awa I Kaawa I Giya:
An Anthology on Migration (2022)

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*Dear
Children,
Sincerely...*



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ARTISTS**

The Youth Ensemble of Stages Theatre Group

THE YOUTH ENSEMBLE OF STAGES THEATRE GROUP

Introducing the Youth Ensemble of Stages Theatre Group, a group of twenty five young and talented artists aged between 16 and 24 who are dedicated to improving their creative abilities and contributing positively to their community.

Since February 2022, despite the political and economic crises in the country, these young people have consistently participated in theatre workshops led by our company's directors, Ruwanthie de Chickera and Lihan Mendis. Their unwavering attendance at these weekly workshops demonstrated their eagerness to learn and grow in the arts. On recognizing the dedication, talent, and potential of these young people, STG decided to focus on developing them into a cohesive group of artists.

The Youth Ensemble's past endeavours as a group include organising their very own protest during the Aragalaya, and creating a short film, titled 'Double Sadness Milkshake', which explored the various personalities that people can adopt and manifest online.

PING! Virtually everything is fine is the group's debut as the official Youth Ensemble of STG. This is just the beginning of what we envision for these young artists. STG is working towards transforming the Youth Ensemble into a self-sustaining Youth Theatre company and applying this model to establish additional youth theatre groups in various regions of Sri Lanka.

The STG Youth Ensemble is inclusive and open to individuals aged 16 to 24, irrespective of whether they are already a part of another theatre group. Our only expectation from potential members is a willingness to work diligently, maintain a growth mindset, and cultivate discipline. If you fit this profile and have a passion for learning about theatre, both onstage and off, please join us! Please contact **Lihan on 077-901-2021** for more details.



PLAY DETAILS!

About the play.

PING! Virtually everything is fine is set in contemporary Colombo, Sri Lanka, and tells the story of young people caught in the crossfire of a country's structural collapse, and the impact social media has on their lives. The play offers a poignant and timely commentary on the challenges faced by both teenagers and their families today.

PING! explores the lives of four families in a middle-income apartment complex in Colombo, centering the perspectives of their teenage children. The story focuses on one teenager in particular: Dirk Anthonisz. Dirk is a mysterious, broody 17-year-old, with an intriguing reputation, and a devastating secret. When Dirk starts to interact with the other teenagers in the apartment block, his secret is leaked, and chaos ensues – in both physical and virtual worlds.

The aftermath exposes the cracks that have developed in relationships between friends and families, cracks caused by the country's collapse, but also by the ubiquity of technology. The play explores how digital dependence has contributed to deteriorating mental health and hopelessness across generations, and asks the audience to consider the cost of their virtual escapism.

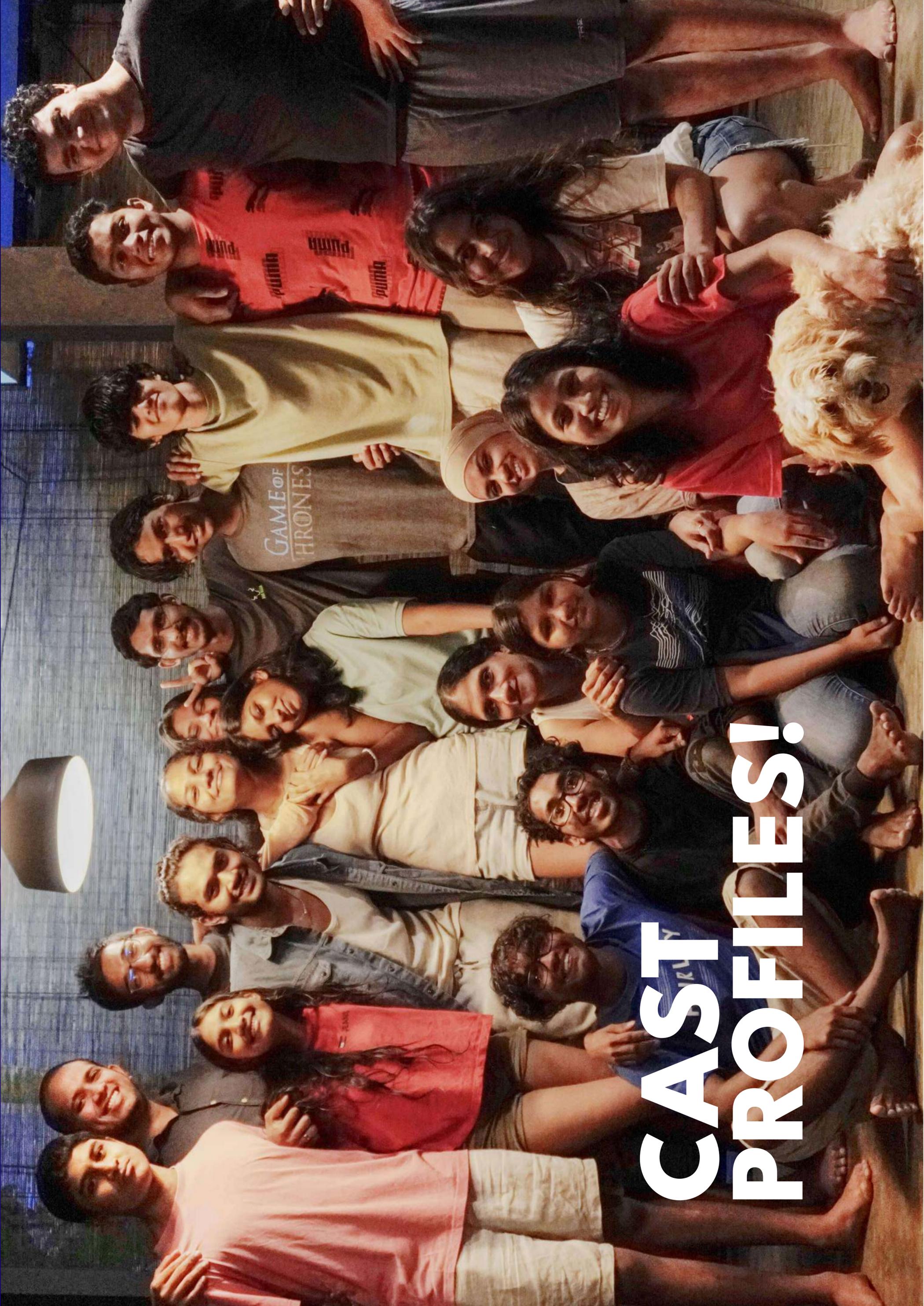
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For our people,
environment
& future

of the latest Stages Theatre show,
PING! Virtually Everything is Fine.



stages
theatre
group



CAST PROFILES!



The
Anthonisz Family

THE ANTHONISZ FAMILY

VISHWA WIJESOORIYA - DIRK

Vishwa Wijesooriya is an up-and-coming stage and screen actor. *PING! Virtually everything is fine* is his debut in a theatre production. Hailing from Kandy, Vishwa has always been passionate about acting, though he struggled to find avenues to fulfil this calling. He took to performance during the COVID lockdown, by generating TikTok videos through the account 'Ammatahudu'. His almost instant success with the medium strengthened Vishwa's resolve to keep pursuing his dream of becoming an actor. In the meantime, he worked as a Banker and undertook part-time modelling. Four years later, Vishwa responded to an open call and was cast as the lead role of Dirk Anthonisz in *PING!* Vishwa feels that this is the turning point he has been patiently waiting for.

NIKHITA ABEYWICKREMA - AYANA

Nikhita Abeywickrema is a 13 year old student from Methodist College, Colombo. She is the youngest artist of this particular production. She is a member of Stages Theatre Group's Junior Ensemble. She was a cast member in *Am I Important?*, the Junior Ensemble production which was staged in December 2022. Nikhita has a keen passion for acting, singing, dancing and sculpting. She is also a part of the School Choir. Nikhita hopes to continue as an actor on the stage and the screen.

THE ANTHONISZ FAMILY

THERUNI INDRAPALA - HAIZLYN

Theruni Indrapala is an actor, singer and drama coach . Her acting credentials include starring in *Candide*, *Yauwane*, *Chaos Lounge*, and two musicals, *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* and *Like You Like It*. She has been acting since 2016, starting off with school productions, and has also participated in multiple inter school drama competitions. Theruni was nominated for Best Supporting Actress and Best Actress at the Inter School Shakespeare Drama Competition in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Furthermore, she won the Fan Favourite award at the Inter School House Cup organised by CT7. Currently, she serves as the drama coach at Visakha Vidyalaya.

SASINDU RANDEEPA - JOHANN

Sasindu is a young performing artist who has harboured a passion for theatre and the performing arts since his school days. He took part in various school plays and was appointed as the Secretary of the Sinhala Drama Society and, during this period, he won a string of awards for acting, directing, and writing. In 2022, Sasindu joined the Stages Theatre Group as a Youth Ensemble member and, under Ruwanthie de Chicckera's instruction, gained further experience as an actor as well as experience as a stage manager and a lights operator. In a personal capacity, Sasindu has also served as art director for a music video ("Nissara Heene"), written the script for one short film (titled "Dice"), and scripted, assisted the director, and played the leading role onboard another (named "Hi"). Currently, he is working on another short film which he has scripted.



The
Yoganathan Family

THE YOGANATHAN FAMILY

NETHRA PEIRIS - KAYA

Nethra Peiris is an actor who has taken part in many drama competitions, including the Inter School Drama Competition. Her past productions include *The Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon (2022)* and, more recently, *12 Incompetent Jurors* in February this year. She is also a part of the Stages' Youth Ensemble. Nethra currently works at Asia Broadcasting Corporation as a news reporter and reader.

ANOUK ABEYWICKRAMA - KAYA

Anouk Abeywickrema is a 16 year old student from Methodist College, Colombo. She is a member of the Stages Theatre Group Youth Ensemble. *PING! Virtually everything is fine* is her debut in a theatre production, and she will be sitting her O/Levels soon after this. Anouk is passionate about acting, creative writing and singing, and is a part of the School Choir at Methodist College. Anouk hopes to continue as an actor on the stage and the screen whilst also pursuing a career in writing.

SHENAYA FERNANDO - YASHO

Shenaya Fernando is an actor, singer, and aspiring chef. She found her passion for theatre and music when she was schooling at Gateway College and when she joined her church choir. Her acting credits include *A Little Princess*, *Big Bad Wolf musical*, *Inspector Incognito* and *the Kansas City Kid*, and *Bedside Manor*. She has taken part in Inter School Shakespeare Competitions and was a part of the group that made it to the finals in 2018. Shenaya has a diploma in Speech and Drama. While she plans to pursue her higher studies in Australia in culinary arts, her heart lies with musical theatre.

THE YOGANATHAN FAMILY

SAMUEL SUNDARALINGAM - YOGA

Samuel Sundaralingam is a writer and actor, mentored under Sri Lankan playwright Ruwanthie de Chickera, at the Stages Youth Ensemble. He was a part of the S. Thomas' College English Drama Society and a winner of the school's 'Arndt Memorial Prize' for English Literature in 2019. He is making his professional debut at the Lionel Wendt with ***PING! Virtually everything is fine.***



The
Dias Family

THE DIAS FAMILY

AKMAL HAMID - RAINN/REHAN

Akmal Hamid is an actor and also has an interest in writing and sound designing. He is one of the company artists of Stages Theatre Group's Youth Ensemble. Akmal has secured a Best Actor nomination, joint Best Supporting Actor and the Best Actor award for the All Island Inter School Shakespeare Competition for the years 2018, 2019, and 2021 respectively. His acting credits include: *Chatroom* – both the filmed version which was part of the Children in Lockdown arts festival organised by Stages Theatre Group in 2021 as well as the stage play in 2022, and a musical event called *Applause 22* which was directed by Jerome L. De Silva. Akmal is currently an A-Level student, having completed his diplomas in Speech and Drama and Performing Arts.

GANAN KUGAN - SHEHAN

Ganan Kugan is an actor and a company artist with the Stages' Youth Ensemble. He is a part of the English Drama Society of S.Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia and was the President of the English Drama society at S.Thomas Preparatory School. While working with the Youth Ensemble, Ganan was elected as one of the youth leaders to partake in the International Youth Forum 2022 which was held in Berlin, Germany.

He is making his debut at the Lionel Wendt with *PING! Virtually everything is fine.*

THE DIAS FAMILY

VISURA PADENIYA - SHEHAN

Visura Padeniya is currently an A-Level student at Elizabeth Moir School. His first performance in a public production was as an ensemble member in the 2022 play *Yauwane* by AnandaDrama. Visura is a past pupil of Ananda College and was a part of the school's English Drama Circle, where he took part in multiple inter school events including the Inter School Shakespeare Drama Competition, Royal College's Drama Comp, and an Inter School Drama Competition organised by Trinity College, Kandy in which he performed a duo skit. Visura is currently a member of the Stages' Youth Ensemble.



The
Saleem Family

THE SALEEM FAMILY

KITHMI RANATUNGA - JAH

Kithmi Ranatunga is a 16 year old student from Methodist College, Colombo. She is a Company Artist in the Stages Theatre Group's Youth Ensemble. This is her debut performance in a theatre production. Kithmi was also one of the supporting writers of the script of *PING!*

Kithmi has a keen passion for acting, directing, writing and dancing. She will be sitting her O/Levels immediately after this production. At Methodist College, she is part of the School Choir and actively contributes to school and house drama productions. Kithmi hopes to continue as a writer, director and actor for the stage and the screen.

AKHIL SKANTHAKUMAR - SHAKEEL

Akhil Skanthakumar is an actor and Company Artist at the Stages' Youth Ensemble. He is currently an A/Level student at S. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia. Previously, he served as the Vice-President of the English Drama Society at S. Thomas' Preparatory School. He made his debut public performance in *The Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon*, a joint production between S. Thomas' Preparatory School and Bishop's College, Colombo. Akhil is making his first appearance with the Stages' Youth Ensemble in *PING! Virtually everything is fine.*

THE SALEEM FAMILY

HAJARAH FALEEL - NOORAH

Hajarah Faleel is an actor, writer and director. She has worked with various international schools in Colombo, and directed the musical, *Shakespeare Rocks*, at Colombo International School in 2023. Her recent work includes playing the roles of Laura and Eva in the play *Chatroom (2021-2022)*. In addition to playing the role of Noorah, she is one of the lead writers of *PING! Virtually everything is fine.*



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PING!

A devised production

What do we mean when we say that *PING!* is a “devised” production?

“Devising” is a collaborative process of creating a piece of theatre from scratch, without a specific story in mind; this allows the plot to gradually take shape based on what works (and what does not!) during the team’s creative attempts.

Whereas most productions begin with an existing script that is usually written by one or a few specific individuals and then acted out and refined, the devising method involves a group of artists (including but not limited to actors, writers, directors, and designers) who work together to develop the material, characters, story, and themes of the production. The devising process is STG’s calling card.

The devising process typically begins with a period of research and exploration, during which the group may read and discuss various texts, conduct interviews, engage in improvisation exercises, and experiment with different performance techniques. This stage is designed to generate ideas, spark creativity, and inspire the group’s collective imagination. In the case of *PING!*, this stage began towards the middle of 2022, during the KNH workshops, with a series of discussions between the Youth Ensemble members and Ruwanthie and Lihan. One question in particular, “Why are teenagers so sad?”, repeatedly emerged in one form or the other during these conversations. The group decided to use this question as a springboard, and began looking more into teenage sadness and what factors could be causing and contributing towards this phenomenon.

The devising process continues with the group beginning to shape the ma-

terial into a more cohesive narrative, refining and revising the work through a series of workshops and rehearsals. This may involve improvisation and experimentation with different staging and performance techniques, as well as incorporating feedback from outside observers and potential audiences. For the rehearsals for **PING!**, Ruwanthie and Lihan would select a few artists from the Youth Ensemble to improvise a scene; the improvisation would be observed by the rest of the ensemble who, when the scene was concluded, would offer constructive criticism. Based on the response, the actors would redo the scene in line with the feedback - even when it meant having to switch roles, substitute or add more actors, or change up the scene entirely. These improvisations would be filmed by ensemble members Kaveesha and Sasindu, so that Ruwanthie and the writers in the ensemble could use the videos as references when creating and furthering the plot. Additionally, most of the rehearsals would include time for the ensemble to sit down together and collectively discuss what they were working on in relation to devising the play. This was helpful in order to make sure they were all on the same page, as well as to brainstorm and get more inspiration that would help further the plot and/or character development. The cast and writers of **PING!** were also taken on a 4 day Lodge Rehearsal at the beginning of April, in order to have uninterrupted time to devise the production.

Throughout the devising process, the group uses a range of tools and techniques to develop the material, including physical movement, music, multimedia, and other forms of nonverbal communication. For example, with **PING!**, Ruwanthie guided certain actors in a visualisation and grounding exercise called “Sandman”, which includes breathing techniques adopted from yoga. Vishwa, who plays Dirk in the production, found that he was able to truly connect to and understand the character following this exercise. He was also able to provide the writers with additional insight into his character and, as a result, the trajectories of the character and the play itself have deviated from what was first conceived.

The goal of the devising method is to create a unique and engaging theat-

rical experience that speaks to the group's shared vision and artistic sensibilities. To quote Lihan addressing the ensemble members, "There is no room for ego here". Due to the nature of the devising process and how it builds on the continued input of so many people, it is not possible to credit (or blame!) just one or two people for how the play evolves.

Ultimately, the success of the devising process depends on the collaborative skills of the group, as well as their willingness to take risks, experiment, and embrace the unexpected.

By working together in this way, the group can create a piece of theatre that is truly original and deeply meaningful to both the artists involved and the audiences who come to see it.

We hope you enjoy what our Youth Ensemble has devised. We will be releasing a Resource Pack in the months following this production, which will contain the script for ***PING!*** and also provide more insight into the devising process and how the characters and plot came to be. If you would like to be notified when the Resource Pack is released, please send us an email at **info@stages.lk** and we will add you to our mailing list.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Directors - Ruwanthie de Chickera & Lihan Mendis

Producer - Lihan Mendis (Stages Theatre Group)

Designer - Hidaayath Hazeer

Head Writer - Ruwanthie de Chickera

Lead Writers - Banuja Nethusara , Hajarah Faleel
& Samuel Sundaralingam

Supporting Writers - Akmal Hamid, Nivedhith Jeyashanker,
& Kithmi Ranatunga

Editing - Niky Pasolini

Lights Design - Ryan Holsinger

Lights Operation - Ryan Holsinger & Kaveesha Wijetilleke

Original Music Composition - Niky Pasolini

Sounds Operation - Shazad Synon & Sahein de S. Wijeyeratne

Stage Manager - Hidaayath Hazeer

Backstage Crew -

Huzefa Gulamhusein, Lakranga Hewavitharana, Murthaaz Barry, Sudeera Chinthaka, Inura Dewasinghe, Chiran Gunasekara, Sandadev Liyanage, Kenolee Ranatunga, Yasiru Sandaruwan, Thisuka de Silva, Dulana Wanasinghe & Chelaka Wijesinghe

Prop Manager - Thisuka De Silva

Projection Design & Operation- Nivedhith Jeyashanker

Front of House Managers - Shazna Zuhyle & Vineshka Mendis

Front of House Crew -

Aisha Anver, Murthaaz Barry, Hanim Abdul Cader, Asuka de Chickera, Joel Clehan, Anuk Fernando, Charya Gamalath, Amanda Halliday, Lahiri Jayasinghe, Ginura Kariyawasam, Okitha Karunadhara, Vihanga Mendis, Kavindi Ranatunga, Roomini Wijayarathne & Methuka Wijerathna

Costume Sponsor - Spring & Summer

Costume Coordination - Chiran Gunasekara & Shacheli Fernando

Makeup Artist - Pasan Samarasinghe

Publicity Design - Hidaayath Hazeer, Naveed Hashim & Kithmi Ranatunga

Promotional Partner - Drama Sri Lanka & Varna Packaging

Digital Souvenir Design - Naveed Hashim, Ayra Wadood, & Rachel Abraham

Souvenir Team - Kavindi Ranatunga, Vihanga Mendis, Niky Pasolini & Lihan Mendis

Social Media Team - Hidaayath Hazeer, Kithmi Ranatunga, Chiran Gunasekara, Chelaka Wijesinghe, Visura Padeniya & Inura Dewasinghe

Cast Care - Anouk Abeywickrema, Chiran Gunasekara, Lakranga Hewavitharana & Sudeera Chinthaka

Cast Refreshments - Fonterra Sri Lanka

Rehearsal Documentation Lead - Vihanga Mendis

Rehearsal Documentation Team - Samuel Sundaralingam, Banuja Nethusara & Murthaaz Barry

Rehearsal Photography - Kaveesha Wijetilleka & Venuki Sesandi

Rehearsal Videography - Kaveesha Wijetilleke & Sasindu Randeepa

Production Photography - Prauda Buwaneka

Production Filming - Malith Hegoda & Team

Finance - Lihan Mendis, Ruwanthie de Chickera, Shazna Zuhyle, Vihanga Mendis, Savanthi de Silva, Shenaya Fernando, Ganan Kugan, Kavindi Ranatunga, Kithmi Ranatunga & Samuel Sundaralingam

Ticket Coordinator - Sandadev Liyanage

Production Assistance - Shazna Zuhyle, Vihanga Mendis, Kavindi Ranatunga, Huzefa Gulamhusein, Shashini Donpawulu & Shazad Synon

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WHY
ARE
TEENAGERS
SO
SAD?

CAMPAIGN

#WATSS CAMPAIGN

The Youth Ensemble was perplexed by the prevalence of teenage sadness among themselves and their peers, which they felt was greater than in previous generations, prompting them to ask and explore the question “**Why Are Teenagers So Sad?**”, which ultimately led to the creation of *PING!* and the **#WATSS** campaign.

The Ensemble realised that social media and technology play a significant role in impacting mental health, especially since most of us – adults and children alike – have unintentionally developed unhealthy habits around technology and social media due to the lockdowns, curfews, and political instability we have had to endure over the past few years. These virtual platforms, which were supposed to connect us when in-person communication was not possible, have become a means of instantaneous escape and avoidance, eroding our abilities to interact in real life and handle in-person relationships and situations. This predicament is even more challenging for young adults and teenagers, because they must deal with these issues as well as the highs, lows, and growing pains that come with growing up.

According to research, mental health issues are increasingly affecting today’s youth, with higher rates of depression being reported. This is a concerning trend as our society lacks sufficient support systems to effectively care for individuals, especially children and teenagers, who are experiencing mental health challenges.

In response to this, the Youth Ensemble created the **#WATSS** campaign to increase awareness of teenage sadness and to help their peers feel less alone, while educating adults who are raising and/or work with teenagers and young people. **#WATSS** began on Instagram and WhatsApp, a month prior to the opening night of *PING!*

The Youth Ensemble members responsible for the campaign – Murthaaz, Chelaka, Inura, and Chiran – would send the rest of the ensemble a particular video or image related to mental health, social media, and/or technology, asking them to share it on their WhatsApp or Instagram story with the caption “**#WATSS.**” The videos and images included influential individuals such as Simon Sinek (author and inspirational speaker), Andrew Huberman (neuroscientist), Tristan Harris (technology ethicist), and Dr Shefali Tsabary (psychologist and author) among others, discussing the impacts that technology and social media have on young people’s mental health.

The social media-based nature of the campaign enables the **#WATSS** message to transcend geographical boundaries and go beyond Colombo and Sri Lanka; allowing and empowering our youth to participate in and contribute to ongoing global conversations surrounding these crucial topics.

For the first two weeks of the campaign, the members posted on Mondays, Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, increasing the frequency to daily posts two weeks before the show. Each post contained the caption “**#WATSS,**” piquing viewers’ interest. Even if viewers did not know what the acronym meant, they would begin to notice a theme given the frequency and content of the posts. Furthermore, if they followed the hashtag on Instagram, they would also discover the publicity posts for **PING!**, realising that the two were linked.

The Youth Ensemble also contacted locally based professionals and activists who specialise in the fields of mental health and education, inviting them to join the **#WATSS** campaign by submitting a short video related to the topic and/or participating in one of the post-show discussions that would focus on what was depicted in the **PING!**

The **#WATSS campaign** will continue even after the conclusion of **PING!**, because it deals with a crucial and relevant topic that is affecting young people worldwide and is one that is close to the Youth Ensemble’s hearts.

STG'S PARTNERSHIP WITH KINDERNOTHILFE

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The Youth Ensemble emerged from a series of workshops that STG conducted in collaboration with the German-based child rights organisation Kindernothilfe (KNH). For the past three years, a significant amount of the work done by STG has been made possible by KNH's generous aid.

The main objective of this collaboration is to provide children with real agency so that they are able to address issues that affect them, through the arts, in the form of public performances in their communities. STG trains artists to run methodical, well thought-out workshops which culminate in a performance that addresses a topic that is affecting the children, and also to build networks with other similar groups. These workshops have proven to be so much more than learning theatrical skills; they have been life changing for some of the children who come from the most vulnerable strata of society, because it has given them a sense of purpose, belonging, and a space to express themselves freely and without judgement.

At present these workshops are conducted in Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Hatton, Welimada, Bogowantalawa, Galle, Piliyandala, Modara, and Colombo (with two groups at the Salvation Army and two groups within STG, namely the Junior and Youth Ensembles); approximately 230 children are currently receiving consistent, high-quality training in the arts through these workshops. The basic premise is for the lead artists of these regional groups to be in contact with each other, in order to share their ideas, expertise, and build networks and so best benefit the children.

Thanks to the funding provided by KNH, all the workshops are conducted free of charge and are therefore accessible to some of the most marginalised children.

Our collaboration with KNH includes Workshop Facilitation Training and Language Learning Courses for artists, also conducted free of charge. The Workshop Facilitation Training is conducted for the artists who work with children and youth in their communities. The training includes guidance and network support on how to improve their teaching and knowledge-sharing skills, helping the artists become better educators and creators. The Language Learning Courses are foundation courses in Sign Language, Tamil, and English, that are made available to artists with the aim of developing and expanding their communication skills, and enabling them to build relationships across various regions and cultures.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of our collaboration with KNH, as well as to refine our own methods, we have been meticulously documenting the work being done, and analysing it using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Our aim is to ensure that these young people are better equipped to succeed in their careers as theatre artists by providing them with comprehensive training and networking opportunities – both locally and internationally – and, more generally, by creating a stronger and more sustainable arts industry for the future generations of Sri Lankan creatives.

If your organisation would like to collaborate with STG in a similar capacity, do reach out to us on email at info@stages.lk.

HOW TO SUPPORT STAGES

If you find the work we do at STG meaningful and you would like to support our efforts, there are several ways in which you can contribute. You could:

- Sponsor a local or international tour of one of our plays. Please call us to inquire about this opportunity.
- Partner with us in our #WATSS campaign, helping Sri Lankan youth engage with each other and communities around the world on the question, “Why are Teenagers So Sad?”
- Make a monthly donation to support the STG artists who run free workshops for youth and children all over Sri Lanka. Your donation will help cover the costs of training these artists, training which includes but isn’t limited to developing workshop facilitation skills and furthering language skills.
- Make a [monthly donation](#) to support the core costs of building the Youth Ensemble of STG.

- Provide non-monetary support for our efforts to build a strong network for the next generation of Sri Lankan artists. Please call us to inquire about ways you can get involved.
- Engage with our fundraising efforts for upcoming projects and our work with youth and children in theatre in Sri Lanka.
- Assist with the workshops we conduct for children, if you are a theatre artist and interested in giving back to the community.
- Intern at STG for a fixed period and assist us with the administrative side of running a theatre company.

Please send us an email at **stageslk@gmail.com** for more information.

PING! **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The entire cast, crew and production team of *PING!* would like to acknowledge:

- The Sunethra Bandaranaike Trust and The Yuma Foundation- we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering support and generous contributions toward this production.
- Our donors - Vinod Hirdaramani, Azra Jafferjee, Christoph Feyen, Azira Esufally, Shakthi Ranatunga, Ruwan Rajapakse, Shiromal Cooray, Commercial Bank, and MHN Holdings - we are deeply grateful for your support and contribution towards this production. Your generosity has made this production possible.
- Our numerous GoFundMe patrons around the world.
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- Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to our valued audience members for joining us tonight and for your continued support of the arts.

