



stages
theatre
group

*Dear
Children,
Sincerely...*

a conversation across generations

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“What keeps the human species evolving creatively is the absence of a sense of mortality in the years of youth. You go on, regardless of what old people tell you of their lives, as if you will go on forever.” (Quote from Sri Lankan transcript)

Stages Theatre Group

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Contents

The project in brief.....	4
Stages Theatre Group	5
Inception of DCS.....	6
Phase 1 (April – September 2015)	7
Phase 2 (October 2015 – February 2016)	7
Culmination of the project - 2017	8
DCS Research Team.....	8
International Collaboration	10
Future Plans.....	10

The project in brief

‘Dear Children, Sincerely... a conversation across generations’ is part research project and theatre production that draws on the stories of Sri Lankans born in the 1930’s. The project archives their journeys to and through independence, through multiple insurrections, a 30 year war, and continuous development and technological progress. The project, through in-depth conversations with senior citizens will take their stories of the journeys, struggles and triumphs that they faced – and bring them to life once again in the form of short performance pieces. These stories will then be performed for Sri Lanka’s youth.

“Our generation made some terrible mistakes. But we must learn to let go. Other generations may not be doing what we would have done. Or may not be doing it in the way we would have done it. We have to face our differences. I really feel we have to have that confidence, in our people. Yes, we made some terrible mistakes. We can only hope they will learn from those.”

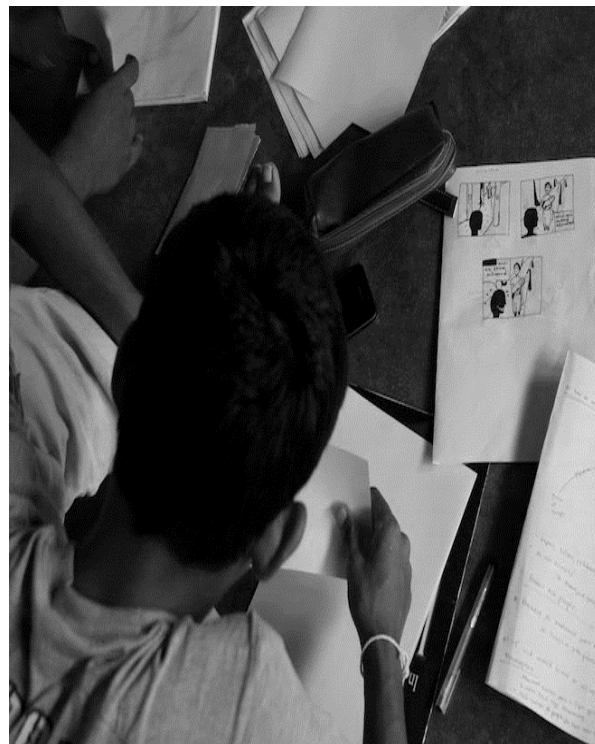
(Quote from Sri Lankan transcript)

Stages Theatre Group

Stages Theatre Group was co-founded in 2000 by Ruwanthie de Chickera as a youth theatre group. We have since become one of the most respected theatre companies in Sri Lanka, and are committed to producing socially conscious theatre of high artistic value.

Our creative process reflects our objectives, as our performances are devised in the rehearsal room and reflect issues that we feel are socially relevant and will challenge the audience to think. As an ensemble we work in both English and Sinhala and are currently working towards becoming a trilingual ensemble group – as we are committed, not only to creating interesting and arresting work on stage, but also to creating ways and means of sustaining the work of theatre beyond live productions, and to sustain and carry the interest of theatre into wider and deeper segments of society – both within Sri Lanka and internationally.

‘Dear Children, Sincerely...a conversation across generations’ is one of our ongoing projects which will bring our creative processes together with in-depth research that will allow us to create a series of stories about Sri Lanka and its people – creating a link between our past and present, bridging gaps between generations and creating a space for a better understanding of the journeys and struggles Sri Lankans have faced over the years.



Inception of DCS

The generation born in the 30's have witnessed so much and have so much to offer. They have not only witnessed many of Sri Lanka's firsts – both the good and the bad (independence, technological advances, insurrections and war) – but have also on occasion had front row seats or a hand in the events that have shaped our country and its people.

Given that they have so much to offer us – we began to consider how these stories might be archived and transported to the youth of Sri Lanka – and so DCS was born.

Dear Children, Sincerely was started in April 2015 with seed funding from the Esufally Foundation. We will draw from the conversations we have with our seniors and create from these, a story bank of approximately 15 performance pieces. Each story will be not more than 15 minutes long and will take on one issue (for example – The Old Left, the Burgher Community, the '71 Insurrection). This will allow us the flexibility to pick performances to suit our audiences and to cover a wide arrange of issues and stories. Since the main purpose of this project is story-telling, the production has been created to be an easily transportable one.

A troupe of 10 actors will be trained to perform these pieces in English, Tamil and Sinhala. They will then travel to schools, universities and communities across Sri Lanka to perform from the bank of performance pieces. The troupe of actors will be able to travel every month to a specific district or province and put up relevant performances and conduct workshops for youth in the area.

“We gave young people this grand education and made them feel they can achieve anything... and thenwe could not support them... Oh the tragedy of it.”

(Quote from Sri Lankan transcript)

Phase 1 (April – September 2015)

A series of 15 interviews were conducted by our research team during the first phase of the project and we began to collect and create stories from the recordings and transcripts of these interviews. Three stories were then selected and have been performed since.

We also participated in the UBUMUNTU Arts Festival of Humanity at the Genocide Memorial Centre in Kigali, Rwanda, in July 2015, where we worked in collaboration with Rwandan artists also involved in the DCS project. The production was a huge success and the collaborating artists were able to arrive at deep insights into each other's and their own histories.

The trailer for the performance can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtKz3bs9Thw>



Phase 2 (October 2015 – February 2016)

Having completed the first phase of this project we are now preparing to move onto the second phase – which involves more research, more conversations, more devising and creating of stories for performance.

While phase one involved interviewing Sri Lankans who were pioneers in their field of expertise or played a role in Sri Lanka's history, we will now be expanding our research with the aim of collecting the stories of various communities. We have also decided to send our researcher's out of Colombo, allowing us to access stories from urban and rural perspectives, and multiple communities in relation to Sri Lanka's rich history.

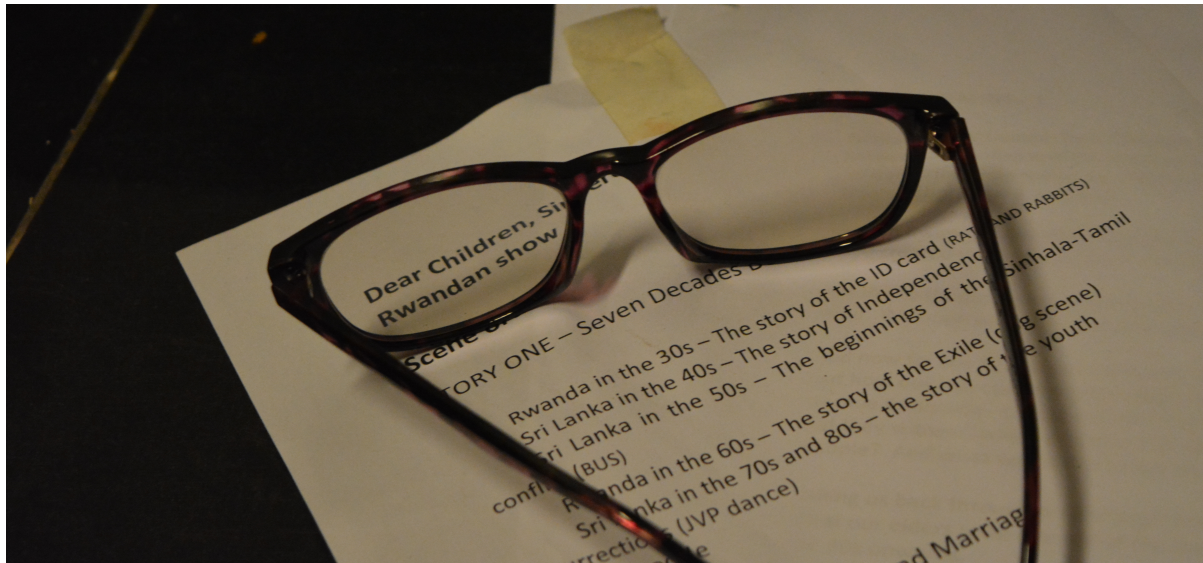
Research and the devising of stories will happen parallelly – as we will continuously be adding to our bank of stories and creating new performances based on the stories we collect.

Culmination of the project - 2017

Over the years we hope to continue to add to our existing bank of stories and to get more and more Sri Lankan youth involved in the process of interviewing and collecting their own stories that will allow them the opportunity to interact with and learn from the elders in our society. We also hope to continue expanding the DCS project overseas, bringing together many more countries so that we might then be able to create and establish a ore collective sense of the world's history.

The project will come to a close in 2017, with a conference to be held in Sri Lanka that will bring together all international collaborators on the DCS project. The conference will afford us the opportunity to see what progress we have made, to share our stories with one another and to also share the performances that have been created across the world as part of this project, with one another – giving us access to our shared history and insights into the various journeys of the worlds multiple communities.

DCS Research Team



Recognising that the material of our conversations will only be as good as the researchers we use, we have taken care to pick a group of well-experienced researchers. Our expanded research team consists of individuals from multi-disciplinary groups, who also belong to different communities in society. This is to allow for more variety, quality and focus in the collection of stories from elders – as our researchers are encouraged to pursue issues of interest to them through these conversations. Our researchers are a mix of lawyers, activists, journalists, business people, artists, and teachers and the team comprises the following members: Gehan Gunatilleke, Dylan Perera, Ruwanthie de Chickera, Nilimini Buwaneka, Sanjeewa Upendra, Halik Azeez, Farzana Haniffa, Gihan de Chickera, Dilkie Liyanage, Deanne Uyangoda, Niran Anketelle, Nagulan Nesiah, Saumya Liyanage, Zainab Ibrahim, Pramila Samarakoon, Akalanka Prabashwara, Nadie Kammallaweera, Azra Feyen and Jehan Mendis.

The members of our research team have been well trained, have all participated in series of mock interviews and have been informed of ethics with regards to interviews. They are well researched and are committed towards seeing the completion of this project.

The group will also, through workshops and demonstrations, encourage young people across the country to engage in similar conversations with their elders in order to create their own stories that relate to our country's past and present.

International Collaboration

Originally conceived of and initiated in Sri Lanka ‘Dear Children, Sincerely...’ was however, in a matter of three months, picked up by several other countries. The project is currently being conducted in 9 countries – Ireland, Rwanda, the DRC, Belgium, Burundi, the UK, Serbia, and Palestine – making it a compelling international theatre project.

While these 9 countries will interview their own seniors and create their own performance pieces, there is also opportunity and interest in collaborations and the creation of comparative and collective performance pieces.

Future Plans

While the focus of our research continues to be local, we look forward to further collaborations with the other countries involved in this project, as such collaborations are not only a good opportunity to learn from one another but also to closely examine parallels and departures in our compared histories. The international nature of this project also provides us with the opportunity to take Sri Lanka’s stories to the world – creating a better understanding of our past and our ongoing journey as a post conflict country.

In creating a bank of stories, that a troupe of travelling actors will then perform across the country – we hope to make these narratives transportable – the bank will allow us the flexibility to pick and choose stories that would be relevant to different communities, audiences and times. The performances are targeted at Sri Lanka’s youth – in the hopes that they will learn from our past and work towards avoiding similar mistakes. We also hope that the stories we perform will help to bridge the gap between generations by making our elders seem more accessible and relatable to younger generations. Through the workshops we will conduct, we hope to inspire our youth to engage with the elders in their communities – be they family, teachers or acquaintances – to seek out stories for themselves, thereby taking on the role of ‘researchers’ for themselves, allowing them the opportunity to ask their own questions which will allow them a better understanding of our past and where our future might be headed.

While DCS functions in part as a means of archiving the multiple narratives of Sri Lanka’s history (and in its international capacity – the history of many other countries), we hope that

it will also carry the value of legacy learning – providing us with multiple perspectives into our history and the events that have shaped our present, that will also allow us to understand and learn from our mistakes.

“So I don’t think there’s anywhere in the world, a minority. I wanted to tell him was I am not a minority of anybody. I am me and my community is this. This is my take and my advice to everybody I meet. You people are not a minority, you are a community.”

(Quote from Sri Lankan transcript)