

MAKING FRIENDS

An intercultural exploration framework in practice

Report from Rumble Theatre

In this report we outline certain practices for engaging a community with whom you wish to work, specifically, about whom you wish to create work. The central theme in our approach is reciprocity. Or, more simply put: making friends.

Below we outline the process we underwent to develop a genuine relationship with our community partners. At each event we met folks who became involved in the project. This process took nearly a year. We're now at the point where we can impact both of our communities (Viet Diaspora and our existing community) in a respectful way.

The timeline below is not meant to be prescriptive, but rather is included to illustrate the amount of engagement required to achieve meaningful connection and trust.

We can now take our approach and findings and test them in the production phase of *Medea*, while also reaching out to new communities through this process in the early phase of other projects.

Our work with the Southeast Asian Cultural Heritage Society (SEACHS) is ongoing. As such, this is a living document that will be completed and shared once the full project is realized.

PROJECT TIMELINE AND HIGHLIGHTED FINDINGS

January 24, 2019

Rumble's Artistic Director and Managing Director (Jivesh Parasram and Christie Watson) met with Community Consultant Thai-Hoa Le, President of the South East Asian Cultural Heritage Society (SEACHS). They discussed pressing issues in the community.

- Key issue that needs to be addressed in the community is intergenerational trauma.
- This can be addressed through art, music, and storytelling.
- Jiv to contact the musician (Vi An Diep) and academic that Thai-Hoa suggested.
- Mui Ngo Gai was proposed as a good meeting place for discussions and small events. They are closed on Tuesdays. We should go there with board of Rumble and the board of SEACHS to officially start this project!

Rumble and Thai-Hoa Le continue to meet or be in touch at least once a week.

Early observations from Thai-Hoa Le: "I know I brought up the expression myself, but instead of "pathologizing" the issue with the expression "inter-generational trauma", we may want to frame it more as an inter-generational disconnect, made acute by complicated history and language barrier? Through the arts, in its many forms, including the ones using language, we can attempt to build that bridge."

February 8, 2019

Tet fundraising dinner at Floata Seafood Restaurant

Managing Director Christie attended this fundraising dinner to meet people in community and support SEACHS.



Photo of Christie Watson (middle), his wife Emelia Symington Fedy (left), and Thai-Hoa Le (right).

February 9, 2019

Kiwassa Lunar New Year lunch with SEACHS performance



Artistic Director and Managing Director attended Kiwassa's Lunar New Year Event. We helped with the event execution and set up for the entertainment (Impromptu)

Met with Mark Gifford (introduced by Thai-Hoa), the Executive Director of Kiwassa Neighbourhood House. He was into supporting the initiative however possible, likely through offering space.

Photos of (left) AD Jiv serving lunch and (right) performers at the event.

February 10, 2019

Lunar New Year Parade

RUMBLE and SEACHS march together.

February 17, 2019

SEACHS Oakridge Mall showcase.

RUMBLE provided tech support.



Spring 2019

Regular meetings with Thai-Hoa Le and other community members while developing *MEDEA* with recent consultation in mind.

June 6, 2019

The SEACHS Board of Directors and Rumble Staff share a meal at Mui Ngo Gai and discuss *Medea*.



June 20, 2019

First public read-through of *Medea* at Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, as part of Rumble's Donor Thank-You event.



Observations by Howard Dai, documentarian:

The first public reading of a new work is usually a cozy event, and only attended by those who also work in theatre; but not for Carmen Aguirre's adaptation of *Medea*. At the Kiwassa Neighbourhood House in the evening of June 20, 2019; more than 50 people, composed of mainly Vietnamese, filled the room with vibrant conversations and excited chatters. It was empowering to see the Vietnamese community coming together, gathered by *Medea*'s community liaison and actor Ty, to support and witness this event. Dijon Kitchen generously catered the room with traditional Viet cuisine accompanied by champagne.

At 7:30pm, the event started as Rumble Theatre's staff gave a rundown of the evening, which was then translated by Thai-Hoa. "You all speak it better than me, why don't you do my job?" said Thai-Hoa jokingly after he was repeatedly corrected for his Vietnamese translation. The room was responsive and alive. When asked if this was the first Rumble Theatre event that anyone has been to, more the majority of the room put up their hand. A performance from SEACHS preceded the reading. Thai-Hoa introduced the dance as being about the successful Vietnamese uprising against the French.

"Both North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese can dance this together", said Thai-Hoa, "this dance is about unity." The gorgeous and uplifting dance was an appropriate prologue to the adaptation backed by a history of conflict within Vietnam. The reading began at around 7:50pm.

The zither accompaniment heightened Linh's monologue, which were modeled after the convention of a Greek chorus's direct address to the audience, driving the narrative and establishes the story's historical context. The audience was engaged and attentive through the two-hour reading.

Instead of the normal talkback format that theatre generally adapts for feedback, a bilingual survey is used, which puts less pressure on the audiences; especially considering most of the room are not frequent theatre-goers and might not be as comfortable with responding verbally and as quickly.

What the audience laughed at:

- *Medea*: (about being with other Vietnamese even though she doesn't like them) at least we speak the same language and I can insult them and they'd understand
- Tuyen's jokes!
- Binh: I will do what the white does: Call the Police.
- Uprising Bread.
- Trickled down
- Scene leading up to sex

like a community gathering, where audience could participate in the work at varied levels of engagement. This was in response to feedback from a June 2019 showing specifically focused on the Viet community that took place at the Kiwassa Neighborhood House. At that event we found that while community members were quite invested in the work, some would prefer to have more mobility, occasionally leaving the room to talk for a short while before and returning. So, for this Performance Works showing, we wanted to explore ways to openly encourage audiences to have more agency while still being able to meaningfully engage with the work. The experience had more of a street market/cabaret vibe, for which we received quite a lot of positive feedback.



Photo of (l-r) Grace Le, Jasmine Chen, and Thai-Hoa Le during the work-in-showing performance of Medea (Aug 15, 2019): Christopher Edmondstone.

Observations by Howard Dai:

Attendance: 41 people.

Performance works. Doors at 7pm, show at 8pm.

Boca Del Lupo residency. Workshop presentation.

A row of seating marking the proscenium of the stage, behind is three cabaret seating tables, then short riser of seats. Lots of gap between seats, so audience could roam freely, eating food and striking conversation.

Food truck “Na Mi” served the audience authentic Vietnamese food for free.

I introduced myself to each group of people with the feedback form.

Puppeteer making the infant as a character with a lot of presence. Visibly intricate and handcrafted. A lot of weight in that puppet.

Accessible projection. Name “billboarding” to introduce character with silhouette that’s quite genius.

August 29, 2019

Viet Without Boundaries

Rumble Supported Initiative | Aug 29, 2019 at PL1422

Produced by SEACHS & Motaam Promotions | Hosted by Huy Ta

This event was a live “talk show” (approximately 60% in Vietnamese, 40% in English) featuring musical performances, video screenings, and interviews with local community celebrities, which we hosted at PL1422. We were able to provide support by way of hiring technical staff, in-kind support in the form of the use of PL1422, and significant in-kind mentorship in live production to MOTAAM, a start-up event group of young Vancouver-based Vietnamese artists. It was held in August 2019 in complement to TaiwanFest: “Riding the Seas with Vietnam”, which hosted Vietnam as their featured partner.



October 12, 2019

ĐẠ CỒ HOÀI LANG (Hello Vietnam)

Filmmaker Nguyễn Quang Dũng | Starring: Hoài Linh - Chí Tài

Rumble Supported Initiative | Oct 12, 2019 at PL1422

Produced by SEACHS & Motaam Promotions

This was a screening of Nguyễn Quang Dũng ‘s film, *Hello Vietnam*, which tells a story of inter-generational silence and misunderstanding between the elder refugee diaspora and the first generation. Rumble was able to provide in-kind technical support and use of our space at PL1422 to host this community event. It was an immensely moving night, as the film directly responds to the intergenerational divide that we have been discussing with SEACHS throughout our partnership. Held in October 2019, it assisted as a fundraiser for SEACHS’ 10-year anniversary event, BANYAN.

November 9, 2019

BANYAN: An Intercultural Ceremonial Performance

Directed by Dennis Gupa

Rumble Partnered Initiative | Nov 9, 2019 at Performance Works

Produced by SEACHS with support from Rumble

We were happy to partner with SEACHS on BANYAN, their 10-year anniversary event of uniquely assembled pan-Southeast-Asian ritual performance, which was created under the direction of Dennis Gupa. Rumble was able to support by way of financial contribution, production support, and providing hired mentors to work with SEACHS community artists in areas such as Stage Management and Production Coordination. The event took place in November 2019 and featured many Vancouver community-based and professional artists from the Southeast Asian diaspora, including Vi An Diep, Kathar Pilipino Indigenous Arts Collective, Grace Chi, Anour Sinthara, Karla Comanda, Ha Sam, and the Srikandi Indonesia Dancers.

