

Go Inter

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Abstract

“Go inter” is a short form of being international recognized. This word is widely used in Thai society especially when someone goes to do some activities in other countries or gain international fame; in this case, cultural activities.

In this 21st Century, traveling overseas is not difficult anymore since there are more choices. Tourists can come to appreciate the arts in the country they love. Artists can also travel overseas to promote their arts. Alternatively, the art appreciation can be done via many ways such as all kind of media. Based on the authors’ experience in cultural performing arts, this article will illustrate how to prepare performances and workshops in order to “Go Inter” or be recognized in this global community. The article would detail steps in which to guide traditional arts performers on how to impress foreign audience or participants and will include audience/ participants’ feedbacks after the activities. The example of a few productions will be shown.

Keywords: “Go Inter,” Traditional Performing Arts, Cultural Heritage Management, Cultural Performing Arts Management

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Figure 1. Thai Khon performances as part of “Ramayana Revisited” at the Peranakan Museum Singapore, February 2011.

Introduction

Amidst an ever-changing modern world, traditional performing arts are fast losing their significance within the global and even local communities. Today, it is not uncommon to find people who are unsure of their own traditions. In response to this challenge, many cultural groups have resorted to improvising their traditional performing arts by incorporating more contemporary flavors. Others however, have chosen to uphold, as much as they can, what they deem to be purely traditional performing arts. In order to do so, it has become somewhat necessary for such traditional performing arts groups to promote their act within a larger international audience. This increasingly popular trend among traditional performing arts groups may perhaps demonstrate their desire to reach out to a wider global community to help create international exposure (and possibly appreciation), thus ensuring the survival of their arts.

These developments within the arts scene can best be described in Thailand by the term, “Go Inter.” As mentioned in the abstract, “Go Inter” basically summarizes the whole process of exporting for example, culture to other countries and the resulting recognition or even popularity of such activities among the international community. Referring to the above point, in English, the word “Go Inter” can actually be explained in several ways. The term “Go Inter” points to the act of going out to the international arena to gain exposure, recognition and appreciation. It may also represent a desire to carve one’s name out among the global players. In illustration of this point, we can today enjoy the traditional Thai dance-drama even in cities as far away as London and Taiwan. In fact in Thailand itself (as in other

parts of the world), the act of exploring the international stage especially in the arts has become so highly sought after, giving rise to the phrase “Go Inter”, familiar to the Thais from all walks of life.

That being said, the term “Go Inter” is considered grammatically incorrect in the English language. This minor detail may simply be a lack of English usage or understanding of the English language among the people who coined the term. Nonetheless, it may possibly point to a larger discourse between the performers’ perception of their art and practice as compared to or in comparison with what the foreign audience/ participants would expect from the former. This point would be further elaborated on later in the article.

From the author’s experiences, many traditional performers are clueless about what they can do on a global stage. They believe that to “Go Inter” is something beyond their capabilities. They assume that one who studies traditional performing arts might possibly have a dim future, or end up being a teacher, or local performer who would never earn enough. That is why very few parents would encourage their children to choose this area as a career or major of study. On the other hand, the author believes that it is not impossible for performers to explore or to expand their arts within the international sphere provided they learn to adapt and manage their attitude and mindset within a global stage.

This article is not meant to be a comprehensive guide for students or performers who want to “Go Inter” or want to earn much. All the same, it is hoped that this article would inspire or motivate more traditional performers to think that “Go Inter” is possible for everyone and that being a traditional performer can be an interesting job and help you earn a living. In this article, it is not only just about “Go Inter” for a short trip but it can possibly be long term “Go Inter” such as being a lecturer or an instructor or a traditional performer in other countries. It is hoped that traditional performers would expand their act and knowledge to a worldwide audience and global society instead of focusing solely on the native countries of their arts.

While this article is written in reference to the direct experience of the author and of her assistants, friends, and people around, its main aim is to equip traditional performers with some pointers on what they can do before embarking on the quest to “Go Inter.” In this article, the authors will use various case studies and examples of the director’s experiences and business ““Absolutely Thai”” on organizing international cultural activities and international traditional performing arts in various countries including Singapore, Indonesia, United Kingdom, Taiwan. Hopefully, this article can be useful for all traditional performers and students, as well as for those who are interested.

Let us now look at the background of Miss Paphutsorn Wongratanapitak (Miss Koong), the Director of “Absolutely Thai.” As the director, she has unofficially and officially “Go(ne) Inter” since 1993 and 2002 respectively. In spite of this, she believes that without the support of family, teachers, friends, students and Chu-

lalongkorn University, it would have been impossible for her to carve a “Go Inter” career in the traditional performing arts scene in today’s context. She believes that the first step before anyone, including herself can “Go Inter” is to get the support and understanding of the people closest to the individual. At the same time, any egotistical notion of self on the part of the performers/ artists should be gotten rid off. More imperatively, traditional performing artists must be disciplined, responsible as well as good in English (or at the very least, can comprehend and communicate in basic English). This will help make it faster and easier for “Go Inter” performers to adjust themselves in other countries since they may be working with many different individuals and organizations globally, where English or basic English may be the main form of communication or instruction.

Undeniably as in any other industries, pursuing traditional performing arts in the corporate world poses its own challenges. Performing Thai cultural arts overseas opened new opportunities for the director and her business because she managed to network and form lasting professional relationships with foreign performing arts groups. But while such contacts greatly facilitated Miss Koong in expanding her business as well as in offering future cultural projects for her to work on, she had had her own difficulties. First and foremost, she was formally schooled in traditional performing arts and not in the area of cultural heritage management or cultural performing arts management.¹ That she should embark on such an industry despite the lack of training in this area was a noteworthy risk she was willing to take in her desire to preserve cultural performing arts mainly of Thailand initially, but now also of Asia and other parts of the world. With no theory to fall back on or examples to follow, the director had to rely on her own experiences and learn from her mistakes.

Secondly, the author’s business is mainly focused on inviting the traditional performing art groups especially from schools and universities to perform or conduct cultural activities for events and festivals abroad. That being so, it has been difficult to secure funding and financial support both from the performers themselves and even from the government, local organizers or private sectors. It is typical in many countries that traditional performing arts are not the major concern of the host or sponsors. People usually pay more attention to those contemporary styles of performance which is where funding is generally channeled to. Understandably, since most of the performers invited by “Absolutely Thai” are students, it would thus be almost impossible for the author to ask the performers to advance their money or to fully finance their own trip. Often, the director had to finance performances or performing arts groups from her personal savings before she obtained payment from the relevant parties. In a number of instances where performers agreed to look after their own expenses, funding and finance were never a big issue for the author.

¹ In 2008, Tobie S. Stein and Jessica Bathurst produced a book titled “Performing Arts Management: A Handbook of Professional Practices,” which details the nature of performing arts company including its organizational structure and for- profit or non- profit practices. Here we would like to expand this theory of Performing Arts Management to include the cultural performing arts that “Absolutely Thai” specializes in.

Moreover, from the author's experiences in Singapore, it is normal for the local supporter to delay the funding or payment. And sometimes, the agreed funding or fee is not paid or is remunerated at a lower amount. At times, those who hired the author and her members for performances or even performers themselves defaulted on the initially agreed fees. As a leader, the director has to end up using her own finances to cover the loss to her members. Although she has faced no such issues when collaborating with state boards or government bodies, often the funds takes a while to process (presumably due to red tape measures) and thus payment to the author is delayed. This means that the organizers and performers had never gotten funding before the project or the performance ends. The soonest is one month after but it could stretch to three to six months. Consequently, before executing a project in Singapore, the author must make sure that she would be financially capable to look after the performers and to survive for approximately three months before getting reimbursed. This is a common problem for all art groups and other organizations within the country which deal with the government agencies. Even so, while the above challenges problematise cash flow within the business, the director is continually learning from it and has a strong believe that things will improve with time.

Yet, before we seek to analyze anything further in this article, let us first debate the issue of cultural heritage management. What is cultural heritage management? As quoted in an essay written by Frederick Swennen, "Cultural heritage is the legacy of tangible and intangible attributes of a group or society that are selected from the past, inherited, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations."² And management is defined as "a term we can associate with two groups: the large, corporate organizations whether private, government or not for - profit, and the personal, represented by family or community - based groups."³ Therefore to term it loosely, in this article, cultural heritage management is the administration by a "corporate organization"⁴ of traditions or traditional practices (here referring to the traditional performing arts) taken from an earlier period, preserved and passed down for the good of "future generations."⁵

"Absolutely Thai" was founded on the basis of this theory of cultural heritage management albeit consciously or otherwise. While the author was not trained in this area of study, she aspired to focus mainly on all kinds of traditional performing arts from different parts of the world, which to a large extent, still preserved and promoted the historical culture on which it was formed. In comparison, there have been some other cultural performing arts groups which have adapted more

2 Frederik Swennen, "B-Cultural, in Heritage, Law and Economics," in *To Whom It May Concern. Essay on Public Private Partnerships on Cultural Heritage* (Belgium: University Press Antwerp, 2011): 17. Accessed August 24, 2011.

<http://books.google.com.sg/books?id=vBGIHOrJmLQC&dq=isbn:9054878967>

3 Malcolm Naea Chun, "Ho 'onohonoho: Traditional Ways of Cultural Management," (United States of America: University of Hawai'i, 2009):1. Accessed August 24, 2011. http://books.google.com.sg/books?id=R7bR_U5j5BEC&dq=isbn:1583510508

4 Ibid

5 Malcolm Naea Chun, "Ho 'onohonoho: Traditional Ways of Cultural Management," (United States of America: University of Hawai'i, 2009):1. Accessed August 24, 2011. http://books.google.com.sg/books?id=R7bR_U5j5BEC&dq=isbn:1583510508

contemporary styles in the belief that it would help them gain recognition or appreciation among the modern society. In a similar thread, many of the performing arts groups which the author had invited for concerts or celebrations in other countries often felt that foreign audiences expected more contemporary styles of performances as opposed to the traditional. Unfortunately, many of these performers had hardly any experience performing overseas or of living in a foreign country (thus also the term, “Go Inter” instead of a grammatically correct substitute). In contrast, the author’s experience of living and performing overseas for ten years and audience feedback she has collected across several countries over the years, convinces her that the latter usually expect to experience something which they feel is purely traditional or has what they perceive to be limited Western influence. This is in line with the theory of cultural exoticism as discussed by Peter Niedermüller who talked about how “urban ethnic festivals represent the dominant way of thinking about ethnicity as cultural tradition and exotic heritage⁶... archaic and strange which, however, excites admiration.”⁷ To preserve the identity and characteristics of traditional performing arts as far as she can, and to guide fellow traditional performing arts practitioners, the director chose to manage this cultural heritage through forming “Absolutely Thai.”

Thus far we have discussed the term “Go Inter”, the background of “Absolutely Thai” and the challenges its director faces, its administration as well as the performers’ views on overseas performances as compared to that of the foreign audience. Now let us look at some of the ways in which performers can better prepare themselves before they decide to “Go Inter.”

Planning to “Go Inter”

From the time performers decide to “Go Inter” to the time they return back to their home countries, planning should take precedence over all things. To achieve a smooth collaboration with overseas organizers, performers may want to consider the points discussed below.

Upon deciding on the countries that they want to go to or even before that, it is necessary to plan and ensure that they would have enough budget to cover all expenses which may be incurred throughout the whole “Go Inter” journey. It is all the more so when they agree to look after their own expenses which may include air ticket, visa fee, accommodation, meals, transportation, packing for musical instruments / costumes / props as well as insurance, pocket money and airport tax for some countries such as Indonesia.

A lot of times, traditional performing arts groups which have worked with overseas organizers had problems financing their own trips including their accommodation, meals and trips. They often hoped for sponsorship and overlooked the budget factor in their planning. Many of them had the impression that they can

⁶ Péter Niedermüller, “Urban Ethnicity between the Global and the Local,” in *Managing Ethnicity: perspectives from folklore studies, history and anthropology* (Amsterdam, 2000): 52. Accessed August 25, 2011. <http://books.google.com.sg/books?id=FyAvd7irBkC&dq=isbn:9055891835>

⁷ Ibid

seek the help of the expatriate communities (people who come from the same home countries of the performers) in the countries that they are going to. Usually, within three to six months after the performers have confirmed attendance, the organizers will start making the necessary arrangements for the trip and spread publicity of the programme. Despite everything, once the performers realized that airline companies cannot sponsor free air tickets for the trip, nor would accommodation, meals and trips be provided for, they often cancelled on the "Go Inter" performance or workshops even after the final arrangements has been made. It is difficult for organizers to find a replacement on short notice. And with one less item on the list being performed, it may affect the entirety of the event or the festival and/ or even disappoint the audience who expect to watch the performances. And occasionally when the performers do prepare a budget, the budget which they have prepared is too low to even cover all expenses or provide for the whole entourage. Consequently, all of the above budget-related problems here caused a lot of unnecessary problems for the company and the organizers who invited these performers.

Besides budget preparations, it is vital that performers plan and decide on the proposed programme or performance which they would be showcasing overseas. The performers must actually learn to select performances to cater to different stage layout, type of event, audiences and cultural settings. If they are not experienced enough to do so, it would be best to consult someone who is. To illustrate, there can be many different types of stages ranging from the outdoor stage, the indoor stage, concourse, big or small theatre, concert halls and also varying proximity of the stages to the audience itself. First and foremost, the performers must acknowledge that most of the audience in a foreign country would not have a background and thus might not fully understand what the artists are performing. Hence, the performers must not choose a repertoire that is too difficult for the common man to understand. This can also apply to traditional performing arts workshops which the performers conduct for the local communities.

Other questions which the performers may ask themselves would be - "Who would be our target audience - the young, the old, university students, music students or the general public?" and "Do we want audience participation?" If it is an outdoor stage, performers must be prepared to see audience walking in and out of the concert and so they should prepare an item that is interesting and engaging so that the audience would find their performance enjoyable and more would be enticed to stay and watch the whole show.

Then again, most of the times "Go Inter" performers actually lack experience in terms of planning the performance beforehand because it may be their first time performing overseas. And there are a variety of traditional performing arts repertoires to choose from though not all are suitable for the overseas audience. There was one instance where first time "Go Inter" performers had thought of a repertoire without thinking of the size and weight of musical instruments or props required. The instruments and props that they needed proved to be too heavy and too big for transport on a commercial airline. In such cases, the author

would advise the performers to change the performance programme. To assist the performers in avoiding such a mistake and as per her working style, the director requires the latter to consult with her constantly (after they accept the “Go Inter” invitation) as to what to do or what to perform. The planning process for the performance itself would then either be decided by the director, if performers are performing overseas for the first time, by the performers themselves (usually for those groups with experience) or by both the author and the performers.

Undeniably, it would be best for performers to choose a “Go Inter” performance item which they are good at. There have been many instances where the performers decided on a repertoire which they thought was most convenient for them. For instance, they would choose a repertoire which had very little props, easy to prepare and easy to set- up. Ironically, not all the performers are comfortable or proficient in such performances. And so when performing overseas, one would be able to see that the performers lack either the confidence to perform or are not performing to the maximum of their abilities. Often performers think that a foreign audience will not have any knowledge or background on what they are performing. They then manage the performances in the most convenient way for themselves for example, by not following the tradition and turning a blind eye to incorrect arrangements of a piece or to incomplete costumes. The authors would like to emphasise that it is not always true that the audience have no knowledge of such traditional arts or costumes. Sometimes, amongst the audience, we may find traditional arts specialists, lecturers, students and even fellow performers who are well-versed in their respective arts. It is highly probable that they would be familiar with the performances and the culture. Besides, even if the audience does not understand the performance, the director strongly encourages performers to adhere strictly to their traditions and correct arrangement. To do otherwise, may be a sign of disrespect or insult for the performers’ own culture.

Regardless of which performance they have chosen to showcase overseas, the artists themselves must always have alternative options that they have prepared as a back-up plan if something does go awry with the initial chosen performance. Be wary that when planning to perform using music CD there have been cases where the CD formats were not compatible with the organiser’s CD player or sound system. Unfortunately, the performers had not stored their music in alternative devices such as a USB flash drive and the performance had to proceed without music. The authors recommend that one way to preempt this problem is to instruct all performers to email them the music files, store the music in their notebook or tablet PC, mobile phone, or even a portable music player such as iPod. Ideally, performers must be good improvisers so that if mistakes do happen throughout the performance, they can rectify it immediately. This includes being able to conceal their mistakes like when forgetting the lyrics while singing on stage by joining the dancers in their dance. But before the performers can do a feat such as this they must first be familiar with the different items to be performed and this can be best achieved by preparing the performers from the initial planning stages of the performances back home.

In planning the performance, the artists must also bear in mind the time constraints given them by the organizers. This is to avoid exceeding the time limit because in some countries and some venues, every extended minute, is chargeable. In Singapore and London for example, if a performance exceeds the stipulated time as agreed by the organizers, the organiser would have to financially compensate the venue owner and their staff. This added cost may either be passed on to the performers or borne solely by the organiser. What is worse is that in one of the well known venues in London, if such an issue were to occur, the organiser would not only be charged an additional rental fee of the location and so on, but also a fine. Sometimes, this type of working culture may not be widely practiced in the home countries of the performers so these performers often overlook this matter in their planning processes. That being said, it would be wise to remember that in many countries, time is money and everything would have to be compensated in monetary terms.

One other point that the performers would have to decide on in their "Go Inter" planning process would be the technical specifications required by their performance. These include things such as the instrumental layout, for example, where they want each instrument to be placed, or which part of the stage each item would be performed at. In addition, how many solos each performance would have and how many microphones would be required for each repertoire and so on. While this may seem like a minor point to some, on several instances and at some venues, performers had to bear extra costs on additional technical equipment such as microphones which they requested for once they realized that the existing equipment as per their demands were insufficient. Had there been prior and careful planning on the part of the performers, such problems could have easily been avoided or minimized.

Whilst planning on the technical specifications of a performance is essential, costumes and / or musical instruments would be another integral part of any traditional performing arts. This would then be the next logical factor to include in the planning process. One, the performers must know exactly what types and how many sets of costumes and / or musical instruments would be required for individual performances. Two, the performers must have enough budget to obtain all the necessary costumes and / or musical instruments. Three, when packing the instruments, the artists must check that they did not exceed the allocated luggage weight limit given by the airlines. If and when the performers realize that they would exceed the assigned baggage weight, they may actually pre - purchase a higher weight provision at a discounted price while booking their air tickets if travelling with budget airlines, or requesting for an additional complimentary weight allowance from the normal airlines if travelling as a group. Pack the instruments well because these fragile objects may get damaged along the journey. If possible, it would also be advisable for performers to pack spare instruments or have a back up plan in case the main instruments cannot be utilized due to various reasons. The authors recommend that performers do a check list of musical instruments, costumes and their baggage so that they would not forget anything on the date of departure. At the same time, the performers should put a logo of

the group including contact detail on each luggage and item so that if it is lost, the founder would know where to deliver and how to contact the owner. It is very important not to lose or forget anything for the performances. Otherwise, it would cause a lot of difficulties to both performers and the organiser when such problems compromise the quality of the performance. Do remember that it is almost impossible to find traditional costumes or traditional musical instruments in foreign countries to replace what the performers lose or break during the journey.

Apart from preparing all of the above for a “Go Inter” trip, there are several documents which performers to the organizers for security/ planning as well as publicity purposes. To begin with, once the performers have made final confirmations with the organizers, they must submit a name list to the organizers including the identification numbers of all the students / artists who would be participating in the event. This is crucial for organizers to produce admission passes for the performers especially in places with restricted access security system in place such as the “Esplanade Theatres on the Bay (better known by locals as the Esplanade)” in Singapore. It would also facilitate organizers in applying for a license from the government or arts regulatory agencies for performance in public places like the Singapore Botanic Garden.

Performers must also bear in mind that they would need to submit these documents to apply for a license to perform from the relevant governing or arts regulatory organizations in many foreign countries. One of the reasons for this is because the censorship or arts regulation laws may differ from country to country and some performance may be deemed unsuitable or sensitive by the governing bodies. Which is why in countries like Singapore for example, any public performance would require performers to apply for the Arts Entertainment License at least two months in advance.⁸ To apply, performers would need to submit together with the name list, other details of the performance including its length of “duration”, a comprehensive programme timetable, arrangement plan of the venue, “set list and encore list, with lyrics of original compositions” and other multimedia materials.⁹ The application is subjected to approval from the relevant government bodies such as the Media Development Authorities (MDA). Performers who fail to do so may face prosecution by the relevant authorities including jail term or fine. For performers planning to apply for this license, the author would advise against choosing traditional repertoires that are of a religious / racial or political nature. Although the MDA does not out-rightly ban the performances of a religious or racial nature, it seeks to protect racial, religious and also national harmony and any infringement on these values would not be tolerated.¹⁰ These values and laws or regulations may be similar to those found in other multiracial societies.

⁸ Performers may view the license application guide through the website titled “Media Development Authority: A user’s guide to arts entertainment licence applications.” accessed August 29, 2011. http://www.mda.gov.sg/Licences/Documents/Submission_guide-lines_for_AEL.pdf

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Refer to MDA policy guidelines on application for licenses to organize a cultural show or to perform in “Appendix 2, Licensing Conditions for Variety/Cultural Show.” Accessed August 29, 2011. http://www.mda.gov.sg/Licences/Documents/VarietyCultural_show_conditions.pdf. The guideline states that, “the licensee shall ensure that the songs/acts performed do not offend or denigrate any race or religion, demean, humiliate or insult the dignity of any section of the community.

Submission of the relevant documents and proposals as discussed above are also another way to address copyright issues in the chosen “Go Inter” destination. In comparison to countries like Thailand and Indonesia, in theory as well as in practice, Singapore and the United Kingdom have strict copyright laws stretching across various industries including media and the performing arts. In submitting the proposed performance programme, performers should already have been granted permission or a license from or have paid royalty to the artists from whom they have borrowed the performance item. Many developed nations such as the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada and even Singapore would not allow or tolerate any compromises to the copyright laws of the country.¹¹ If the artists submit their programme proposals and important documents, beforehand, any copyright issues (if present) can be addressed much earlier on in the “Go Inter” process and allow more time for the performers to make necessary arrangements or changes giving them additional time to prepare for a performance.

And as explained in the previous few paragraphs, the performers are required to present technical requirement lists and stage layout diagrams, preferably with clear illustrations of where each instrument is going to be placed, how many musicians or dancers would be performing for each item, the transition from one item to the next as well as duration of each piece, to the organizers as well. This is to assist the organizers in preparing the necessary equipment and planning the stage settings for the performers early. It would also allow for the organizers to choose the most suitable equipment and technicians for the particular performance. In quoting the “Esplanade” in Singapore as an example, once the organizers receive a confirmation list from performers, detailing also the type of performance they would be showcasing, its technicians will prepare equipment (like microphones) suitable to the type of musical instruments or performance. And if the performers decide to change their performance item without informing the organizers in advance, this would affect the quality of the sound during the event itself as well as the stage layout and lighting. Such mistakes may affect not just the quality of the performance but more importantly, the reputation of the organizers. That is why, “Esplanade” is adamant about sticking to the submitted programme as much as they can. Performers must inform “Esplanade” of any changes preferably at least a week in advance to provide its technicians enough time to withdraw equipment from the department. Such a requirement applies not only to the “Esplanade” but also in many other foreign venues particularly in the Western or European countries.

In terms of showcasing their events and to make it easy for audience to comprehend the traditional performing arts that the “Go Inter” artists are proposing, the authors would like to suggest printing programme notes and other publicity materials. These would act as aids or tools where performers can reach out to more people within the foreign country they are going to and to give a standard

11 For a list of nations which have signed the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, refer to the WIPO website titled “WIPO-Administered Treaties.” Accessed August 29, 2011. http://www.wipo.int/treaties/en>ShowResults.jsp?lang=en&treaty_id=15

and clear definition of their arts. To produce a programme note, the performing artists must first do around 100 - word write - up on their group profile, how they chose the specific repertoire for the performance and also some explanation about their arts based on academic sources. Other than that, they should include professional photos of the group itself to be printed on the programme notes as an introduction to the group. They may even print other things such as posters to publicise their performance. Most importantly, performers must see to it that all documents, programme notes, publicity materials and so on, to be submitted to the organizers are properly produced and well - organized. As the saying goes, "The devil lies in the detail." Therefore any carelessness or ill-planning on the part of the performers can clearly be seen if the submitted materials are shoddily produced which would in turn indicate a lack of professionalism by the former.

Most imperatively, the director believes that the individual traditional performing arts groups should learn to give opportunities for international exposure to as many of its members as possible. Many groups repeatedly bring only the best to perform at the expense of other performers within the repertoire. Since the director's "Absolutely Thai" aims to support traditional performing arts groups through educating students as well as giving them new opportunities, we would like to suggest giving other students or other artists a taste of the overseas scene by allowing them a chance to perform internationally especially if the trip is funded by the schools or external organizations. After all, this "Go Inter" opportunity may be the student's one and only chance for such an experience. Or it may even inspire them to further their "Go Inter" aspirations in the future. Undeniably, these students should also have gone through a thorough selection process to ensure that they are of reasonably good standards before they are chosen to "Go Inter." This may actually help to reduce the numbers of students or artists who are affluent enough to fund their own overseas exposure performance but whose performing standards leaves much to be desired.

Preparing the Self to "Go Inter"

Debatably, it is usually harder for artists to perform or conduct workshops in overseas venues as compared to their home countries. The unfamiliar terrain, culture as well as language may prove to be huge challenges to performers who choose to venture the globe. Hence, the authors reckon that prior to deciding which country to go to, it is advisable for performers to research on some basic information of each country.

Performers or artists must familiarize themselves with the immigration laws and custom procedures of individual countries to avoid getting into trouble with the law. As a case in point, when traveling to perform in Australia, all items that are made from wood and animal parts (in this case - musical instruments) must be inspected and certified bug and "disease" - free by an authorized local company before shipment into Australia. Failure to do so would mean these items will have to be declared at the custom on arrival at the Australian airport without any guarantee that the instruments would be allowed into the country or allowed in

on the same day.¹² If such a thing were to happen as it did before, it will cause many problems for the performers who would not be able to perform without their instruments. Not knowing these basic immigration laws may complicate the immigration process for the performers, perhaps even to the extent of making it difficult for them to enter their chosen “Go Inter” country.

Next, they should try to learn and understand the culture and environment of the countries they are going to in order to avoid getting into conflicts with the local population or to commit any faux pas. Remember also that in some countries such as Turkey and Slovenia, English is not the main language (though disputably more commonly understood than perhaps Thai or Bahasa Indonesia). Hence, learning basic words or phrases in the native tongue can prove useful especially in asking for help pronounced as Mi lahko pomagate¹³ and Bana yardım edebilir misiniz¹⁴ in Turkish and Slovene respectively. And as can be found in most travel guide books, performers should know something about the weather conditions of each country as well as the food so that they may pack their luggage appropriately. If one realizes that he or she is not accustomed to food without chili, chili paste or fish sauce, then it would be wise for them to bring along travel- sized condiments to flavour the food in the foreign countries. Logically, when traveling to the colder regions, the performers must bring along sufficient and suitable cold- weather outfits. Taking note of these sometimes minor but significant details would go a long way in making the performers’ stay in the “Go Inter” country more pleasurable and allow them more time to focus on larger issues regarding the performance itself. As it is, not doing so, may cause the performers to fall ill and being sick while travelling may be very uncomfortable and inconvenient for the performers. Not only would it affect the quality of their performance, (or even bring about possible cancellation), it would also be expensive to seek medical treatment overseas especially without travel insurance coverage but we would be discussing this point later on in the article.

Before Departure

Before departing for another country, there are some basic immigration precautions that the performers can take to minimize any hiccups which may happen along the way. Every individual within the performing arts group coming to perform overseas must check that their passports are valid for at least six month before the date of departure and that they have applied for the necessary visa (information on visa requirements can be obtained from the official webpages of foreign embassies). Verify that the name on the visa is spelled according to the name in the passport because any discrepancies in the name may pose potential immigration problems such as listed below. There was one instance where the performer actually held several passports under his name and on the day the group was bound for departure, he had actually brought along a passport that had

12 “What can’t I take into Australia?” Last reviewed June 07, 2011. <http://www.daff.gov.au/aqis/travel/entering-australia/cant-take>

13 “Slovenia- tourist-guide, Your guide to Slovenia!” Accessed August 27, 2011. <http://www.slovenia-tourist-guide.com/useful-slovene-phrases.html>

14 “Linguanaut, the Turkish phrases and expressions.” Accessed August 27, 2011 http://www.linguanaut.com/english_turkish.htm

already expired. Eventually, he had to purchase another departure air ticket but on the day that he was going home, the airline realized that the name listed on the air ticket differed from that in the passport. Fortunately, at that point in time, the airline was willing to make amendments for him and the problem was resolved amicably.

Nonetheless, performers must remember that airlines are not always able to or willing to assist with immigration issues such as this, especially in countries with strict immigration laws such as United States of America. Most of the times, due to the cost- saving nature of budget airlines, the budget airline companies seem to be less flexible when it comes to altering information such as flight details, guest particulars and so on. Guests of budget airlines may end up having to fork out additional fees to the budget airlines when problem arises to cover the additional administration costs, processing fee and also any difference in flight fares incurred. As such, the author always encourages performers to travel with non - budget airlines even if it is relatively more expensive than budget airlines initially, so that if the need arises, performers can request for changes to their flight details and information with ease and without unexpected additional expenses. Please note that the author has no issues with budget airlines but it is not recommended when travelling as a group or with students because chances are, there will be problems like students missing the flight, invalid passport, overweight luggage, and so on. Next, every repertoire member must ensure that the luggage which they had packed including costumes and musical instruments must fall within the weight limit allocated by the airlines. Lastly, do not board the wrong plane or get your flight details especially the departure and arrival time, mixed up.

Of course to prevent any unforeseen circumstances from happening and as briefly mentioned earlier, performers are highly encouraged to purchase travel insurance before they depart and be fully aware of their schedules and accommodation arrangements. The travel insurance bought must cover all the members and be valid for the whole trip including throughout the duration of their stay in the foreign country. Ensure that the travel insurance also covers medical bills and emergency evacuation measures. Once they arrive in the foreign countries, they must register their names and disclose their accommodation information with their respective embassies. The parents of guardians of every performer must know the full schedules of the students/ artists, their accommodation arrangements, their contact details and so on. Previously, a group of student performers got lost in the foreign country which they had gone to and ended up in the police station because they could not remember the name of the hotel or its location. To make things worse, they had no means to contact other people in the group. Therefore, all the performers must at least have the address of their accommodation in the foreign countries (preferably a name card or a brochure of the place would help) so that in the event that they get lost, they may actually ask for directions from the locals or get on the public transport.

Arrival in the Foreign Country

As soon as they land in the foreign country, the performers must realize that they are ambassadors of their own countries. As representatives of their own countries, the students / performers must be well – behaved and be respectful of the people and culture of the countries they are in at all times. This is because even if it may be the first time they are there, the locals or people in that country look to the performers as a point of reference which can inform them of how people from the home countries of the performers are like. Thus if the traditional performing arts members act displeasingly, the locals may not just blame the school but it may also taint the reputation of the countries the former are from.

Teamwork would be another essential point in ensuring a smooth and enjoyable experience for all members within the traditional arts groups. When the groups “Go Inter” it may be one of the few times where the members stay together for twenty - four hours. Hence, it would be important for them to extend help to each other spontaneously. To illustrate, every member, whether they are dancers or musicians or backstage personnel should help carry costumes, instruments and so on even though it may not be theirs. This will help the group work faster and more efficiently, leaving a pleasant impression of the group to the organizers. Other than that, they must be aware of each other’s whereabouts at all times and refrain from wandering off from the group to prevent anyone from getting lost. It may be advisable that they engage in a sort of buddy system where every member would be responsible for one other member in the group and report to the appointed leaders.

The performers must also remain accountable at all times. First of all, they must be punctual and report to the relevant leaders at the appointed time. For example, if the group has decided to meet at the hotel lobby at 10 in the morning, individual members must be there by 10 or a little earlier than that so that they would not delay the hired bus, other members or even the performance itself. Next, they should stick closely to the schedule as arranged and as agreed by their leaders prior to their arrival. This is because upon confirmation of the schedule, place and transport arrangements would already have been made and any cancellations would inconvenience all the parties involved. And particularly for groups that obtained funding from their government, schools, universities and so on, performers should realize that they are in the foreign countries not for a holiday but for international exposure and educational purposes. Accordingly, they should make their trips as meaningful as possible by ensuring that they learn something perhaps about the culture or history of the country they visited so that they can share this with their friends, family and even future performers back home.

Before the Performance

While early planning before departure is crucial for groups who want to “Go Inter”, being fully prepared way ahead of the performance itself would be equally relevant. In the author’s opinion, it would be best for performers to always be well prepared for each dance / music item at least two to three hours in advance. This is so that the performers have enough time for sound & light check as well as stage set up. And if they face problems such as the accompanying audio does

not work (as had happened before) or if they are not comfortable with the performance format, layout or performance item itself, they would have ample time to deal with the situation.

One thing that performers have to bear in mind is that they have to maintain professionalism in all aspects. Even though most of the audience may not have had any exposure to the traditional arts before, the performers must never assume that it would be acceptable for them to perform sloppily or to disregard traditions, or to perform as they please. To do so would actually amount to a kind of disrespect for the people who have come to watch them. Performers must make sure that their movements are sharp and confident and that the costumes are appropriate and complete as defined by their traditions. Ultimately, as discussed earlier, there would be some people (like lecturers, researchers, even fellow artists) within the audience who have watched, or even been trained in similar art forms before and they would be able to differentiate between a good traditional performance as compared to an inferior one. And even when conducting workshops for the local communities, performers have to remain friendly and humble to the participants and abstain from reproaching them to prevent any conflicts or resentment between the participants and the performers. Again, as ambassadors of the traditional arts of their home countries, the local community would view the student artists as stereotypical representations of their people back home. It is hence vital that the performers leave the local community with a great impression of themselves and their country.

During the Performance

While performing, the traditional performing arts members should hold the assumption that the audience has zero knowledge of the arts that they would be watching. As explained in the section on maintaining professionalism, this does not mean that the performers can do as and what they like. And the authors do not intend to contradict the point that there will possibly be experts in the traditional performing arts within the audience. But in assuming that the audience had never been exposed to their arts, it would remind performers to explain their dance / music items to the audience in a more simplified manner for the benefit of those unfamiliar with this art form. Audience participation even in the form of engaging them albeit from afar is always important. The detail lies in how to perform and to bring forth among the audience similar emotions that the performers would feel when playing or dancing their piece. Apart from explaining their piece, the artists themselves must always maintain eye contact with the audience or at least in the audience direction. This may serve as an indication of a form of respect for and even a certain level of interest in the audience who may in turn respond with the same level of interest in and admiration for the performers / performance itself.

After the performance

As performing artists or upholders of the traditional performing arts, it would always be good for performers to have an evaluation session after every performance. For example after the first set of dance/ music item has completed, and

performers realize that the audience did not really enjoy it, the performer who has done self-evaluation may be able to give pointers to help improve the performance and attract more crowds. At the end of the day, this is common practice among arts groups of international standing and doing so would help portray or develop a more professional image of the traditional performing arts groups which "Go Inter" to gain international exposure and recognition.

Conclusion

In this article, we have written about cultural heritage management and discussed the various ways which performers can subscribe to, in their dreams to "Go Inter." We have dissected the article into various sections starting from the initial stages of planning for a "Go Inter" project, preparing the self to "Go Inter", things to do before departure and things performers should take note of upon landing in the foreign country, before and during the performance. These include points such as having knowledge of the immigration laws of the countries performers are going to, proper budget planning, purchasing travel insurance, teamwork, audience participation and so on. Lastly, the authors hope that this article will be useful for all traditional performers to prepare themselves more confidently and in a professional manner, before "Go Inter" and will motivate future traditional performing arts practitioners to do the same. In conclusion, the authors would like to thank the University for proposing this project and wishes to write another "Go Inter" article for the organizers in the near future.

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Images of performances and festivals organized by Absolutely Thai. Below, a Chinese music ensemble for the 1st Asian Traditional Music Forum at Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand, Aug. 09.

