New vision for the Arts Fest

Next year’s programme will feature more original content from Asia, reports CHEAH UI-HOON

RECENT Singapore Arts Festivals gauged success by numbers but not Lee Kee Hong, the general arts programme for this year’s festival. Despite a new counting system that drastically lowers overall attendance figures, the real picture shows that actual attendance was about the same.

The festival counted 80,800 people as attending the 29 ticketed productions, compared to a number about 10 times bigger last year — 800,000. The National Arts Council has explained that the change is due to more stringent head-counting guidelines, so that participation at free events, or complimentary tickets weren’t counted.

Not wanting to make it a numbers game, Mr Low feels that the success of this year’s festival is that it made the transition to one which will focus on creating original content from Asia.

How did this edition — the first of a trilogy of festivals that Mr Low has been tasked to oversee — turn on its head is the disbanding of traditional categories, so the audience can

- Be an exercise in nostalgia, with the producers deciding not to update the play too much, and the public having a full year to roll out the programme.
- Have a chance to re-visit iconic works without the play too much, and the danger lies in whether all re-staged productions will walk this line.
- Re-staging iconic works was never meant to be for nostalgia,” counters Mr Low. “It is a recognition, and re-visit, of Singapore’s performance heritage. If we have no sense of what has been done, then it is very difficult to move forward.”