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**Aye, aye, skipper!** Spanish theater group Manifesto Poetico's artistic director Carlos García Estéves (second from right) leads by example in his workshops with the cast of *Nama Kamu Atas Perahu*.

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**Kakiseni Arts Exchange 2013 programme themed *Nama Kamu Atas Perahu* is an ambitious multi-national journey on stage.**

**H**OW do you bring together artists from half a dozen countries to tell a single cohesive story?

Carlos García Estéves, the artistic director of Manifesto Poetico, believes all you need is a story that speaks to them beyond the limits of their native tongues.

Estéves will be contributing his directing talents to the Kakiseni Arts Exchange 2013 Programme themed *Nama Kamu Atas Perahu*, which brings together 16 artists from seven countries onto one *perahu* (small boat) with Estéves as their captain.

International artists participating are Iranians Hamidreza Fallahi and Maryam Moyni, Indonesians Deden Trsnawan and Moh Hariyantu, Spaniard Monica Vareal Couto, German Manuel Schunter, Americans Hannah Heller and Ghafir Akbar (now based in Kuala Lumpur), Hong Kong-national Cheung Ming-yiu, and Korean Jungju Kim.

Representing Malaysia are the boys from Hands Percussion – Jack Wan Wai Keat, Jimmy Ch'ng Lip Hann and Leong Kah Mui, Instant Cafe's Jo Kukathas, Aswara's Zamzuria Zahari and Chinese Opera singer Ling Goh. Their fields of expertise are as eclectic as their nationalities, with actors, dancers, musicians, poets, puppeteers and even a professional clown.

Designed as an intense two week workshop for the varied artists, the training culminates in a visual performance which will be staged at KuAsh Theatre in Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Kuala Lumpur on Oct 31 and Nov 1.

"I came up with the theme after seeing the artists I was working

with. My country and theirs have a society with many immigrants. It is a topic common to everyone here,

for people who leave and those who stay behind," notes the Spaniard.

"I wanted a story that concerns all of us. The title *Your Name On A Boat (Nama Kamu Atas Perahu)* refers to how you are on this boat, I am on this boat, we are all on this boat," says Estéves, though he is quick to laugh off that it was an intentional reference to the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*.

Explaining the theme further, he says that in the case of many immigrants, they go abroad to find riches, thinking the grass is always greener in the other country.

"But the riches we're looking for are right here," he says, thumping the spot over his heart with his fist, "it's not just money, but what's inside you, your friends and family".

The director also faced two more challenges in bringing together his artists, the fact he had not met them until he arrived in Malaysia just two weeks before performance day and

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the issue of language: half of the cast do not speak the other's language!

During one of the Arts Exchange workshops, Estéves shows how good direction isn't hampered by what language one speaks.

"Language is not a barrier, the primary 'language' spoken among the artists is movement, and these guys are quick at picking up what I'm teaching," he says.

It does not hurt that Estéves also speaks English, Spanish and French. It is quite a sight seeing him act as the bridge between fellow Spaniard Couto and Korean Kim (who picked up French while studying in the Jacques Lecoq International Theatre School in Paris).

To quickly come up with a story without denying his cast a chance at pitching their ideas, Estéves used a *Canovaccio* story structure. Estéves describes it as a way of "telling what, not how". While the story has some key points and scenes, it would be

largely improvisational how the final result will turn out.

Three concrete ideas that he did lay down was that the play will have three main characters: the traveller Mismar (played by Akbar), his wife Alma (played by Zamzuria) and the Narrator (played by Kukathas).

"In the performance, we will play with space, voices and puppeteering. I will also include elements of *Mak Yong* and folk songs to add to the mood," says Kelantan-native Zamzuria, who teaches traditional theatre, including *Mak Yong* and *Mek Mulung* in the Academy of Arts, Culture and National Heritage.

Kukathas says as the narrator, she will pop in and out of the narrative as another visual and vocal element to move the story forward.

"We play point and counterpoint to each other and find ways to keep the story dynamic and playful. Many characters pop in and out of

the ensemble and then disappear

back into the scene as manipulators of objects and puppets," explains the veteran actress.

The duty of composing the soundtrack to the performance falls on Iranian Hamidreza, with the help of a handful of equally talented musicians like percussionist Jimmy and Jack, as well as actress Heller, who also plays the violin.

"I tried different music according to scenes that Carlos and the actors produced through all materials that could make some sound and at the end, we got the best results through Carlos' intelligent directing method," says Hamidreza.

■ *Nama Kamu Atas Perahu* will be staged at The Actors Studio @ KuAsh Theatre, Taman Tun Dr Ismail in Kuala Lumpur at 8.30pm on Oct 31 and Nov 1. Entrance is free, though those interested are recommended to prebook at [www.kakiseni.com](http://www.kakiseni.com)



The cast and directors of Kakiseni's Art Exchange programme *Nama Kamu Atas Perahu* humorously displaying their nationalities using flags taken from the buffet table, at the launch of the programme.