

## PrimeTime Member Spotlight

April 2010

Each month *Connections* talks to a PrimeTime member to find out more about them, what they do, and their association with PrimeTime.



This month:

Nathalie Ribette  
Executive and Artistic Director of  
Sing'theatre

Interviewed by:  
Andrea Chalupova Hessmo

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### Personal talk ...

**Connections:** Where are you from originally, and how long have you been in Singapore?

**Nathalie:** I'm from Paris, France. I've lived in Singapore for 13 years.

**Connections:** Have you lived in other foreign countries?

**Nathalie:** No, I haven't.

**Connections:** What brought you to Singapore?

**Nathalie:** I followed my husband. He works in the steel industry.

**Connections:** What do you enjoy most about living here?

**Nathalie:** Life is easy. Particularly *life at home* is easy! Having a domestic helper is great and something every woman in Europe should have. Also, because the weather is so wonderful, every morning I can breakfast outside.

**Connections:** What are your interests and hobbies?

**Nathalie:** I like jogging, cooking and eating!

**Connections:** Have you had any particularly interesting experiences you would like to share with us?

**Nathalie:** When I was pregnant, eight years ago, I had to fight against a spitting cobra in my garden and I cut its throat with a pair of large secateurs (scissors). I never thought that I could be so brave and so stupid at the same time!

**Connections:** Which are your favourite restaurants/shops/places to go?

**Nathalie:** I like the Straits kitchen in the Hyatt hotel on Scotts Road.

**Connections:** What one thing would you like to accomplish in your lifetime?

**Nathalie:** I would like to produce a musical at the Esplanade Theatre!

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## Professional talk ...

**Connections:** Please tell us about your business.

**Nathalie:** I run Sing'theatre, a professional local company producing English-language shows with Singapore-based artists drawing on the French cultural heritage. You may have heard of our latest musical shows, such as "No Regrets", a tribute to Edith Piaf in 2007 or "Jacques Brel is alive..." in 2008 and also our latest play "Members Only" in 2009. Right now, we are preparing for the presentation of a brand new musical called "A Singaporean in Paris" at the DBS Arts Centre.

The premiere is on April 14<sup>th</sup> and it will be showing until April 24<sup>th</sup> and stars Hossan Leong, Emma Yong and George Chan. There will be lots of singing, dancing and fun!

**Connections:** What did you do before you started your own business?

**Nathalie:** I worked in sales and marketing at Siemens in Paris. When we first moved to Singapore, I wanted Siemens in France to transfer me to a job here, but my twins were very ill and needed hospital care, so I couldn't work at all. This was the worst time of my life, but living in Singapore also gave me the best time of my life too.

After one year, I was so depressed about the whole expat wife situation that I created my first business. I was basically an agent for a conveyor belts company for the French mining industry. I could work from home and did this for a few years. This was long before my artistic career got going.

**Connections:** How long have you had your own business?

**Nathalie:** I've run Sing'theatre for three years. We're a registered charity, which means that we are recognised by the state to be useful to Singapore. I also perform in restaurants (singing and dancing) and do that through my own company.

**Connections:** How did you get started?

**Nathalie:** In 1998, I decided to go for my old dream of being a performing artist. I thought, why not give it a try! I went to an audition for an amateur musical production at Alliance Française. I was lucky because the director liked me and there were very few auditioning. They chose me and I completely fell in love with the performing arts! I decided that I wanted to be a part of this whole creative, artistic process.

Subsequently, I joined a professional entertainment company and we did shows at places like the American Club, mainly to get the people in the audience to dance. This was a paid position I had for five years. Then, after having been coached by a professional actress, I acted in a play called 'The expat wife' for a small theatre company.

By this stage, I was ready to create my own theatre company, and Sing'theatre was the result.

**Connections:** What were your toughest challenges as an entrepreneur with your own business?

**Nathalie:** Fund-raising was definitely the hardest part. We are funded by the National Arts Council, private sponsors and by the French embassy. It's also a challenge to bring the Singaporeans to the theatre, as there is no tradition of it here.

**Connections:** What do you enjoy most about having your own business?

**Nathalie:** The freedom.

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**Connections:** Any advice for those thinking of starting their own businesses in Singapore?

**Nathalie:** Singapore is the land of opportunity and you will do things here that you would never have imagined yourself doing before!

My advice to any 'trailing spouses' would be this: when you arrive, start your own sole proprietorship straight away, even if you don't know exactly what you want to do. You can name your company "Consulting something" and then figure it out as you go along. Just by having a registered company I was able to pick up opportunities and, most importantly, I had a business card and an answer when people asked me what I did. Then, gradually, I changed the name of the business, the activities, everything. Really, this first action gets you on the track and forces you to think seriously about the future. You'll appear as somebody ready for business to anyone you meet, as opposed to "just the wife".

Unfortunately, though, it may not be that easy to register a sole proprietorship straight away in the future as the authorities in Singapore are in the process of changing the rules regarding foreigners. If you become a PR, however, you can register a business easily.

My other piece of advice would be to network. As a foreigner in Singapore, you have the opportunity to meet people you would never have met otherwise. For example, I've been invited to meet the Singaporean president and this certainly would never have happened in France. Aside from presidents, there's a good mix of people here and that makes for good networking.

In my experience, you gain trust easily in Singapore as a European/Caucasian and this is to your great advantage. I really think that the future is here in Asia.

### **PrimeTime talk ...**

**Connections:** When did you join PrimeTime and how did you find out about it?

**Nathalie:** I joined three years ago. I had heard about it for years but just hadn't got round to joining.

**Connections:** Which PrimeTime subgroups do you belong to?

**Nathalie:** The Arts group and Human Resources group.

**Connections:** Do you volunteer at PrimeTime? If so, in what areas have you become involved?

**Nathalie:** No, unfortunately I have no time to volunteer.

**Connections:** What do you personally feel are the benefits of being a PrimeTime member?

**Nathalie:** The opportunity to learn new skills and be surrounded by so many competent women gives you a lot of energy!

**Connections:** Which was the most interesting or inspiring PrimeTime event you've attended?

**Nathalie:** The activities night. I was very impressed by Juanita Woodward, the founder of PrimeTime. She looked very clever, was clearly a high profile person, yet low key and with lots of charisma at the same time. I liked that.

Thank you, Nathalie!