



**Opening remarks by H.E. Pierre Buhler, Ambassador of France to Singapore
Launching ceremony of *Encore ! The European Season in Singapore*
Grand Cathay, Singapore, May 6, 2008**

Dr Lee Boon Yang, Minister for Information, Communication and the Arts, our guest of honour for tonight, Excellencies, Dear friends, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure to welcome you here, on behalf of all European Union countries, of the European Commission, of the four cultural institutes and of EuroCham, to the opening ceremony of *Encore ! The European Season in Singapore*.

We are gathered this evening to usher in an unprecedented event, a genuine première, and that is the first European cultural season to be organized anywhere in the world, two months ahead of a similar endeavor in France, which takes up the presidency of the European Union on July 1st.

Something which has no precedent deserves a definition in the first place. So allow me to share with you in a few words what *Encore !* is all about.

Firstly, it is about culture. Culture and art provide an ideal vehicle for tightening the bonds between European countries and Singapore, as a way to reach out, beyond governments and institutions, to the people. That falls perfectly within our brief as envoys of our different nations. It is not enough, though, to help bring exhibitions, music, theater, dance and films to the City-State. We must also publicize, promote and advertise them proactively to the broadest possible public, Singaporeans and expatriates alike, as well as to tourists visiting the country. This is what *Encore !* aims to do, in the form of a marketing platform and a branding umbrella. The booklet you have just been given, which covers the upcoming events of the next three months only, gives you an idea of how much more is in store until the end of the year.

Secondly, it is about Europe. Europe, the success story of the past half century, which has transformed the landscape not only of the Old Continent, but of the whole world. But while the European Union is a tangible reality for political scientists and trade negotiators, it is still very much a blurred notion for the broader public, especially one that is 10,000 km away. This makes the case for raising the profile of an entity which is here to stay and which deserves to be known better. Culture and art can be the tools to that end. As Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of Europe, said on that famous day of May 9th, 1950, “Europe will not be made at once or according to a single plan, but through concrete achievements”. This is a legacy we proudly refer to, today, as we launch our cultural season. Although culture very much remains a prerogative of the member-states, it is also subject to a constant and powerful blending.

As you may have noticed, we have given our season a name which happens to be a French word that has taken a life of its own in English, suggesting a rapturous ovation by a public at the end of a performance. And the opening screening of our European Film Festival is a film by a French director, based on an English novel, with a British cast, produced by France, Belgium and the UK.

Encore ! is about culture, as I just said. It is about Europe. And it is about Singapore. For it is not by mere chance that this happens here, in a city with an appetite for cutting-edge initiatives, for pioneering and innovation. In a city of which we Europeans breathe the air, in a city where we live next to each other with our Singaporean neighbours, too often walking past each other and not always fully understanding each other, in a city which invites so many of our events on its stages and into its concert halls, onto its streets and into its museums. Singapore, a city eager to embrace new horizons, a city curious about the world, a city so hospitable to our businesses that tens of thousands of fellow Europeans call it home. It is only proper that we get our act together and reach out to a nation which has succeeded in making us feel welcome here.

Let me add that in this endeavour one element I found truly heartening has been the enthusiastic response from our Singaporean friends, be they foundations, companies, media groups, presenters or patrons. Allow me, Minister, to convey, through you, who represent here the government of the Republic of Singapore, our heartfelt gratitude to these people for their pivotal role in helping us kickstart our Season. Their names appear proudly on the screen behind me. The same holds true for all those European companies which have boldly embarked on this venture at a stage when it was still much more of an idea than anything else, and to whom I would also like to thank wholeheartedly. They embarked boldly, as I said, and farsightedly, I should add. Farsightedly, for this venture commands, I am confident, a huge potential for the future. It is my sincere hope that a growing number of European businesses among the two thousand present in Singapore will come to realize the magnitude of that potential.

And this is where I would like to conclude my remarks. I do believe that we have here the beginning of something bigger than us, of an organized endeavor liable to generate community, understanding, friendship and empathy for one another, the beginning of an inclusive endeavour, also, which takes nothing away from anybody, but provides opportunities for bonding, networking and outreach. It is also a tool to provide our modest, yet growing, we trust, contribution to your plans for making Singapore a hub, in Asia, for the arts and culture.

It is very comforting to see so many friends of Europe here tonight, yourself in the first place, Mr Minister – and allow me here to thank you for gracing our celebration with your presence.

We invite you all to join us in becoming the stakeholders and the stewards of this venture - already a joint venture between Singaporeans and Europeans - to make it blossom together and to reap the fruits together. And we look forward to seeing you again, often, along the future steps of an ever-prospering *Encore !*

Thank you all and enjoy the evening.