

**Opening remarks by H.E. Pierre Buhler, Ambassador of France to Singapore**  
**Opening event of *Christian Lacroix, the Costumier,***  
***Encore ! The European Season in Singapore***  
***Voilà! French festival Singapore 2009***  
**19 March 2009**  
**National Museum of Singapore**

Mr Lui Tuck Yew, Senior Minister of State for Education and Information, Communication and the Arts,

Ms Lee Chor Lin, Director, National Museum

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with a great sense of pride that I take part in raising the curtain tonight on three very significant events, the opening of the exhibition *Christian Lacroix, the Costumier*, the launch of the second edition of *Voilà! French festival Singapore 2009* and, also, of the second edition of *Encore! The European Season in Singapore*. It is truly heartening to see so many friends gathered here, on the enchanting premises of the National Museum of Singapore, and I would like to thank you all for sharing with us this infusion of beauty and emotion.

Allow me to begin with a salute to the celebration of this magnificent creator, and wizard of French *haute couture*, Christian Lacroix. As Chor Lin has already addressed the artistic significance of the exhibition you are about to discover, allow me to just emphasize that, one year after the return of the Greek masterpieces to the Louvre, this exhibition is yet another sign of the strong bond between French and Singaporean museums, a bond which our two countries further strengthened two months ago, in Paris, by signing two cooperation agreements. This has not occurred by mere chance, but is the outcome of steady and patient efforts between the museums of our countries, between institutions such as the National Heritage Board and, from the performing arts, the National Arts Council, the Singapore Lyric Opera, and their French partners. It is therefore proper that, on behalf of France, I should thank you all, Minister, Chor Lin, and dear friends from Singapore, for being so open, reliable and dedicated. And I trust, Minister, that you will unveil some of the good things that are in store for us in the years to come.

The opening of this exhibition provides us with a most welcome opportunity to usher in another French feast, namely the revival of a festival first featured in May 2007 by the French Chamber of Commerce under the name of *Voilà* – with an h, infusing a subtle local flavor into our very colloquial French word *voilà*. A part of the “French springs” that have flourished throughout Asia, the *Voilà !* festival brings you a fireworks of theater, exhibition, opera – Hoffmann’s tales has just closed to rave reviews – classical music, French bossa nova, francophonie, sneak previews of movies in the presence of directors... and so on. Last but not least, since the French and Singaporeans share an irrepressible passion for food – fine food, I should add – a French Gastronomy Festival is, of course, a must.

With some 20 events within one month, *Voilà !* is part of and the curtain-raiser for something much larger, that is *Encore! The European Season in Singapore*. And I am proud, alongside my friend Pär Ahlberger, the Ambassador of Sweden, and all my colleagues, heads of missions of the European Union in Singapore, to introduce, on their behalf, the second edition of an event spanning nearly 8 months. Last year, when the 16 EU Embassies here launched the inaugural Season, we expected a line-up of some 50-60 events at most. We ended up with some 140 such events over the 8 month duration of the Season, and an

aggregate audience of 225 000. This simply means that there is an audience for things European.

How did it come about ? Well, there is no trick. One single word sums it all up : goodwill. The goodwill of so many people, Europeans and Singaporeans alike, who gave us their trust, support and help, in allowing us to create from scratch an endeavor which, we hope, will become a durable addition to the landscape of this city. It was the goodwill of our earliest supporters and sponsors, in 2008, and while I cannot quote them all, allow me to single out our founding partners, the Lee Foundation, the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation and the Shaw Foundation. They made it all possible in the first place, through their generous support . And I was also truly heartened to see so many European companies lending us, again or for the first time, their much valued support. They did so despite the doom and gloom in the air, despite tight budgets, despite the urge for caution from their headquarters and there is no doubt that it has helped boost our morale. Well, hats off to them, dear friends ! It had to be said and I am proud to say it in front of this distinguished audience.

But our gratitude also goes out to a number of other providers of goodwill, such as the members of our patronage committee, as good fairies hovering over the cradle of our Season last year, our media partners, the Singapore Tourism Board as well as the presenters and producers who opened their concert halls, theaters, museums, cinemas and the streets of Singapore to European productions.

To conclude, allow me to share a dream with you. I dream of a Season wholeheartedly embraced by the entire European corporate community of Singapore, a Season establishing itself as a permanent feature of this City, and as an integral part of Singapore's drive to become a global hub for the arts, culture and lifestyle. I dream of a Season which would prosper and develop into a branding tool for the image of the European Union in Singapore, and become a common good around which we, Europeans and Singaporeans, can rally together. I dream of a Season that would be a bridge between Europe and the city-State, as well as a powerful platform to reach out to all communities here, and in the first place to our Singaporean friends. Can that dream come true ? I believe it can, so long as you all lend us your goodwill and your trust.

Speaking of dreams, we can start tonight... and we can start with no one else than Christian Lacroix. We invited you, in this morning's newspapers, to savour the magic of Europe. That magic is now no more than a few minutes away.