

Stairway Theater Trio comes back from the Break-the-Silence European Tour



Stairway's advocacy theater actors Jhonnie, Susan and Jhao just came home from a line-up of performances in Denmark, Germany and Belgium. Performing for the Stairway Film and Theater Campaign against Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) European Tour, under the guidance of Stairway Artistic Director Monica Ray, the trio performed "Cracked Mirrors", a play on child sexual abuse and exploitation in various venues and varied audiences for the whole month of September. In this short interview, they shared their thoughts on what they call a unique and life-changing experience.

Q: Tell us the first thing that comes to your mind when you are asked about the tour.

Jhonnie: Happy, tiring, many challenges. We carried our own sets. It was my first time to go out of the country. When we were in Denmark, I spent a lot of time resting under the apple trees.

Q: What do you remember most from the tour?

Susan: Some people in audience cry after each show. Some disclosed their experiences of being sexually abused as child. Talking about CSAE was a taboo in Denmark; people really do not talk about it. Some of those who watched our shows admitted that although CSA happened to them, people around them did not do anything about it. Even when a victim cries out, people still tend to look for evidence. They most

likely believe only when the offender is caught in the act. In incest cases, authorities usually believe the parents more than the abused child. After watching our performance, some committed to begin discussing CSAP issues.

Stairway Executive Director Lars Christian Jorgensen moderates the sharing session with the audience after a show.

In one instance, one woman disclosed the day after the performance. She had a hard time sharing it to people for fear that friends will abandon her. After seeing the performance, she realized that it is okay to disclose.



Jhao: They were men who disclosed. We saw big tattooed men breaking down while disclosing. These men came from the drug abuse rehabilitation centers in Denmark. The abuse happened to them when they were young. This disclosure happened in Hordum, with 40 people in the audience, in a city of 200 residents. This was memorable.

At the International People's College, everything was so cool. There were no grades, no age limit. Anything you want to study you can just take. The audience came from different nationalities. Our performance really had an impact on them. They committed to including CSAE in the curricula.

Jhonnie: During the last two performances in Belgium and Germany, I went so deep into my own performance and gave all I got. I felt that as an actor, it was not just about acting but also about putting one's self into the performance.

Q: Any realizations?

Susan: Happy because even just by acting I am to raise awareness. As I share my experiences, I am able to help people—assisting them in opening their minds about issues that they should talk about in their country-- and not just in one country but many.

Jhao: In addition to what Susan said, people had the most difficulty tackling or facing the issue of incest. They also did not know what to do or how to respond. Many people want to help but they do not know how.

Jhonnie: I realized that even more the importance of this kind of theater. I am also able to improve my own abilities as an actor. Stairway should conduct training on CSAP for countries, through partner organizations. There are so many people wanting to help but don't know how.

Jhonnie, Susan and Jhao receive a warm applause from the European audience.



Q: What were the difficulties or struggles during the tour?

Susan, Jhao and Jhonnie: We had difficulty with the sets and lights because they were heavy for us. We had to be mobile. We lacked people who can carry heavy things. If we are to be mobile, we should have more people helping. We had Lars as our driver that is why he got no rest. We also had to look for our own food. We were not able to get any food whenever we strike down the set too late in the evening or at dawn because all food establishments have closed for the night. We also got very home sick and missed Filipino food. We missed eating rice.

We had people helping us bring the sets and lights around the venues, and most of them were women.

Q: How do you feel as a member of the advocacy theater team?

Jhao: We would like to do this more often. We want to bring this to more places.

Jhonnie: We came to know more about what we have to do.

Susan: Whenever we arrived in a place of performance, each of us already knew what to do. We worked as a team.

Jhao: We worked together very well that we set up our own lights and climbed ceiling to install each light.

Q: What do you see as possibilities for the Stairway theater program?

Jhonnie: We have to have more actors so more roles can be assigned, including actors who can play as perpetrators.

Jhao: We hope Stairway can reach country leaders. Stairway should also train people who can take on this strategic approach to tackling this issue.

Susan: Theater brings the message to people in a more direct manner. Especially when, after each performance, when we talked to the audience and disclosed our experience, the audience always got amazed that we also experienced abuse. What we do as a team is also part of our healing.

Jhonnie: Step by step, we came to accept what has happened to us. Performing is part of healing.

Jhao: We had trainings on theater under Monica Ray (Stairway Artistic Director) and some artists but these are not enough for us to train others. Sending us to scholarships on theater studies will help us become theater trainers.

Susan: If are to train others, we just need to undergo theater courses or trainings so we know how to do it. We would like to have that.

Jhonnie: Yes, we do.



"It's a team
effort."
Stairway
theater team
with
European
volunteers
strike a pose
after a night
of
performance.
