

## Media spotlight falls on performances

SINGAPORE Season's line-up of arts and cultural performances is drawing a fair share of media attention in Britain.

One man in the spotlight is theatre director Ong Keng Sen, 41, who curated *Insomnia*, the first show of Singapore Season.

The multifaceted show is a contextual look at Singapore and South-east Asia and focuses on young artists working in alternative media such as the Internet and digital arts.

It begins today at London's Institute of Contemporary Art.

In an interview with the *Financial Times*, Ong struck an upbeat note as he took stock of the works he has taken beyond Singapore shores.

"Singapore has always been multicultural, and has all the signs of being a 'global soul'.

"I still believe art must be seen in its cultural context, but I'm no longer at the confrontational stage," he said. "But I'm confident that the feelings in this show permeate our own foundation so deeply that I don't even have to explain anything."

The paper said Ong's pan-Asian, personalised, multi-disciplinary works have put Singapore on the international map.

It also said that he has so strongly codified a distinctively Singaporean stage aesthetic that even local productions with no connection to him or his company TheatreWorks are often summed up during interval chatter as "good Keng Sen" or "bad Keng Sen".

But it said that for some audiences, the director's approach smacks of self-conscious manipulation.

Still, Ong told the paper that he speaks more as an individual artist than a cultural negotiator.

His new directions are visible in *The Global Soul The Buddha Project*, a production inspired by Buddhist writings and the essays of travel writer Pico Iyer, which premiered at the 2003 Singapore Arts festival.

Since that production, Ong has been particularly aggressive in transcending borders with his works, said the *Financial Times*.

"I think it reflects Singapore's hybridity, and I don't think I could do it if I had been born anywhere else," he said.