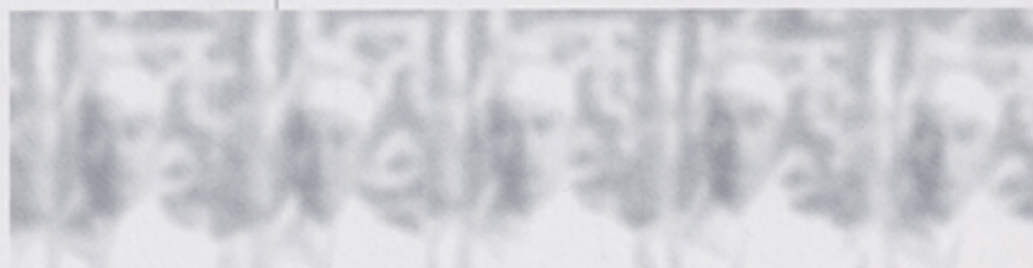


THEATREWORKS



DESCENDANTS | OF THE EUNUCH ADMIRAL

| a meditation |

4 - 13 October 1996

The Victoria Theatre


DESCENDANTS OF THE EUNUCH ADMIRAL

| a meditation |

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The Critic's Choice for Best Acting, Cairo 1996.
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PRODUCTION LIST

DESCENDANTS OF THE EUNUCH ADMIRAL

Written by Kuo Pao Kun

Directed by Ong Keng Sen

Set/Lighting Designer Kuo Jian Hong

Computer Graphics Designer Casey Lim

Production Director Tay Tong

Production Manager Tan Lay Hoon

Stage Manager/Sound Operator Karen Loh

Technical Manager Emmanuel Lee

Sound Engineer Sebastian Song

Video Engineer/Operator Willy Bey

Technical Executive/Lighting Operator Lee Shian Ching

Stage Assistant Eve Tan

Hair Design Ashley Lim

Make Up Design Joseph Ng

General Manager Tay Tong

Business/PR Manager Michele Lim

Publicity/Print Executive Leslie Lee

Ticketing Executive Felicia Chan

Publicity Flyer Designer Design At Work, Rosman Haron

Programme Designer Wong Young Tseng

Chief Muse Janey Hou

Performers Jeremiah Choy

Casey Lim

Noorlinah Mohamed

Tan Kheng Hua

Tang Fu Kuen

A black and white photograph of a bald man with a wide-eyed, playful expression, sitting at a restaurant table. He is wearing a vertically striped dress shirt and a patterned bow tie. His hands are clasped on the table in front of him. The table is set with a white tablecloth, a dark-rimmed plate, a fork, a knife, and a small round object, possibly a butter pat. In the background, other tables with white cloths and glassware are visible, suggesting a restaurant setting.

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When four yuppies stumble upon a dreamworld, they come to the realisation that they have become castrated in the pursuit of excellence and climbing the corporate ladder.

Through stories of the legendary eunuch, Admiral Zhenghe, parallels are drawn between the power struggles of court eunuchs and modern-day office workers.

KUO PAO KUN is a prolific dramatist with an extensive portfolio which includes playwriting, directing and teaching in both English and Chinese. He was co-founder of the Practice Performing Arts School in 1965, the Artistic Director of the Practice Performing Arts Centre Limited and the Practice Theatre Ensemble which he pioneered in 1986. He was also the founder of the Substation, Singapore's first arts centre in 1990.

A 1989 recipient of the prestigious Cultural Medallion and the 1993 ASEAN Award (Performing Arts), Pao Kun was invited by the United States government to go on a four-month study tour of theatre companies and drama schools on a Fulbright Professional Exchange Programme in 1988. His major plays written include *The Little*

White Sailing Boat, The Coffin Is Too Big For The Hole, No Parking On Odd Days, The Silly Little Girl and The Funny Old Tree, Day I Met The Prince, Mama Looking For Her Cat, Lao Jiu, 020001 and The Evening Climb. His works have been performed in Australia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Middle East, and have been or are being translated into Malay, Tamil, German, Arabic and Japanese.

ONG KENG SEN. Director, Fulbright

1993, and Artistic Director of English language theatre company.

In 1994, he was awarded a grant in New York for his achievements

April 1995, he became the first at the prestigious Joseph Papp

Shakespeare Festival. Since his University Tisch School of Arts

directed epic outdoor and site-acclaimed both by the press and

artistic and social significance.

productions in Fort Canning Park and *The Yang Family* in a Chinatown shophouse.

Recently, Keng Sen directed *Six of the Best*, a play inspired by the controversy of the Michael Fay incident. It was a sell-out hit which also received much coverage from the international press. Thereafter, he directed his first full-length

His next project after *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* is *The Southeast Asian Laboratory*, an inter-cultural collaboration which will culminate in an Asian inter-premiering in Tokyo in September

Scholar, Singapore Young Artist

TheatreWorks, Singapore's leading

by the Asian Cultural Council based in Singapore and Asian theatre. In

Singaporean to be invited to direct Public Theatre, New York

graduation from the New York Graduate Programme, he has

specific productions which were audience as ground breaking with

This includes numerous

and *The Yang Family* in a

the Best, a play inspired by the incident. It was a sell-out hit which the international press. Thereafter, feature film, *Army Daze*.

of the Eunuch Admiral is *The* inter-cultural collaboration which cultural production of *King Lear* 1997.



Jeremiah Choy, 33, Practising Solicitor

Acting Credits for TheatreWorks: Beauty World (1988, 1990), Fried Rice Paradise (1991), Lest The Demons Guide To Singapore (Abridged) (1993), Under The Eunuch Admiral (1995), Mortal Sins (1995), The Yang

M Butterfly (1990), The Sword has Two Edges Get To Me (1992), The Complete Space Travellers Bed (1993), Broken Birds (1995), Descendants of the Family (1996) and The Morning Star Project (1996)

Casey Lim, 34, Actor/Director

Acting Credits for TheatreWorks: One Year Back Home Travellers Guide To Singapore (Abridged) (1993), Lao Jiu (1993), A Night Out With Michael Chiang (1994), Undercover (1994), Broken Birds (1995), Yang Family (1996)

(1990), Bernard's Story (1992), The Complete Space Jiu (1993 and 1994), Dirty Laundry (1993), Under (1994), Longing (1994), Where Do You Go Jeremy? Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral (1995) and The

Noortinah Mohd, 28, Actor

Acting Credits for TheatreWorks: Beauty World (1988, Metamorphosis (1989), Trial (1990), Trojan Women Where Do You Go Jeremy (1995), Mortal Sins (1995),

1992), To My Heart With Smiles (1989), (1991), Under The Bed (1993), Longing (1994), The Morning Star Project (1996)

Tan Kheng Hua, 33, Actor

Acting Credits For TheatreWorks: Beauty World (1988, Home (1990), The Moon Is Less Bright (1990), Mad South (1991), Three Children (1992), Lao Jiu (1993 (1994), Undercover (1994), Where Do You Go Jeremy (1995), The Morning Star Project (1996)

1992), Long Green Socks (1990), One Year Back Forest (1991), Trojan Women (1991), Trip To The and 1994), Mergers and Accusations (1993), Longing (1995), Broken Birds (1995), Willis and Secession

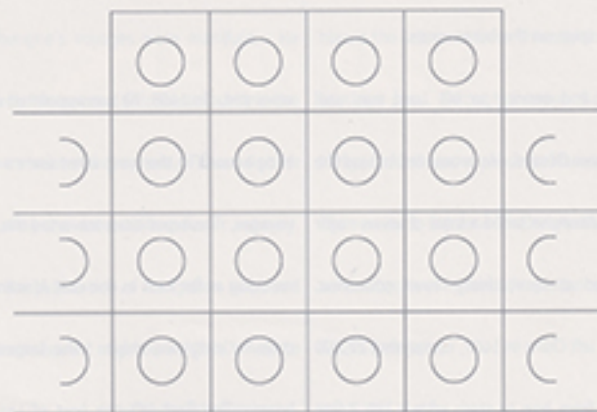
Tang Fu Kuen, 24, National Serviceman/Actor

Acting Credits with TheatreWorks: Children Of The (1993), Watching The Clouds Go By (1993), Scorpion Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral (1995), The Yang

Pear Garden (1992), Sammy Won't Go To School Orchid (1994), Longing (1994), Broken Birds (1995), Family (1996)

KUO JIAN HONG has been designing professionally both in Singapore and the United States. Some of her work in Singapore include set and lighting design for *Fishing Eagles*, *Midwife's Diary*, *The Next Generation* and *The Savage Land* for Practice Theatre Ensemble, and lighting design for TheatreWorks' *Scorpion Orchid*.

In the United States, her work has been seen at East West Players, Foothill Theatre Company, Iowa Summer Repertory and Iowa Playwrights' Festival. She received a Masters In Fine Arts in Directing from the University of Hawaii at Manoa and a Masters In Fine Arts in Design from the University of Iowa.



Zhenghe (Cheng Ho, 1371-1433), Grand Eunuch and was a Muslim of Mongol-Arab origin. During the tribes were captured and castrated for service as imperial eunuchs. Others were castrated as punishment.

Male castration has been practised from antiquity. In the West, the practice originated in Africa and became customary among the oriental monasteries and the Greeks and Romans. In the Far and Middle East, eunuchs were commonly employed in the harems.

In China, eunuchs were employed for court service since important political roles which continued through the dynasties. Rampant abuses of political power by the eunuchs directly led to the decline of the many dynasties. In particular, the Han, Tang and Ming dynasties. It was during the Ming Dynasty in 1381 that Yunnan was conquered by the Ming Emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang. Many young boys were captured and castrated to serve the emperor. One of the young boys was Zhenghe. In the ensuing years, Zhenghe played a significant

master mariner, was born in Kunyang, Yunnan, China. He expansion of the Ming empire, many boys from the border eunuchs. Some of them were sent as tribute to the

the Zhou Dynasty (1100BC). They later went on to assume the Zhou Dynasty (1100BC). They later went on to assume dynasties. Rampant abuses of political power by the in particular, the Han, Tang and Ming dynasties.

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military role in the power struggle between his lord,

Chudi, and his kinsmen for the Ming throne. In 1402, Chudi finally succeeded in usurping the throne from his nephew, Zhu Yunwen.

Upon Chudi's ascension to the Ming throne, he replaced all court scholars suspected of remaining loyal to the deposed emperor with eunuchs loyal to himself. The eunuchs were deployed as envoys, as officers on military expeditions and as spies on the bureaucrats.

Zhenghe's loyalty and service to his Lord was well rewarded. In 1405, he was appointed commander of the Ming armada in the most extensive maritime expeditions in China's history. Zhenghe sailed a total of seven major voyages. The expeditions traversed the Pacific and Indian Oceans and visited at least thirty-seven countries, reaching as far west as the east African coast. The expedition first left China in 1407, comprising 27,800 crew in sixty-two ships. The largest of these ships measured 440 feet from bow to stern with a 186.2 feet beam. The fleet left the port of Liu Jia Gang of the Zhejiang province and proceeded south to Fujian.

As the expedition approached the coast of Sumatra, it confronted and defeated the fleet of a powerful pirate. The pirates had been plundering ships passing through the Malacca Straits. The pirates were captured, taken to the Ming capital and executed. Zhenghe's success in bringing the pirate to justice ensured safe passage for

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shipping in the Straits. More importantly, it enhanced

The expedition continued its journey in October 1407 and reached Calicut, west coast of India. On his arrival, Zhenghe presented imperial gifts and greetings to its King. A tablet and pavilion were erected to commemorate the occasion.

After his return, Zhenghe set sail again in October 1409. He led a fleet of forty-eight ships to the West Coast of India. Along the way, excursions were made to Siam, Malacca, Sumatra and Ceylon.

In 1413, Zhenghe's fourth expedition set sail with 27,670 crew in sixty-three ships. It explored the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the east coast of Africa. As a result, nineteen countries sent envoys and tributes to the Ming Court.

In 1417, Zhenghe reached the east coast of Africa. He established diplomatic ties between seventeen south-eastern African countries and the Ming court. He returned with the African envoys and also with a menagerie of exotic animals, including ostriches, zebras and giraffes, then unknown in China.

Zhenghe's sixth expedition, from February 1421 to September 1421 was his shortest. He travelled only as far as Sumatra, after which the expedition was led by his subordinate officers.

The seventh voyage of Zhenghe from 1431 to 1433 was his last. This marked the beginning of the end of an era of maritime exploration and diplomacy. On this last expedition, Zhenghe revisited the Red Sea and the coast of Africa. He died shortly after his journey. Some said he died on his return to China in 1433 at the age of sixty five, while others have said that he passed away on his way back to China from Calicut, India.

The effects of Zhenghe's voyages were manifold. He blazed the sea route from China to the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and beyond. Through a series of diplomatic missions, the market for Ming products was expanded. Trade with South-East Asia increased, stimulating the domestic handicraft industry. The resultant increase in China's knowledge of oceanic geography led to the publication of navigation maps and several books of historical importance. This also provided an impetus to the subsequent migration of the Chinese to South East Asia.

| compiled and written by

the prestige of the Ming Court in tropical Asia.

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Mok Wai Yin |

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KENG SEN

| interview |

"... the most wonderful theatre, the most wonderful expression has always been focusing on the marginal to give a picture of what's happening in society ..."

| By Mok Wai Yin

May 14, 1995 |



Longing, Broken Birds and Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral... A continuity of themes and

aspirations... "The main continuity of theme from the two earlier productions (*Longing* in August 1994 and *Broken Birds* in March 1995) is in terms of the relationship with the audience. Definitely a refusal to condescend them. I'll just present my work and they will find meaning in it.

All three productions talk about the search for the mystery of the everyday. Life is mysterious in our daily existence. There's a certain degree of magic or a belief in the unknown. Why else do we keep talismans, crosses, rosaries and other religious objects in our cars? Why do we sometimes get a *deja-vu* feeling?

There is a very strong connection between the *karayuki* (the Japanese prostitutes in *Broken Birds*) and Zhenghe - these people are so far away from our time, almost mythical. Yet I feel connected to them through time and space...that is something mysterious.

The productions are a very strong protest on my part of how Singapore has become so fixed on the tangible and the material. My reaction as an artist has been to move into the ethereal and intangible, to try to eke out a meaning from that.

These plays are not history plays. They tell you very strongly about your present condition, your present life. That's why I've fought against just telling the story of Zhenghe. It's not Zhenghe's story, it's our story using him to illuminate the condition here."

Of Prostitutes And Eunuchs... "The most wonderful theatre, the most wonderful expression has always been on focusing on the marginal to give a picture of what's happening in society. From these marginal persons, we begin to get a vision of how that society is constructed and hence, we can critique it.

We are agitated through the throwing of marginalised characters into our world; we are forced to re-examine our lives."

On Being Asian... "We have to be very careful not to stereotype what is meant by 'Asian' - that it has to be traditional or that it has to be filled with history. These definitions of Asian would immediately exclude you and I in the sense that we are English-speaking and completely contemporary. Being Asian in the everyday does not immediately call up the clichés of Chinese opera, Kabuki or traditional puppetry. We must not say that 'Asian' means only certain categories. It is important to expand the meaning of 'Asian' rather than to limit it. I hope that people

watching the play will begin to see the broader concepts of Asian theatre in this piece, rather than saying 'This is not Asian!' because we are not doing Chinese movements or using an ethnic language. If you sit back and absorb the whole work, you will begin to realise what is Asian is not in the costumes, nor in the gestural work. But it's on a deeper level. There are still distilled elements of 'Asian' in the play. So maybe the play for me is a process of distilling all these Asian motifs which I have used in my past work into something purer. Just as I feel I'm a distilled product of my Chinese ancestors. Maybe corrupted, in the sense that I am a hybrid."

On Descendants Of The Eunuch Admiral...The Feel clean, very minimalist, very pared down. The scenes seated and chanting from the internet."

Movement In The Production... "In all my rehearsal processes, movement has been a major way in which we discover ourselves. Movement remains the

beginning impetus for the play. In the early years, that has been my response to colonial theatre - to move away from language to the body. Now there's a return from the body to language. I feel that by going this route, there's a deepening of meaning. It's this restlessness within myself, my search for meaning. This always comes from de-constructing what I've set up. I'm throwing away the styles which I first developed in 1988 - this whole reinvention of Chinese traditional theatre in the English language. I've left that aside because I began to be dissatisfied. I have to liberate myself."

Castration... "The play moves beyond the literal. I didn't want this play to be about losing one's manhood. It would immediately become less universal. 'Castration' does not only affect men. We can see castration on a larger level. That's why there are two women in the cast. The play is about how these Singaporeans, Shentonites, have discovered that they may have castrated themselves in trying to get ahead. Sometimes in the small ways - you find that you can no longer connect with something simple. The things that make life beautiful. You cannot stop and smell the coffee. That's what happens on an everyday level when you subvert yourself trying to achieve excellence. I can say that in that respect, I am a eunuch. I often censor a natural part of myself. That, on the simplest level, can be said to be castration."

Of the Production... "The feel is very modern, very don't have high action. The actors could be literally

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The Audience... "The important thing about the piece. Not to prejudice the piece. Try to move new things descend on you. It might lead to a more theatre. We are not interested in who these four successful Singapore. They are seen as one group. theatre is often trapped in the narrative . It has one of theatre is that it's multi-focused. There'll always many layers - that is life . Theatre-makers through 'life-like' on stage. For me, theatre is not life-like in mysterious. The mystery is removed when you're too linear character development."

Collaborating with Kuo Pao Kun.... "I used to believe discussing and working together. I realise now that

when you each do your own process separately and Pao Kun gives me the script. We discussed it initially, doesn't interfere. What that leads to is a final worldviews - a younger world view and an older world into one world view."

Zhenghe... "Pao Kun's perception is very much the Zhenghe. He was a wonderful warrior and diplomat armada of 60 ships with 27,000 people on board. He balance these very differing positions?"

For me, the play is not just about Zhenghe but how he highlighting his wonderful skills.

This production is about contemporary society, our present lives; through which we explore the 'Are we also castrated beings?'.
 ...

appreciating a piece of work is to be open throughout into the unknown. Only when you are open would powerful interpretation. This is unconventional Shentonites are. They are archetypes of the Their journey is as a group. Contemporary Western focus. Conversation proceeds on one field. My belief be several things happening at one time. There're the ages have been in the search of the 'natural', the the characterisation but life-like in the way that life is explicit. That is why I fight against one narrative or

collaboration was about two people sitting,
sometimes a very fulfilling collaboration can result

then arrive at the product.

But ultimately, when I'm in the rehearsal process, he's a piece of art. He's an aesthetic piece that is a combination of two of our views. I think it's important so that it doesn't collapse

same as mine. We both have a lot of respect for
and a great navigator. In 1405, he commanded an
was Muslim, but slave to a Taoist lord. How does he

reflects us. I think I have shifted away from simply

questions 'Are we slaves to our aspirations?':

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TheatreWorks is an independent Singaporean theatre company which develops and nurtures professional theatre skills. It is dedicated to reaching a broad section of the community and to taking Singaporean theatre abroad. The Company recognises its responsibility in encouraging awareness on human and social issues. Ultimately, TheatreWorks is inspired and dedicated to sharing the Magic of Theatre. TheatreWorks (S) Ltd, a non-profit organisation, was incorporated in February 1985 as the first English language adult professional theatre company in Singapore. TheatreWorks has over its years of existence produced critically acclaimed productions.

Recognition for their successful fusion of Western and Eastern dramatic traditions have earned the Company a reputation for being the best theatre company in Singapore. The company also patented the concept of carnival theatre in the outdoors with *Theatre Carnival On The Hill*, *Longing and Broken Birds*.

As a pioneer theatre company, TheatreWorks realises its responsibility to provide opportunities for and impart skills to practitioners with training programmes like The Writers' Laboratory, Springboard and the Directors' Laboratory. It also sees as its responsibility to build up theatre audiences both quantitatively and qualitatively by broadening the range of theatrical experiences available. In late 1994, TheatreWorks, after starting the wave of staging popular theatre, forged a new edge with its new works. These emphasised the use of interdisciplinary and inter-cultural styles and techniques. These works often blurred the line between theatre, installation art, video art, photography, sound, dance and architecture.

The company has toured many countries around the region and the world.

Directors Lim Kay Tong, Lim Siau Chong, Justin Hill, Abhisheganaden, Michael Chiang, Goh Eck Kheng, Kalyani Tong, Lim Yu-Beng, Lok Meng Chue. **Artistic Director** Ong Michele Lim. **Production Manager** Tan Lay Hoon. **Publicity/Ching** Librarian Mok Wai Yin. **Accounts** Sally Neo. **Ticketing** Robin Loon. **Resident Set Designer** Justin Hill. **Resident Composer** Mark Chan. **Accountants** Coopers and Lybrand.

Ong Keng Sen. Members Alex Abisheganaden, Jacintha Kausikan, Dana Lam, Sylvia Lim, Kim Ramakrishnan, Tay Keng Sen. **General Manager** Tay Tong. **Business/PR Manager** Print Executive Leslie Lee. **Technical Executive** Lee Shlan Felicia Chan. **Chief Muse** Janey Hou. **Writer In Residence** Lighting Designer Kalyani Kausikan. **Resident Music Legal Advisors** Lee and Lee



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