

THEATREWORKS presents

# MADAME MAO'S MEMORIES

by HENRY ONG

With Claire Wong as Madame Mao  
Directed by Ong Keng Sen

21 - 31 March 1991  
8 p.m. nightly  
Matinees on 24 and 30  
at 2.30 p.m.

The Black Box  
Fort Canning Centre  
Fort Canning Park



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# MADAME MAO'S MEMORIES

BY HENRY ONG

WITH CLARE WONG AS MADAME MAO

DIRECTED BY ONG KENG SEN

SET DESIGN BY TANG DA WU AND ONG KENG SEN

MUSIC BY MARK CHAN

Please note that this performance will run without an Interval

MADAME MAO'S MEMORIES takes the audience through the life of Jiang Qing, architect of China's Cultural Revolution, and widow of Chairman Mao Tse-tung.

Henry Ong has created a picture of life in prison with the woman who enslaved China in order to liberate herself. It is not a documentary account of the life and times of Jiang Qing. Neither does it pass judgement on the woman who became famous (or perhaps notorious) throughout the world through her attempts to destroy China's centuries-old culture, killing 50,000 people in the process.

It is the playwright's portrait of a human being, of facts combined with imagination.

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## HENRY ONG

Henry Ong, a journalist by profession, makes his theatrical writing debut with *Madame Mao's Memories*. *Madame Mao's Memories* became an instant hit when it opened at Theatre/Theater in Hollywood, California in September 1989 and ran for six months. It subsequently played at the Asian-American Theatre in San Francisco, the Los Angeles Arts Festival and the Bailiwick Theatre in Chicago. Henry's interest in biographies dates back to his graduate school days when he studied the relationship between journalism and biography, his Master's thesis topic at Iowa State University. A former *Straits Times* reporter, Henry has worked on a variety of newspapers and magazines as Managing Editor for the past 10 years in Los Angeles College. He is a graduate of Hollywood Scriptwriting Institute. He holds a Certificate in Film Production from Los Angeles College and has written and produced a short film, "First Date". For three consecutive years, he was producer of the Asian Television and Film Awards Shows, a project he initiated for the Association of Asian/Pacific American Artists. He has worked with many actors as their publicist and personal manager. He is happy to return to his homeland—after an absence of eight years—to witness his play and to sample the local food.

## ONG KENG SEN

Ong Keng Sen has been TheatreWorks' Artistic Director since 1988. Since returning from a 7-month stint in the United Kingdom and the United States, where he observed theatre companies at work and attended master classes, he has been the Artistic Director of The Retrospective of Singaporean plays; initiated the TheatreWorks' Writers' Laboratory project and the Springboard series of theatre training programmes; and established an alternative repertoire in The Black Box

TheatreWorks wish to thank our pioneer corporate sponsors, Tungs Studio and Glaxo (Singapore), for their continued support; the National Parks Board for our premises, the media; and all publicity assistants, stage hands, ushers and front-of-house assistants.

## CLAIRE WONG

Claire Wong has been an active participant in theatre since her school days and while she was in NUS, performing in *Mad Forest*, *To My Heart With Smiles*, *Three Children*, *Oedipus Rex* and *Night, Mother* amongst others.

Wong has never been able to keep away from theatre for long and while in Sydney, Australia on a year-long working scholarship with a law firm, she attended several courses covering text analysis, character building and role building using meditative techniques at The Actors Centre.

## TANG DA WU

Born in 1943, Tang Da Wu went to London in 1969 to study art, specialising in sculpture. Unable to keep away from family and friends, he returned to Singapore in 1988 and started an artists' village with ten artists and craftsmen in rural Sembawang in 1989.

During the 1990 Singapore Festival of Arts, Da Wu showed pieces of performance art on social and environmental issues as well as on the art of enjoyment in auditoria and in the open air. Some pieces he has performed include *June 4 Incident* (Tien An Men Square), *The Death of a Filipino Maid* and *Some Trees Take 50 Years to Grow to This Height*. He has also performed in Paris, Portugal and England.

Da Wu conducts a weekly programme of Art therapy at MINDS. This is his first set design.

## MARK CHAN

Singer-songwriter/Composer/Recording artiste, Mark has two solo albums to his name, besides countless appearances on TV and radio and representing Singapore in song-writing and singing competitions.

He has a special affinity for Drama and his original music has graced Singapore theatre in numerous productions over the past three years. Some of the productions he has created music for are *Three Children*, *Sound of A Voice & The Dance And The Railroad*, *Medea*, *Mother Courage*, *The Robbers From Nutmeg Town* (A children's musical in Mandarin), *The Silly Little Girl And The Funny Old Tree*, *The Day I Met The Prince*, *Our Town* and *Trine*. He also created music for Henri Chen's painting exhibition at the Empress Place Museum last year.

It has been said that Mark's theatre music goes beyond illustrating the action, often taking on the role of another actor, adding an extra dimension, opening another door.

Mark spends his spare time painting, reading, playing tennis, swimming, watching movies, talking to his birds and eating.

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## PRODUCTION CREW

<i>Production Managers</i>	Tay Tong Dawn Westerhout
<i>Stage Manager</i>	Dawn Westerhout
<i>Technical Manager</i>	Lim Yu-Beng
<i>Lighting Design</i>	Michelle Lim
<i>Sound</i>	Koh Joo Kim
<i>Lighting Operator</i>	Leong Mun Hoi
<i>Projectionist</i>	Quah Seok Whee
<i>Hair</i>	Ashley Lim
<i>Programme &amp; Poster</i>	Goh Eck Kheng
<i>Voice Coach</i>	Pat Browning
<i>Taiji Instructor</i>	Rennie Chong
<i>Front-of-House</i>	Lim Wee Mien

## COMMENTARY

With the crushing of the pro-democracy demonstrations in the summer of 1989, China's leaders have tightened control of the cultural life of the city.

Experimental theatre, modern dance and avant garde art have been thrown out as promoting 'western thought'. In their stead, productions from the days of the Cultural Revolution, when Madame Mao dictated the tastes and thoughts of the masses, have begun to make a come back.

Ironically, lines from *Red Lantern*, one of eight revolutionary operas popularised by Jiang Ching, have taken on new meaning. Consider these: "Everyone going onto the streets to demonstrate..." and "blood debts being repaid with blood." The latter was, in fact, an epithaph scrawled in blood on a Beijing wall in the dawn of 4 June 1989.

More significant was the reaction of the capacity first night audience at the reopening of *Red Lantern* in February 1991. Certainly, there were the few who wondered if its revival indicated that Madame Mao had been returned to favour, but it was the applause that was most telling. The audience applauded where they had never applauded before, they applauded like they never had before. It was as if they were watching a new opera.

The official government drama critic, shedding light on the revival, insisted that *Red Lantern* "is a good opera in itself". It was Madame Mao who had stolen it from the people and had used it to further her own cause. The restaging, it was claimed, was evidence that it had been returned to the people.

This may be true, but closer to the heart of the matter is that, perhaps, the people of China have reclaimed this story of courage and revolution for themselves.

SHATTER THE IRON SHACKLES OF A THOUSAND YEARS. WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY.  
—painting by Cheng Mao-sheng

