

*A Psychological  
Suspense Thriller  
That Unfolds  
All Around You*

THEATREWORKS  
PRESENTS

The  
First  
Emperor's  
Last Days

13, 14 June 1998, 8.00pm  
14 June 1998, 2.30pm  
Victoria Theatre



Singapore  
Festival of  
Arts  
1998

NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL

Production Sponsor

**Mobil**



## Partners with the Arts



### *Nobody Dies on Friday*

*from American Repertory Theatre  
June 6 - 7 at Jubilee Hall*

This comedy is written by the founder of the American Repertory Theatre, Robert Brustein. It explores the unique relationship between famed acting teacher, Lee Strasberg and his celebrated pupil, Marilyn Monroe; and the humorous repercussions it has on his family.

### *When The World Was Green*

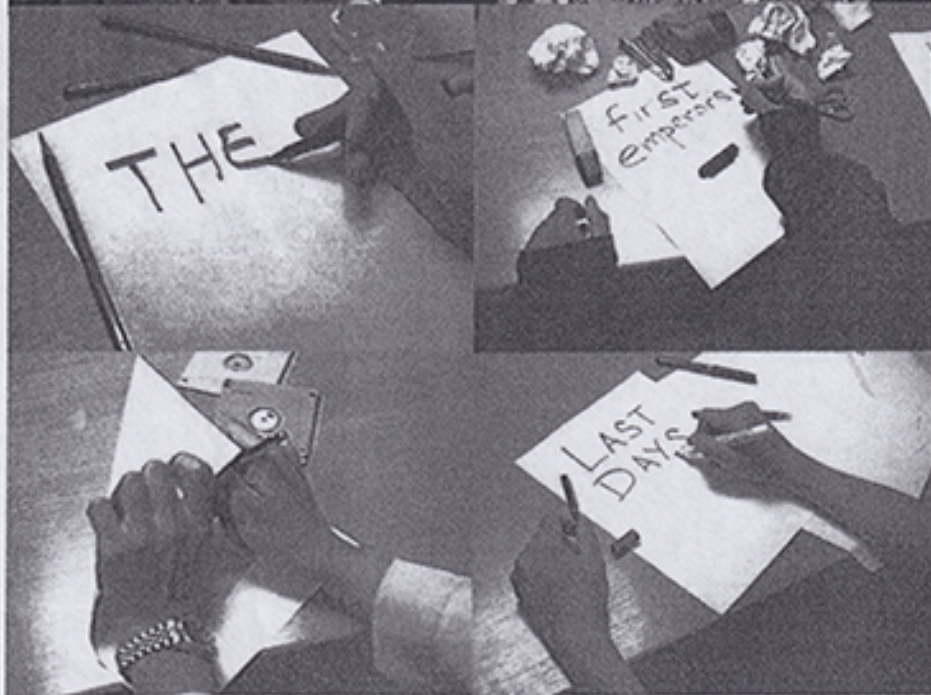
*from American Repertory Theatre  
June 9 - 11 at Jubilee Hall*

This finely crafted play unearths the mysteries of the human condition when a famous chef is thrown in jail for mistakenly poisoning the wrong man.

### *First Emperor's Last Days*

*from TheatreWorks  
June 13 - 14 at Victoria Theatre*

TheatreWorks, one of Singapore's leading theatre company, presents a multimedia play set in a mythical time where four people are imprisoned and made to write the biography of China's first emperor, Qin Shi Hwang. They are torn between writing the truth and telling a lie, as either would result in their deaths.



The performing arts: theatre, music, and dance is much more than entertainment. Mobil believes that the arts enriches the lives of many by enabling people to experience exciting forms of creative expression first-hand.

From being the first and only corporate sponsor of the Singapore Festival of the Arts when it began in 1977 and one of the pioneer sponsors of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and TheatreWorks, Mobil has been at the forefront of arts sponsorship. It is a developmental role we are proud to play. Mobil - your partner with the arts.

**Mobil** The energy  
to make a difference



# PRODUCTION LIST

## CAST

Tang Koh Boon Pin  
 Set Yew Lim Yu-Beng  
 Aileen Karen Tan  
 Gordon Ravi Veloo

## PRODUCTION TEAM

Playwright Tan Tarn How  
 Director Ong Keng Sen  
 Video Artist Paul Wong  
 Set Designer Pierre Thibaut  
 Lighting Designer Kuo Jian Hong  
 Structural Engineer John Portwood  
 Sound Designer Ong Keng Sen / Tamura Tomoyuki  
 Costume Designer Hayden Ng

Production Director Tommy Wong  
 Production Consultant Tay Tong  
 Production Manager Tan Lay Hoon  
 Stage Manager Florence Wee

VPA/Assistant to Video Artist Chong Chee Yin  
 Video Production Assistant Selvam s/o Gopal Dass  
 Video Production Assistant Juliana Mattar  
 Video Production Assistant Nisha D. Khemlani

Production Assistant Elvan Ong  
 Properties Mistress Lucilla Teoh  
 Properties Assistant Wendy Lim  
 Publicity Designer Sharon G M Tan  
 Lighting Operator Tiang Oon Kheng  
 Sound Operator Jacinda Chew  
 Rehearsal Sound Operator Adrian Chong  
 Dumb Waiter Operator Gabriel Cher  
 Dumb Waiter Operator Tan Jun Han

Stage Assistant Lili Chin  
 Stage Assistant Elizabeth Goh  
 Stage Assistant Supriya Rao  
 Stage Assistant Ian Tan  
 Stage Assistant Julian Teo  
 Photographer Henrick Lau  
 Videographer Lawrence Siow

Associate Artist Casey Lim  
 General Manager Michele Lim  
 Print/Publicity Executive Su-Lin Ngiam

Four writers – a dissident, a poet, a journalist, a government hack are under house arrest to write the living biography of the First Emperor of China. Confined to write the authorised biography of the Son of Heaven is a task laden with dangers.

A psychological twister, the smell of death permeates the stifling writers' lair.

The scent of suspense is thick with waifs of espionage. History, truth, a severed head and power are the ingredients of this multimedia story.

Four writers are confined somewhere in our past, present, and future. They carry out their imperial duties in a space warp void of everyday distractions such as time, daylight or the four seasons. They must write the definitive story while the Emperor still lives. They write with uncertainty, each stroke of the pen, click of the keyboard and fleeting thoughts are being recorded. This is the digital age of surveillance.

Who is exactly watching?

Who is manipulating?

Who is in charge?

The Emperor has done many great things.

But oh, the terrible, cruel things he has also done.

So what does one write?

Especially if one loves life.

And truth.

And the price of truth is death.

## PRODUCTION LIST 1

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## A MESSAGE FROM OUR SPONSOR



Mobil is proud to sponsor one of Singapore's best known theatre company, TheatreWorks, in this year's festival. As a pioneer sponsor of TheatreWorks, we have supported its other innovative and entertaining productions, such as *M Butterfly* and the new play for the Festival continues TheatreWorks' fine tradition of bringing exciting productions to the community.

Reputed for its fine experimental works, TheatreWorks will present a new multi-media play, *The First Emperor's Last Days* by Singapore's playwright Tan Tarn How and director, Ong Keng Sen. The imaginative use of cameras on stage and television monitors throughout the theatre will transport the audience to a world of court intrigue and suspense.

Supporting the arts has long been a hallmark of Mobil's philosophy of returning something of value to the community. We have had a long and fruitful association with the Singapore Festival of Arts since its inception, being the sole sponsor when it began in 1977.

Today, the Festival has grown into a multi-million dollar showcase of the world's quality cultural performances, catering to the myriad tastes of thousands of residents and visitors. Mobil is proud of its developmental role with the Festival and its contributions towards building Singapore's cultural heritage. Tonight, we are especially pleased to continue our tradition as your partner with the arts.

LUCILLE J. CAVANAGH

CHAIRPERSON

MOBIL ASIA PACIFIC PTE LTD



## A MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL



Welcome to the 1998 Singapore Festival of Arts.

This year's festival brings together more than 680 performances of dance, theatre and music presented by more than 3,000 local and international artists in both the main and fringe programmes.

We have tried to make this Festival especially memorable as it brings to an end the cycle of biennial festivals: the Festival of Arts, initiated in 1977, and the Festival of Asian Performing Arts, since 1993. From 1999 the two festivals will effectively be merged into an annual Singapore Arts Festival. We believe that this move will enable us to give Singapore a clearer and stronger identity worldwide as the home of a unique international arts festival with a distinct Asian flavour.

The success of our festivals is due to the enthusiastic support of both our arts and business communities. New works by homegrown companies have formed a cornerstone in the programming policy of the Festival while the visionary financial support of corporations and entrepreneurs has enabled the Festival to expand in breadth and depth.

Equally important is the unwavering support demonstrated by Singapore audiences. This will enable the Festival to grow from strength to strength.

I would like to thank all sponsors of the 1998 Singapore Festival of Arts, and in particular Mobil Oil Singapore Pte Ltd for sponsoring the production of *The First Emperor's Last Days* by TheatreWorks.

A stylized, handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Liu Thai Ker'.

MR LIU THAI KER

CHAIRMAN

NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL





## THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

ONG KENG SEN

My interest as a director has always been to expand the written play. Expanding the play beyond the immediate context of where we live and our time. When I was rehearsing the play, I was affected by the sound of the ancient *bianzhong* bells. In the summer of 1978, excavations at the tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, in Hubei province, uncovered 65 bronze bells, known collectively as a *bianzhong*. It had been buried since 433 BC. Once again, the earth had surrendered one of her secret treasures to the people of the future. It was a memory capsule which challenged the history of music theory. The bells were able to perform both Chinese and Western music, both ancient and modern. What was particularly startling was that Marquis Yi had been buried with painted coffins holding the bodies of 21 musicians and dancers. They ranged in age from 13 to 25, probably buried alive after their master's death. This art lover was buried with 125 musical instruments and his favourite performers.

After 2400 years, the *bianzhong* bells rang again in my sound system, carrying with it the sounds from centuries past. What if the people of the future would one day discover our record of truth which contests the official record? This

was a question which interested me and perhaps affected the way the play ended (we had many possible endings which developed from workshopping as well as the original drafts that Tarn How had given us).

Last night, sitting in the Victoria Theatre during our trial of the production, I was tremendously excited by the transformation of the theatre into a giant installation of TV monitors, projection screens, on-stage cameras. For the first time, the auditorium space was alive and abuzz with live surveillance, 'dangerous' suspended objects over the heads of audiences, the dumb waiter. Charging the space beyond the stage and the lives of the four characters was extremely important to me. This play is about the First Emperor in all our lives, in history, in reality or illusion. The four characters' response to their predicament could be ours, their conflicts could be ours. Their betrayals, their humanity, their fears, their cowardice, their ambition, their self loathing should be all too familiar.

Beyond a book, beyond a radio play, the theatre has an immediacy with a live audience. Hence when Tarn How and I first discussed the play, I told him that I would like to add a level of live surveillance through the use of video. As I collaborated with Paul, I began to feel that the surveillance cameras should not become a substitute for television. The video should not only be about following the literal, dramatic and emotional thread of the narrative. Instead it could become a visual composition adding to the tension between the narratives on stage and on video. The audience would then deal with a double focus during the performance itself, competing narratives which weave and intersect.

For finally, *The First Emperor's Last Days* is about negotiating conflict, dilemmas, stress and contradiction. Could we become the First Emperor if we had the opportunities? Are we corruptible in the face of power? After all, the First Emperor is the Son of Heaven but he is also a human being.

ONG KENG SEN

3 June 1998



## THE PLAYWRIGHT

TAN TARN HOW

After writing a play about the price of telling – and not telling – the truth, I find little I can add to what the work says and does. Partly, it is because this play, like all others, must speak for itself: all other words outside of it is extraneous. Partly, it is because some things cannot be said in public – the very subject of this play. I write for my children, Mingjuan and Mingwei. I am able to write because of my wife, Li Chang.

I would like to thank the National Arts Council and the Shenanarts of Virginia, USA, for sponsoring my trip to the Shenandoah International Playwrights Festival last year. The first draft of this play was written and performed during my wonderful one-month stay there.

I would also like to thank Keng Sen for willing once more to take a risk.

TAN TARN HOW





## AN INTERVIEW WITH THE VIDEO ARTIST

PAUL WONG

**THEATREWORKS:** *How did your collaboration on *The First Emperor's Last Days* come about?*

**PAUL:** This collaboration came about when Keng Sen and I met in Hong Kong earlier this year during *Journey to the East* 1998, a showcase of 12 international Chinese artists' works at the Hong Kong Arts Centre. It was there that Keng Sen and I first met and we were impressed with each other's work. He then invited me to Singapore to collaborate with him on this play.

**T:** *Why, and what were the both of you impressed with in each other's work?*

**P:** The theme of *Journey to the East* was about the Chinese diaspora and the piece that I presented was called *Overseas Wab-Q* which involved live and pre-recorded video images. This was a stage work that I directed, and I also acted in this piece. *Overseas Wab-Q* was about the overseas Chinese experience – specifically in Vancouver, and where some of them are trilingual and speak Mandarin, Cantonese and English – in relation to their sexual attitudes and experiences in relation to AIDS. This topic of AIDS awareness in the Chinese community was actually derived from a previous project *Blending Milk & Water: Sex in the New World*. I guess Keng Sen liked the video work and the kind of social consciousness he saw in it, maybe also because it came from a Canadian artist. I mean, although Canada is part of the West, it is not America, and is not well known for its arts scene. And likewise, all I knew about Singapore before I met him was what was reported in the Western media which was basically all that concerned punishments – Michael Fay, ban on chewing gum, death sentence, etc. Singapore is portrayed as non-democratic and a police state. I had zero interest in Singapore before I met Keng Sen. Of course this changed somewhat after seeing Keng Sen's work and I realised that there is art in Singapore, and aesthetic and socially conscious art at that.

**T:** *So that pushed you to agree to collaborate with us.*

**P:** Yes, and also the fact that you speak English in this country. But also an important factor is that I am increasingly looking towards Asia for inspiration for my works. I mean a lot of my works are about identity – my identity, and the Chinese identity. I have a deep connection to my own Asianness and would like to see where other Asian artists draw their inspiration from,

especially since I come from an art world which have strong Eurocentric traditions. I guess I am looking for new challenges.

**T:** *You are the first video artist to collaborate in Singapore theatre. What is your definition of video art?*

**P:** Video Art is a very refreshing and flexible medium that can be TV, cinema, theatre, documentary, educational, abstract, sculptural. There are no limits to the artform or what defines the art form, and the possibilities are endless.

**T:** *Do you define yourself as a video artist?*

**P:** I am a multi-media artist. I work and collaborate with sound, pictures, paintings, lights, video, photography, and film. However, I always start, go to, and end up with video. I am also self-taught and picking up video came naturally to me. Also, video is an easy medium and is instant. What you see is what you get. I am a project artist, I work on a project-to-project basis, and have no studio practice. Most of my work is site-specific and works borne within a community. Producing a work for *Journey to the East* marked a return to the theatre, and this is my second.



## AN INTERVIEW WITH THE VIDEO ARTIST

PAUL WONG

*T: Tell me a little about your work back home.*

*P:* Back in Vancouver, I am the co-founder of two reputable artist organisations; one is called Video-In-Studio which was founded in the seventies and is now Canada's foremost video centre for the production, appreciation, distribution and exhibition of experimental electronic arts, and the other is On Edge productions which was founded in the eighties and is involved in the commissioning of new interdisciplinary art and artists projects. What I am more directly involved with is of course, Projects which is my own company set-up solely for the production and creation of my own projects. Even though I may seem quite "successful" or more well-received now, this happened only recently. I have been practising video art for the longest time and it is only recently that my work is gaining more recognition. This is partly because I am no longer such a "bad boy" in my art; I re-invented myself at middle age, but also because the younger generation now are more open to the issues raised in my work. My work has always been about self and identity and if you think about it, the population of Vancouver has increased by 30% in the last 12 years, and half of them are Asian. We are a post-colonial society shifting towards new multiculturalism and I guess there is more place for my work now than before. However, I am no means a mainstream artist and in fact, am still marginal. There is still a faction that

does not accept my work because I deal with both the artistic and social, and some of the issues might be sensitive.

*T: How has collaborating with us been so far?*

*P:* Like I said earlier, before I met Keng Sen, I knew zero about Singapore and had no desire to. I treated Singapore with trepidation. However, I got curious after meeting Keng Sen and seeing his work. I am basically here for the ride, and to gain an insight into Asia. Besides collaborating with Keng Sen, I am also working with a group of students from Ngee Ann polytechnic who are my video production assistants (VPAs). They are basically film students who are on attachment and I am teaching them practical video work; on-the-job training. It is important to nurture them.

*T: Why were you drawn to *The First Emperor's Last Days*? Was it because of the content of the play?*

*P:* It was not so much the content of the play but more the possibilities for the role of video to be integral, and not secondary. The use of video in this play helps shape the play and how it is perceived and interpreted. The content of what appears on the monitors is just as important as what happens on stage. Secondly, the play is about seeking the truth, and I am always interested in this theme. What is truth? Who creates and writes it? I mean, the truth can be many things to many people; the same truth can be different to different people. The bigger the lie, the bigger the truth that the person is lying. I also like it because it is cynical.

*T: Finally, what do you hope the audience will get from your video work in the play?*

*P:* I hope that they will be aware of the lack of individuality and privacy that exists in contemporary society. We are all under surveillance in one way or another.





## THE DESIGNERS

## PAUL WONG — VIDEO ARTIST

Paul is a Canadian-born Chinese and a self-taught media artist, contemporary art curator, and cultural critic. He is however primarily known as a video artist whose work is cross-cultural in form and content. A winner of various awards, Paul was the recipient of the Bell Canada Award for Video Art; a national honour given in recognition for his outstanding contribution to the development of the video language.

Functioning mainly as the director, Paul has worked with artists from different backgrounds and is interested and influenced by visual art, mass media, popular and traditional cultures. The forms his works take are that of videotapes, mixed-media installations, book projects and live presentations, many of them produced for site-specific contexts and places.

## PIERRE THIBAudeau — SET DESIGNER

Pierre is a co-founder of Entr'acte Theatre, a Sydney based performance company which creates original multidisciplinary works. Known predominantly as a set and graphic designer, he has worked for over 25 years in both graphic and set design, and for companies in Canada, Australia, Indonesia and Japan.

Besides set and graphic design, Pierre is also known as a performer and director and has directed, performed in and designed many original works both for Entr'acte and other Australian companies such as The Sydney Front, Sydney Metropolitan Opera, and The Performance Space, amongst others. Pierre accrues the keystone of his inspiration for his designs to his experiences as a performer and director.

## KUO JIAN HONG — LIGHTING DESIGNER

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 *The Next Generation* and *The Savage Land*, amongst others for Practice Theatre Ensemble, and lighting design for TheatreWorks' *Scorpion Orchid* and *Half Lived*. She was also the set and lighting designer for the award-winning play, *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral*.

In the United States, her work has been seen at East West Players, Foothill Theatre Company, Iowa Summer Repertory and the Iowa Playwrights' Festival.

## JOHN PORTWOOD — STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

John is a Permanent Resident of Singapore who has lived and worked here for many years. He is a professional Engineer and a member of the Institution of Engineers, Singapore, and a member of the Institution of Structural Engineers, UK. Besides *The First Emperor's Last Days*, he has worked on other TheatreWorks projects such as *The Yang Family*, and last year's Festival of Asian Performing Arts presentation of *Workhorse Afloat*.

## HAYDEN NG — COSTUME DESIGNER

Hayden is a self-taught award-winning designer who has clothed many a body in local theatre. A versatile designer, his creations were last seen in the recent stage run of the 10th anniversary run of *Beauty World*. Other productions that he has also designed for include *Private Parts*, *The Lady of Soul and Her Ultimate 'S' Machine*, *Lao Jiu* and *Longing* amongst others. He is also the proud boss of Hayden boutique.



## THE CAST

KOH BOON PIN YANG

Boon Pin is a journalist with The Straits Times. He most recently represented Singapore in the Zuni Icosahedron production of *Journey to the East* 1998 at the Hong Kong Arts Centre in January. Theatre audiences here might recall his performances in Tan Tarn How's *Six of the Best*, Michael Chiang's *Private Parts*, and David Henry Hwang's *The Dance and the Railroad*, all produced by TheatreWorks. Last year, he made his film debut in *12 Storeys*.

LIM YU-BENG SEE YEW

Yu-Beng is an all-round theatre person who has taken on roles ranging from technical manager to actor. As a director, Yu-Beng has directed *Sammy Won't Go to School* and *Cetana* for TheatreWorks. However, Yu-Beng's first love is still acting and he is probably known by most Singaporeans as playing Sergeant Leong in the TCS action serial, *Triple Ninj*. Yu-Beng's acting credits with TheatreWorks include *Beauty World* (1992), *Longing*, *Broken Birds*, *The Yang Family*, *Six of the Best*, and *Destinies of Flowers in the Mirror*.

The technical manager for TheatreWorks for five years, he oversaw the mounting of all the company's productions from 1990 - 1994 including *Trojan Women*, *Three Children*, *Theatre Carnival on the Hill*, *Beauty World*, *Lao Jiu*, *Longing* and *Scorpion Orchid* to name a few. Also a lighting designer, he was involved in *Wills and Successions*, *Lao Jiu*, *Broken Birds*, *Us in Singapore* and *Under the Bed*, amongst others. His most recent lighting design was for the 10th anniversary production of *Beauty World*.

KAREN TAN ALLEN

Karen's first venture with TheatreWorks was with *Mixed Signals*, and has since been a good-time girl in *Mini Fan*, a female transsexual in *Private Parts*, a government clerk in *Our Lady of Soul and the Ultimate 'S' Machine*, and a karayuki in *Broken Birds*. She was given a commendation award at the Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre. Now based in the UK, she has been up to the Edinburgh and Glasgow festivals, as well as in a play at the Battersea Arts Centre, London. Her acting these days, however, is comprised mainly of reading Dr. Seuss to her 2-year-old daughter, and re-enacting scenes from Disney cartoons.

RAVI VELOO GORDON

Ravindran was a former senior correspondent with the Straits Times for the past 10 years. An impressive journalist, he has won several awards in his profession, including Journalist of the Year in 1990 from the Press Foundation of Asia (Manila) and Mitsubishi Public Affairs Committee (Tokyo). In the course of his work, he has also won 19 other awards from Singapore Press Holdings, including 6 Features of the Month, 6 Headlines of the Month, and 4 Special Awards, amongst others. Known for his sharp analyses and social critiques, Ravi also writes outside of his profession, and has been published. His novella, *Kampung Chicken* was published, and his short story, *The Truth of the Matter* won first prize in the Sunday Times Short Story Competition. Ravi also writes playscripts and both his short and full-length plays have been performed for theatre and TV by various groups. His short play, *How Do You Know You're Chinese* won second prize in a National 10-minute Playwriting Competition, while one of his full-length plays, *The Play Within*, was published by the Ministry of Culture and won a merit award in the National Playwriting Competition. *The First Emperor's Last Days* is Ravi's stage debut.





# 秦始皇

## THE SON OF HEAVEN, THE FIRST EMPEROR OF CHINA

QIN SHIHUANG (246 – 211 BC)

**Q**in Shihuang – a name that conjures up many different images and thoughts but one that almost all who have an inkling of Chinese history recognise. It is also a name that is capable of raising a myriad of emotions, from contempt to great admiration. Most of what we know of Emperor Qin Shihuang comes from the *shiji*, or Records of the Historian, by Sima Qian. It lists all of the Emperor's great achievements but also notes that they were not made without any sacrifices. In fact, China during this time was ruled with contradiction leading to many of her subjects both revering, fearing and hating their Emperor at the same time. Many subsequent history books about Shihuang Di discuss his great deeds but not without mentioning his atrocities too.

Qin Shihuang, or the August Emperor (*huangdi*), was, to put it simply, a very complex character. The bastard son of a merchant and a woman of easy virtue, he perhaps overcompensated and strove to make others forget about his lowly past.



A workaholic, he was full of energy and had a passion for order, conformity and precision. Qin Shihuang also had tremendous foresight and was full of self-confidence. By naming himself the August Emperor, he implied by the words, *huangdi*, that he was superhuman – a state of being that he was always obsessed to attain. Qin Shihuang was also only one out of the five emperors in all of the more than 200 emperors in Chinese history to ascent Mt. Tai, the holiest of all of

普  
天  
之  
下

China's mountains to perform what later became the most awe-inspiring of all imperial rites – the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices. He did this to gain acknowledgement of a Heavenly mandate to rule, and also to report to heaven a complete success of his duties.

The August Emperor chose the most powerful of the five elements in Chinese beliefs – water as his symbol, and subsequently the number which represented water; the number six to be his number.

This unit then became the standard measurement for caps, axle-widths and even a man's regular "pace". Furthermore, since water was considered a cold and harsh element, the Emperor determined that his law would also be harsh and repressive, and his rule severe. Immediately after he ascended the throne for example, he

coldly supervised the murder of all those who had mistreated his mother in her younger days. In fact, legalism was the system of governance that Qin Shihuang chose to rule his people. Every aspect of their lives were controlled by laws for which harsh, cruel, and disproportionate punishments were meted out when broken. These included banishment, castration, being torn apart by chariots, mutilation in the form of amputation, fines, and the most common of which was forced labour where convicts were sent to do intensive labour, most of the time for the Great Wall of China.

Although Qin Shihuang towards the end of his reign became highly irrational and a megalomaniac, one cannot deny the enormous contributions he made towards the initial unification of China, and the benchmark he set for her future rulers. A leader with a keen grasp of military strategy, the August Emperor had a single-minded purpose which was not only the defeat of his enemies but also to end the constant warfare and division which plagued China. China under his reign imposed universal conscription which contributed to the astonishing size of his army – a standing infantry force of one million men. Also crucial to Shihuang Di's victorious military expeditions were spies and the intelligentsia. He also smartly moved all the defeated aristocrats of the other states away from their old homes and brought them to his capital, Xianyang where he pacified them by building exact replicas of their old mansions. At the same time, he kept them under close surveillance. Therefore, after 5



#





Illustration by Vincent Lee

# the flying circus project

**Taking Asian Arts into  
the Next Millenium.  
The Search for  
New Asia on Stage.  
Leading Asian Creativity.**

"When land bound animals begin to fly  
Reaching for the unknown  
As unexpected transformation  
Rooted but Free  
The same animal but different  
Man's quest for flight continues  
Circus  
The antithesis of museum  
Raw, exciting, dizzying, robust  
Dangerous, magic  
The sacred and the profane co-exist  
Theatre of the people  
Hanuman, monkey, leaps into flight"

In 1996, TheatreWorks' Artistic Director, Ong Keng Sen, successfully launched *The Flying Circus Project*. As part of the New Asia drive, Ong established a seven-year research and performance programme to take traditional Asian artforms into the 21st century. This would mean cultural preservation in an enlightened manner through the reinvention of tradition. "Tradition and modernity is part of a continuum rather than two separate dichotomies."



*The Flying Circus Project* demonstrates the innovation and confidence of Asian artists who harness skills and artistry of the region into a new artform to welcome the next millennium. *The Flying Circus Project* nurtures an Asian world view but at the same time maintains the many different identities of the diverse Asian

cultures. The search for a New Asia on stage is the search for a complex harmony which thrives on difference: different traditions, different languages, different aesthetics, different culture.





## 1996 Southeast Asian Laboratory

The first year of the project saw over fifty masters in traditional arts and practitioners of modern dance, theatre and music coming together to share their skills and experiences in their individual fields. These masters and practitioners were personally handpicked and chosen by Ong from countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore. A Japanese Noh master and Beijing Opera artist from China were also invited to conduct workshops. A total of 232 workshops and classes were conducted over a period of six weeks from November to December 1996.

## 1997 Lear

1997 saw the staging of the critically acclaimed *Lear*, directed by Ong Keng Sen and written by Rio Kishida. The reinvention of Shakespeare's *King Lear* focused on Lear's daughter, patriarchy and the tension between new and old Asia. *Lear* was staged in Tokyo, Osaka and Fukuoka over a period of 3 weeks, playing a total of 12 performances. *Lear* was produced by the Japan Foundation Asia Centre, which also partially funded the first year of *The Flying Circus Project*. *Lear* received favourable reviews from the critics and theatre practitioners from Japan and Asia.

## 1998 India, Myanmar, Korea, Singapore

In 1998, *The Flying Circus Project* will focus on:

- The learning of traditional skills in music, dance and theatre from traditional masters.
- The reinvention into contemporary performance.

The 1998 programme, which will be held from mid-November to mid-December, will bring together 50 masters/performers/participants from India, Myanmar, Korea and Singapore for workshops and classes. The performers will be encouraged to develop creative strategies and to regenerate traditional arts in contemporary performances.

In conjunction with the Research and Development, TheatreWorks will present a Festival of Performances by master artists. The Festival by Masters from India, Korea and Myanmar in Fort Canning Park will be curated by Ong Keng Sen.

*Lear* will tour in

- Hong Kong (Jan '99)
- Singapore (Jan '99)
- Jakarta (Feb '99)
- Perth (Feb '99)



## 1999 Othello

It is intended that the six weeks from 1998 will build a common vision which will result in the production of an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* in 1999. At the moment, *Othello* will be performed by an Indian traditional performer in Kathakali, Kuttiyatum or Chhau, Iago by a Japanese Noh actor, Desdemona by a Korean performer and music from Myanmar. Ideally, certain scenes will be echoed with traditional Burmese string puppets.

## 2000 and Beyond

TheatreWorks plans to embark on the third and final phase of *The Flying Circus Project* in the year 2000, with a Laboratory gathering the finest artists and performers from the Philippines, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet and Papua New Guinea. This will be followed by a production of *Julius Caesar* in 2001. The entire project will culminate in 2002 with a presentation of the three plays as *The Asian Shakespeare Trilogy*, heralding a new age in cross-cultural Asian theatre.

As the project grows, the productions will be available for touring. For example, *Lear* will tour in 1999, and in the year 2000, both *Lear* and *Othello* will be available for touring. Similarly, selected artists from earlier Labs will be invited back.

*The Flying Circus Project* is unique and powerful in that it is purely an inter-Asian exchange. It is from a completely Asian perspective. Furthermore, the reinvention of tradition into the contemporary focuses on the living, organic nature of tradition in relation to the times.

With this mission in mind, TheatreWorks is presently looking for enlightened individuals and corporations to support this project on a year-to-year or long term basis. The project will give individuals and corporations around-the-world mileage for their sponsorship. For more information on how you can help, please call TheatreWorks' General Manager, Tay Tong at 338-4077.

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# GET INTERNED OR ATTACHED TO THEATREWORKS, OR SIMPLY VOLUNTEER!

We at TheatreWorks have always believed in the importance of nurturing new, and young artists, and those who are integral to producing a play. This is to ensure a continual stream of software – human resources and their creativity for the Singapore arts scene. Examples of this would range from our Writer's Lab sponsored by Singapore Press Holdings, to the Director's Lab, the Southeast Asian Lab; part of the Flying Circus Project, to student internship and attachment programmes from institutions like the La Salle-SIA College of the Arts, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, and the Theatre Studies Programme at the National University of Singapore.

For *The First Emperor's Last Days*, we are very pleased to be working with a group of film and media students from Ngee Ann Polytechnic who are interns with us for this production. They have been training under Paul Wong, the video-artist for the play and have been integral to the process and final product. We are also pleased to be working with Florence Wee, the stage manager for *The First Emperor's Last Days*, who is attached to us from the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay for this particular production. We can only hope that both groups of people have gained from their experiences learnt with us, and we would like to take this opportunity to also thank their respective institution and company for extending this opportunity, and support to us.

As a charity organisation, we are also always in need of volunteers for our productions and also administratively. We would like to thank all those who responded to our initial call for volunteers earlier this year. However, do keep those calls coming as we are always looking forward to working with new faces and energies.



With *Theatre Carnival in the Zoo* coming up just around the corner (September), we will be needing many volunteers to help run the Carnival smoothly, given the expanse of the zoo. From sheer arm and leg power, we will also be needing help in crowd control, and front-of-house (ticketing and selling of programmes, merchandise, etc.). So join us in hob-nobbing with the animals, flora and fauna. For those interested in internship or attachment programmes, or volunteering with us, please call TheatreWorks at 338-6735.



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Fort Canning Centre, Cox Terrace

Fort Canning Park

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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 by and dedicated to sharing The Magic of Theatre.*

## THEATREWORKS

TheatreWorks (S) Limited, a registered charity, was incorporated in February 1985 as the first English language adult professional theatre company in Singapore.

Over the years, TheatreWorks has been recognised for their successful juxtaposition of Western and Eastern performance traditions, refreshing interdisciplinary interpretations and unconventional approach, site-specific works and its commitment to cross-cultural collaboration and international touring.

TheatreWorks has produced critically acclaimed works that have earned the company a reputation for being the best theatre company in Singapore. The company has toured internationally. In 1992, the company toured Japan and Malaysia with *Three Children* and presented *Madame Mao's Memoirs* at the Edinburgh Festival. In the same year, *Beauty World* toured Japan. In 1994, *Los Jiu* was performed at the Festival of Perth, and in 1996 *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* was performed at the Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre. This play was awarded the Critics Award for Best Acting and was nominated as one of the Best Productions in the Festival. The latest outing by the company was in January this year, when it performed a new piece, *EAT ME* at Journey to the East 1998, in Hong Kong. TheatreWorks' production of *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* will also tour Berlin and Hamburg in August this year.

With a varied programme, TheatreWorks' repertoire spans from popular plays like *Beauty World*, *Private Parts* and *Los Jiu* to visual experiences such as *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral*, *The Yang Family* (performed in a Chinatown shophouse), *Destinies of Flowers in the Mirror* (performed inside the Suntec City Fountain) and *Workhorse Afloat*.

TheatreWorks has also spearheaded the concept of outdoor theatre with their productions of *Theatre Carnival on the Hill*, *Laughing and Broken Birds*. This year, there will be a *Theatre Carnival at the Zoo*

in September. These productions are testimonies to the company's commitment to develop theatre audiences qualitatively, as well as quantitatively. After starting the wave of popular theatre, TheatreWorks is now forging a new path with their cutting-edge works. With emphasis on interdisciplinary and inter-cultural styles and techniques, the works often blur the line between theatre, installation art, video art, photography, sound, sculptures, dance and architecture.

As a pioneering theatre company, TheatreWorks realises its responsibility in nurturing and providing opportunities for theatre practitioners. Training programmes such as The Writer's Laboratory have forged closer ties with Singaporean playwrights, serving to encourage and nurture new writing. 1998 so far saw the return of the 24-hr Playwriting Competition, this time round held in the zoo, and the launch of The Singapore Dramatist Awards, a national award that recognises good playwriting. Other programmes include The Director's Laboratory which nurtures young directors, and the Springboard programme, a theatre skills training programme conducted by theatre practitioners from the United Kingdom. As part of their mission, TheatreWorks also has a Theatre-In-Education programme for schools, public lectures and consultancy services on the aspects of theatre productions, and student attachment programmes.

In the last quarter of 1996, TheatreWorks embarked on The Flying Circus Project. This major project, conceptualised and headed by TheatreWorks' Artistic Director, Ong Keng Sen, examines the traditional arts and seeks to take them into the 21st Century. The first product of the project was the Japan Foundation's production of *Laer* (1997) which premiered in Tokyo with a multi-cultural cast. *Laer* will tour Hong Kong, Singapore, Jakarta and Perth Jan/Feb 1999. 1998's project will see seminars, workshops and performances by practitioners from India, Korea, Myanmar and Singapore.





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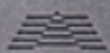


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