

THEATREWORKS

TO MY HEART WITH SMILES

An Enchanting Story of a
Timeless Romance



A play devised by
the Cast and Ong Keng Sen
Script Coordinator: Cheong Peck Leng

Ultra Sportivo

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THEATREWORKS

TO MY HEART WITH SMILES

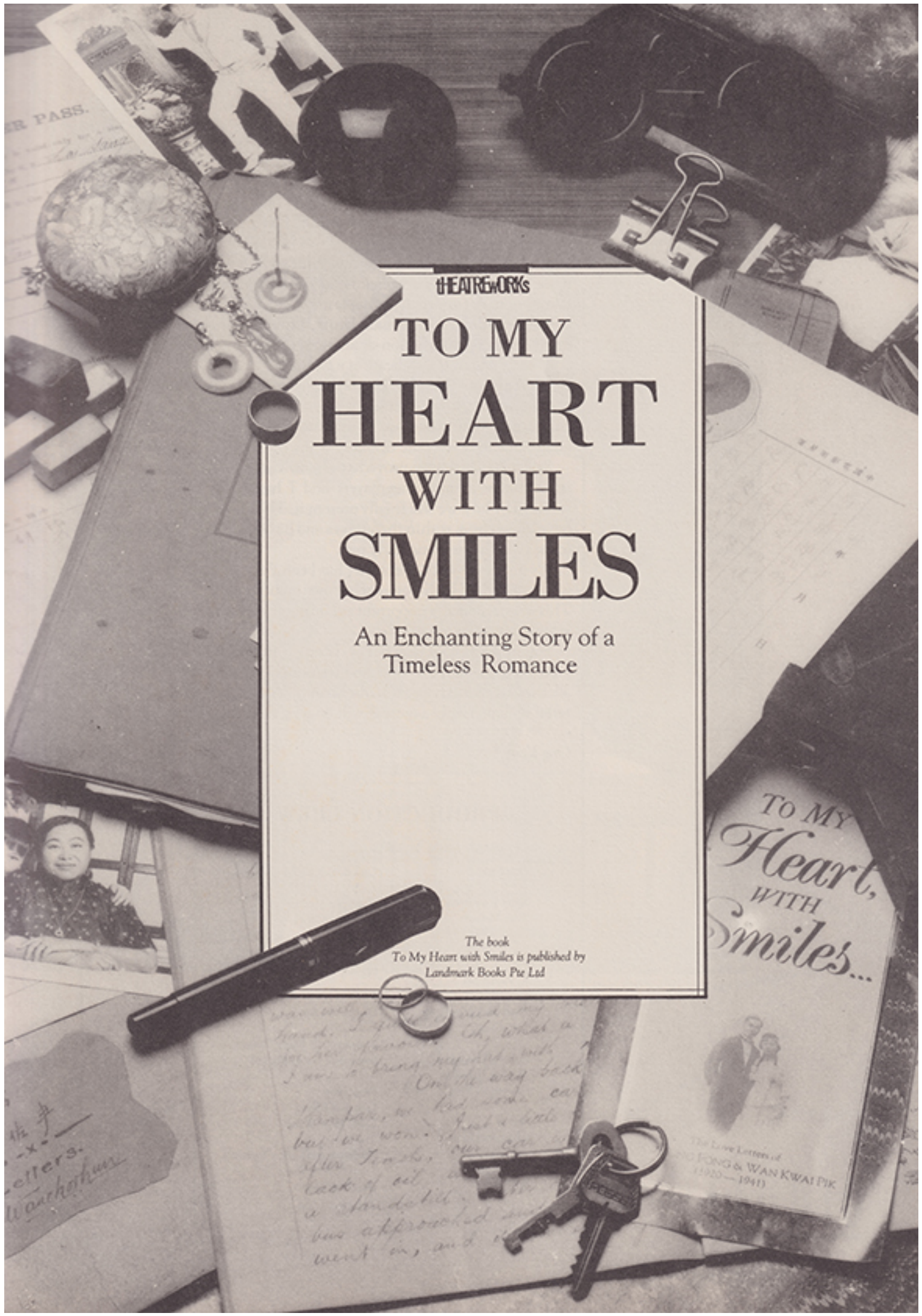
An Enchanting Story of a
Timeless Romance

The book
To My Heart with Smiles is published by
Landmark Books Pte Ltd

TO MY
Heart,
WITH
Smiles...



The Love Letters of
HO FONG & WAN KWAI PIK
(1920 - 1941)





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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

This play has been for us a journey to the past, to a time when a photograph of one's beloved was hard to come by, a time when a kiss was unthinkable.

We have taken an ordinary woman's life and through it we have focussed on womanhood and her gradual maturation. For myself, it has made me re-examine my concepts of drama. In its mundanity, I find the dramatic, in its seemingly non-dramatic scenes, I find a poignancy which is as delicate as a Chinese painting.

Working on the play has sensitised me to the passage of time, how generations pass on wisdom and values and how these are consolidated down the family tree. It has set me thinking of my own roots.

Smiles has however proved tricky to capture on stage. Many a time, the players and I have been stumped by how we will finally present it. The players have drawn from within themselves and have created scenes which are particularly real.

My greatest source of comfort has been Peck Leng who inspired me with stories of her own grandmother. This was particularly important as I do not have much interaction with old people.

Finally for Raja, Lucilla, Tay Tong — thanks for ploughing through the tapes and transcripts — all in all, the cast created close to eight hours of scripted material of which only a quarter will be seen tonight.

Ong Keng Sen

PRODUCTION CREW

<i>Director</i> Ong Keng Sen	<i>Hair Stylist</i> Criscut Salon
<i>Script Coordinator & Stage Manager</i> Cheong Peck Leng	<i>Wardrobe Mistress</i> Christine Capel
<i>Asst. Stage Manager</i> K. Rajagopal	<i>Business & Publicity Manager</i> Ng Soy Cheng
<i>Production Manager</i> Tay Tong	<i>Front-of-House Manager</i> Christine Lim
<i>Lighting Designer</i> Kalyani Kausikan assisted by Koh Joo Kim	<i>Programme & Poster Design</i> Landmark Books Pte Ltd
<i>Sound</i> Chan Mei Lian	<i>Programme</i> Goh Eck Kheng Quah Seok Whee
<i>Set Designer</i> Justin Hill	<i>Exhibition and Gala Organisers</i> Kaan Sheung Kin Ong Eng Chye Tng Peck Chin

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AUTHOR'S MESSAGE

If my grandmother were alive, she would not have revealed her enthusiasm, but I know she would be secretly pleased and honoured to see a play centred on her life. She was, in her mind, only doing what was expected of her as a daughter, a wife and a mother. What's important, though, is that she did it with such devotion and strength of character.

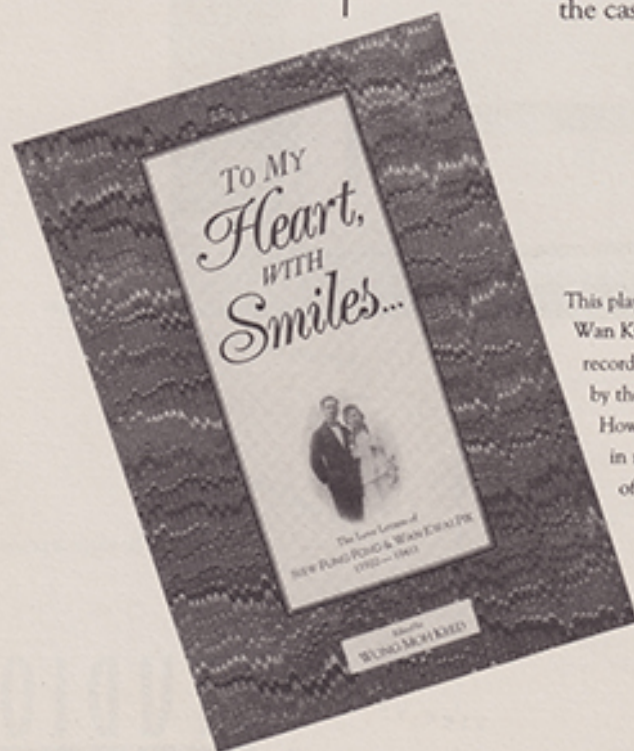
I am, of course, delighted to see this play based on the love between my grandparents realised. *To My Heart With Smiles* is a reflection of my family history, my grandmother's story — and even though it is personal because of that special love she shared with my grandfather — I think her tale is shared by many women who lived in that episode in history.

These women grew up in an era where they escaped the poverty of their immigrant parents, where unbound feet was a symbol of their new-found liberties, only to be confronted with war and chaos and the challenge to find strength within themselves to fight on, fend for and bring up their families, sometimes alone.

In the book, my hope was to capture the emotions and maturation of a girl, young woman, lover, wife and family head. This, I know, is also the hope of the play.

I leave good wishes to TheatreWorks and the cast for a successful production.

Wong Moh Keed



This play is based on the true love story of Wan Kwai Pik and Siew Kam Fong, as recorded in the book *To My Heart with Smiles* by their grand-daughter Wong Moh Keed. However, the characterisation and plot are in no way a faithful-to-life representation of the Wan and Siew family histories.

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AN ENCHANTING STORY OF A TIMELESS ROMANCE

The love between Wan Chor Hun (Kwai Pik) and Siew Kam Fong (Fung Mui)* harks back to a seemingly more romantic time. In reality, they were living in an age of great reform, an age of an awakening and self-awareness among women and an age of the uprising of socialism. In China, the collapse of the Qing dynasty had stirred the nationalistic fervour of every Chinese at home and abroad. Against this, our true love story is set.

During the last quarter of the 19th century, nearly 5 million immigrants left China, the majority heading for Southeast Asia. The Malay State of Perak with its tin-mining towns was one popular destination. Many a young man was lured by the prospects of a better life and equally many were cheated by unscrupulous brokers who promised them this dream, but instead sold them as bonded coolies. Still, a few managed to save enough to take advantage of the opportunities offered. Two such men were Siew Fatt, father of Kam Fong, who eventually ran a billiard saloon in Kampar, and Wan Cheong, Kwai Pik's father, who owned a coffee shop in Goping. Together, they also had stakes in mining concerns.

The children of both families grew up in relative comfort. Kwai Pik and Fung Mui were sent to school. Kwai Pik received his secondary education in Canton and later Penang while Fung went to Kampar Girls' High School. Education for women was not uncommon among wealthier families. Fung was spared the agony of foot-binding. She was allowed to venture out of doors often, though always in the company of her girl friends, or otherwise chaperoned. At a picnic, in mixed company, she even swam under a waterfall.

Kwai Pik, at the eligible age of 20, was a scholar, interested in noble pursuits. He was at the point of deciding whether or not he should further his studies in America when he first caught sight of Siew Kam Fong at his father's birthday on 9th November 1919. In his diary that day, he entered:

It was plum blossom time. Mid-winter. A clear day. The house was packed with relatives and friends... While mingling with guests, I spied a young girl. She was only



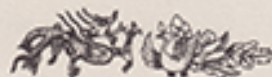
CHRONOLOGY

- 1899 Wan Kwai Pik born in China.
- 1900 Boxer Rebellion.
- 1905 Siew Kam Fong born in Kampar, Perak.
- 1912 Pu Yi, the last Qing emperor, abdicates.
- November 1919 Pik first spies Fung at his father's birthday celebrations.
- 1919 - 1924 Courtship.
- 1921 - 1925 Pik enrolls in Taiping Teacher's Training College and is employed as a teacher in Ipoh and Malacca.
- 4th January 1925 Marriage of Pik and Fung. He is 26, she 20. They move to Singapore that year.
- November 1926 First daughter, Moon Ying, born.
- 1926 Fung and Pik leave for Shanghai. Enroute, she discovers she is pregnant again and returns to Malaya.
- 1927 Second daughter, Moon Sim, born.
- May 1927 Pik returns from Shanghai.
- 1928 First son, Kun Chee, born (Six more children born in intervening years).
- 1941 Japanese troops attack Singapore.
- 1942 Pik is detained by the Japanese. He does not return.
- 1983 Fung's death, aged 78.



* FORMS OF ADDRESS

Fung was Kam Fong's pet name - literally Little Phoenix Sister. Pik adopted the name Wan Chor Hun as a student in Shanghai according to the fashion of the day. He addressed Fung as Mui, a term for a female younger than the addressor. She in turn addressed him as Kor, a term used on older males of the same generation. Pik addressed his future parents-in-law as Suk (uncle) and Sum Moh (aunt).



twice seven years of age. Her face of flower, brow of willow, eyes of autumn water, bone of jade — her whole countenance — enchanted me immediately...

So besotted was Kwai Pik that he immediately sought Fung's hand through the customary authority of his mother. The engagement secured, Kwai Pik poured out his devotion to Fung through many passionate letters. In contrast, Fung's first few letters were restrained. She was shy, but it was a shyness befitting a properly brought up girl of the time.

Early in their courtship, social contacts were limited. Fung's photographs and ring were thus sentimental mementos upon which Kwai Pik built his dreams. His desire to kiss her was pursued with ardour. And when Fung's mother gave permission, the happiness he felt was only surpassed by the kiss itself. It was a watershed in their relationship and Kwai Pik refers to it as a token which would 'deepen our relationship and feeling for one another.'

As their love grew, Fung became more relaxed and their letters began to be filled with intimate expressions of their longing for each other. She now addressed Kwai Pik as 'My lover', 'my most precious', or 'Heart of my Heart'. Often, she signed off 'With Smiles'.

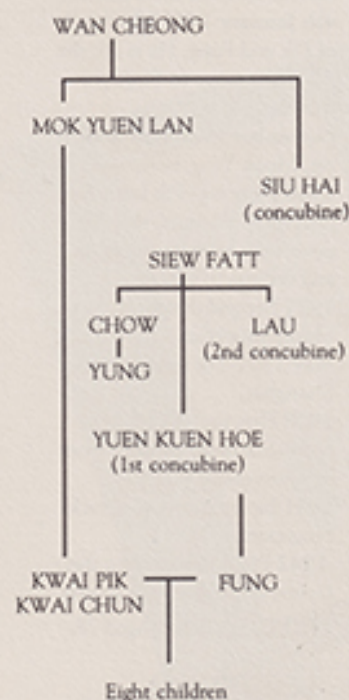
The early years after their marriage in 1925 were marked by trials and frequent separations: there were Pik's sojourns in Singapore and Shanghai for studies; Fung returned to Kampar to deliver her first two children. There were also accusations of infidelity in Pik.

Pik's strained relationship with his father gave Fung some distress. Her mediating role was as expected of a dutiful wife and daughter-in-law. Money was also a constant worry. Still, there were always times of joy. The birth of their first daughter was anticipated with touching anxiety and Pik wrote to 'absolutely forbid' Fung to travel so soon after the birth.

Returning home from Shanghai in 1928, Pik settled his family in Singapore. Bereft of financial assistance from his father, Pik and Fung did their best to make life comfortable for their family. Pik regarded himself as Fung's teacher. He taught her English and world affairs. While he believed in the traditional role of women, he encouraged her to continue her education and later, to set up a beauty parlour. Fung herself looked up to Pik as her advisor for life. Often, they would be alone to talk and share their deepest thoughts.

When the Japanese occupied Singapore in 1942, Pik was among those detained. He never returned. Fung spent months waiting for him at the Esplanade. Left on her own, Fung supported her family and kept it together. She had strength to live and lead a full life with her children, and later, her grandchildren. Throughout, she remained faithful to the memory of the deep love Pik gave her, and from this, she drew comfort.

For the rest of her days, Fung rarely spoke of her happiness with Pik or the pain of his absence. But for more than 40 years, she kept her husband's diary and their letters in a drawer next to her bed. She wanted them always at her side. It is this treasure of nearly 200 letters that record Fung and Pik's special love, and it is on these tender documents that this play is based.



紙一往還如觀面

THE TRADITIONAL STATUS OF CHINESE WOMEN

* not a pretty picture

"Women indeed are human beings, but they are of a lower state than men and can never attain to full equality with them." - Confucius

In this last century, Chinese women have moved from being housebound and footbound, to holding positions of strength in the economy and even in government. The alteration in their status has been quite extraordinary, something which we in our modern day society have fast forgotten.

The traditional status of the Chinese woman was one of inconceivable subservience. The ultimate realisation of this servile position of women was the bound foot, a practice developed by the Neo-Confucianists of the 10th century, and lasting actually into the turn of this century.

The structure of society being what it was, the economic position of Chinese women was quite naturally abysmal. Women were educated in the homely arts and occasionally learnt to read, but to no economic avail. Even if they did work, they were still considered inferior to men.

Legally, Chinese women had practically no recourse to justice as we see it today. Women could not hold or inherit property, and a husband could divorce his wife for 'lasciviousness, talkativeness, thieving, being inveterately infirm, disregarding his parents, or having an envious or suspicious temper.' He could also strangle her on the spot if he caught her with a lover. What is less amusing is that until 1961, when the Women's Charter was enacted, such Chinese customary law was still unchanged in Singapore to a large extent!

Chinese girls were subject to various forms of adoption. They might be sold at a young age as *mai tsai*, with just the uncertain promise of being married off to someone of similar standing, eventually. *Mai tsai* were classified as slaves by the United Nations and it was only in the 1930s that the British government in Singapore was able to help such girls escape their miserable lot. Slightly more glorified, but just as uncertain, were the young girls who were sold as *sim pu kia* — destined to be daughters-in-law to their employers. They did, however, have to do all the domestic work in between. Most cruel of all, if you just couldn't feed the family, you could always leave your little girl by the roadside to die....

Given the constraints in which Chinese girls were placed, it was only through affection and loyalty that women could create any status for themselves. Of course they were matchmade, and could count themselves lucky if they married a good man. If she bore sons, all was well. Unfortunately, if she had an awful mother-in-law or no sons, she would probably have been in a bad way. Her husband was entitled to take other wives of lower status but she would have had to share his affection, a difficult position for any woman.

It is against this background of ingrained attitudes that the love of Pik and Fung is all the more extraordinary. Although we today might see it as a pretty love story, we must realise that both were born into this inheritance of Confucian attitudes, and their parents were among those who would have lived first hand the things we have looked at. Their story becomes all the more remarkable as a record to the changes that have come about since then.



A CHINESE WOMAN'S FULFILMENT

In Chinese tradition, there were 3 stages in a woman's life: girlhood, which is a period of preparation for her future roles in life; motherhood, the crowning glory of a woman's life; and old age, which is a period of stability.

PROGRAMME

ACT ONE

Scene 1: The Esplanade

Scene 2: When I was a Young Girl

Scene 3: It was Plum Blossom Time

Scene 4: Wan Cheong's Second Son

Scene 5: I Saw a Splendid Sight

Scene 6: But They were Engaged!

Scene 7: Photograph

Scene 8: Four Letters

Scene 9: But You Are Different

Scene 10: Bill

Scene 11: Apologise to Your Father

Scene 12: A Token of Love and Esteem

Scene 13: His Eyes grew Soft

Interval

ACT TWO

Scene 1: Wedding Plans

Scene 2: Concubines

Scene 3: It Gets So Lonely

Scene 4: Grandfather's Diary

Scene 5: I Know Pik Kor's Heart

Scene 6: Loneliness

Scene 7: Letters

Scene 8: Building Bridges

Scene 9: Remember Your Promise

Scene 10: Shoulder to Shoulder

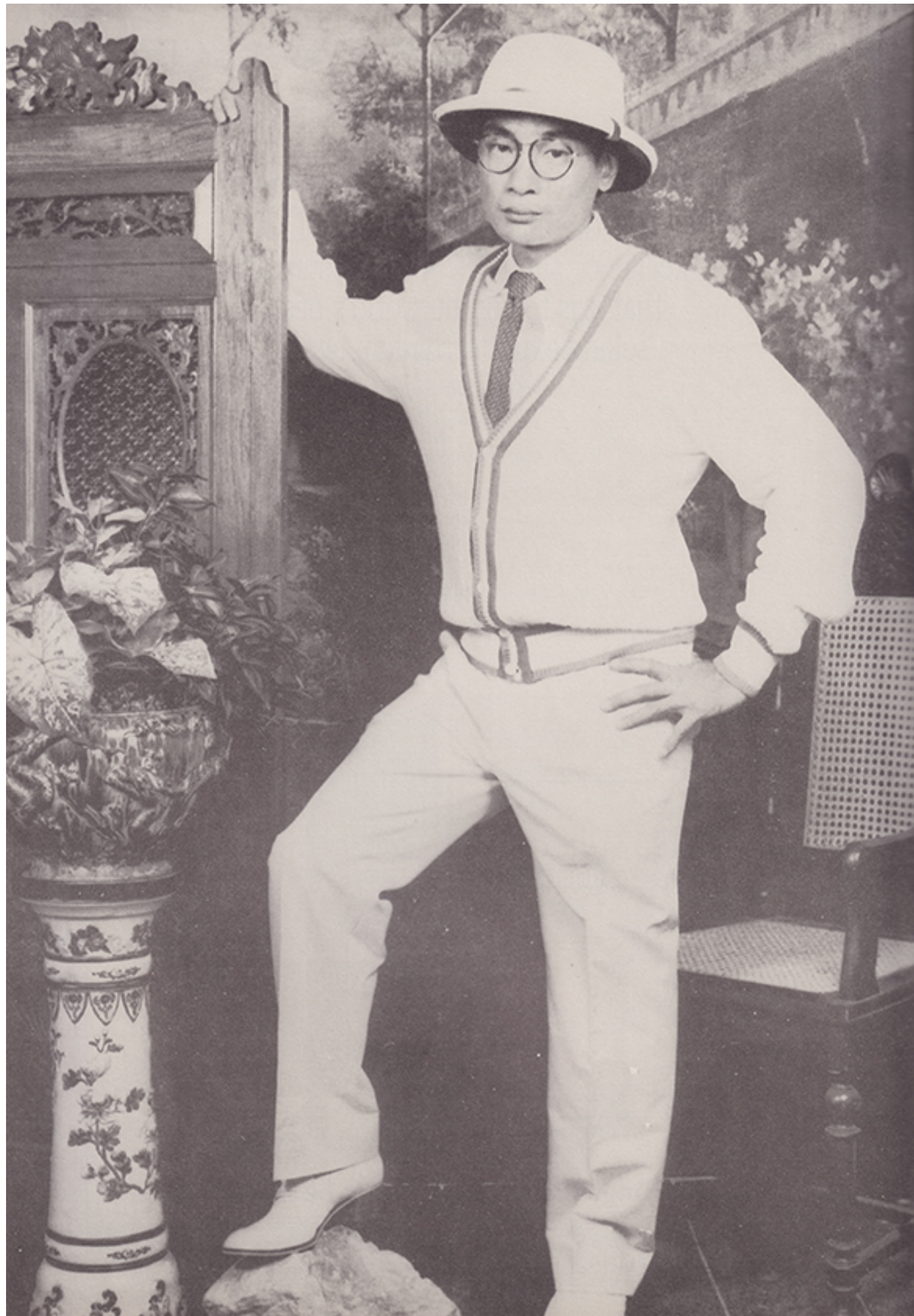
Scene 11: The Spare Key

Scene 12: Fung's Bedchamber

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MALE CAST



Lim Kay Siu
as Wan Kwai Pik

"This person is the second son of Wan Cheong. This youth is scholarly, has the same temperament as Fung and is good looking. If Fung agrees, your father would like Fung to be engaged to him."

Kay Siu's debut as an actor was in *Be My Sushi Tonight* (1985). Since then, he has appeared in virtually all of TheatreWork's productions. The roles he has taken have been diverse: a samurai in *Rashomon*, Solange in *The Maids*, the shadowy Mr. X in *Army Daze*, and a gangster in *Beauty World*. One challenging role, for which he received acclaim, was John Merrick in *The Elephant Man*.

A versatile talent, Kay Siu has written songs and playscripts, both for work and pleasure. He has also

been a presenter for CDIS(ETV). His film parts include BBC's *Tenko Reunion*, *The Nuclear Conspiracy*, CBS-TV's *Passion Flower*, and *Tanamera*.

"I approach the playing of Pik with a certain amount of fear. Fear because anyone who reads the book reads so much of Pik's own words that they are bound to have their own strong perception of the person. Another problem I had when I was looking for clues from Pik's writing was whether he behaved in the way that he wrote."

Lee Weng Kee
as Wan Cheong

"Wan Cheong gambled with life, was a philanderer and a defier of fate. He was notorious for his escapades with women and the risks he took in life. One never

knew what this man was up to. When he was wealthy, he was very wealthy, and when he was poor, he seemed to be really poor."

Weng Kee's last involvement with TheatreWorks was in *Army Daze* where he took the part of the incorrigible nose-picking Ah Beng to comic heights. His many talents have brought him onto the stage with numerous other theatre groups. He is a trained hair-stylist and make-up artist.

"Wan Cheong could easily be conceived as a formidable villain. Upfront he comes across as a compulsive, self-centred, quick-tempered, in sensitive and coarse man. Yet, he has his moments of true generosity and a strong will to hold on to his very own brand of principles."

中華民國十一年二月廿六日



*Quotations in italics are from the book, *To My Heart with Smiles*.



FEMALE CAST



Claire Wong
as Siew Kam Fong
(Fung Mui)

"Mui has been thinking over Kor's words before I sleep. Because of my young age I cannot accept new standards of behaviour...."

While an undergraduate at the National University of Singapore, Claire developed her dramatic talent in lead roles with the Varsity Playhouse Performances. Claire's first involvement with TheatreWorks was in the hit musical *Beauty World*. More recently, she received acclaim for her roles in *Three Children*.

"Fung is an elusive character to devise well for the stage. She was real and it's been a daunting task to mould her into a rounded character.."

Lok Meng Chue
as the aged Siew Kam
Fong (Popo)

"Throughout the years, Grandmother rarely talked of Grandfather, and when she did, it was always with reverence."

Ever since Meng Chue appeared in *Samseng and the Chettiar's Daughter* (1982), she has had many memorable roles with TheatreWorks. These include *The Maids*, *Army Daze*, *Second Chance*, *Beauty World* and *Three Children*. With Asia in Theatre Research Circus, she was in *The House of Bernada Alba*.

"She lived, and this beloved personality obviously had great impact on all those who remember her. This immediacy gives playing the role well an added dimension of responsibility."

Nora Samosir
as Yuen Kuen Hoe,
Mok Yuen Lan
and Teacher

"Yuen Kuen Hoe was only a mui tsai, an indentured servant girl, and a mui tsai had no choice in any matter."

Nora's first acting role was in *Bumboat!* (1984). Her most recent portrayal was in the title role of TheatreWorks's last production, *Miss Julie*. Other credits with the company include *Kantan and Hanjo*, *The Elephant Man*, and *Dreamkeepers*. In 1988, Nora undertook a director's course in Great Britain.

"Yuen Kuen Hoe was obviously a mother who cared for and understood her daughter. She was so warmhearted that her future son-in-law could confide in her his secret longings."

Noorlinah Mohamed
as Siu Har,
Kwai Chun and Fung's
grand-daughter

"A wily woman, Siu Har was more in control at home. She also cleverly concealed any ill feelings she had for Mok Yuen Lan."

Noorlinah was in the chorus of *Beauty World*. A first-year Arts and Social Science undergraduate, she is keen on the stage and has been active in dance shows on campus.

"Very little is known about the different characters I play but that made it all the more challenging trying to breathe life into each of them."



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FROM LETTERS TO A BOOK TO A PLAY

The Process of devising
To My Heart with Smiles



To *My Heart with Smiles* is based on the book of the same title. The process of dramatising the material has required the cast and director to inject imaginary elements in their efforts to create a play with dramatic tension.

This freedom is coupled with tremendous discipline since there is an awareness that the life-story of real people must not be distorted beyond recognition. The result is a play which captures the essence of the book, but has moved beyond the book in that imaginary scenes may have been inspired by a single line of the text or completely developed by improvisation.

The process of devising *To My Heart with Smiles* began with readings by members of the cast. Several sessions were spent going through and discussing every page of the book and focus was put on studying each character, and delving into the cultural and social references raised in the text. This was to ensure that the cast was familiar with the material and that there was consensus in the interpretation.

Once this was done,

the director and script coordinator worked a rough structure of the play, and the taxing hours of improvisation began.

The director would briefly set the scene and the actors would improvise, drawing from their knowledge of the book and their own imagination. An improvisation of one scene could be done once, twice and even up to six or seven times. Every improvisation was tape-recorded and after each improvisation, characterisation and the dynamics of the scene were discussed. All options would be thoroughly explored by the cast and director.

The work of splicing usable elements from different improvisations into a draft script, and the initial refining of dialogue was done by the director and the script coordinator. Sometimes, they even had to create and write a new scene when all the improvisations were unsatisfactory. However, as far as possible, this was avoided.

Scripting a devised play is not a simple process, but the experience is an enriching one. It is a creative process for ev-

eryone involved - a fusion of raw material from the book, acting skills and direction, held together by a clear artistic vision. It can be expected that it will continue to evolve and improve at each rehearsal, perhaps even to the last possible minute before the curtain parts.



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Shell already supports many cultural activities in the Republic. The annual Drama Festival and the Singapore Symphony Orchestra's Community Concerts are some of these.

But its role does not end with the giving of financial support. Shell believes in doing more. It wants to help make culture more accessible to the Singaporean; at the same time, contributing towards nurturing local talents by offering them a venue to perform.

Out of this belief was born its weekly Friday Lunchtime Cultural Programmes at the Shell Theatre - a miniature arts festival encompassing music, dance and drama.

With the enthusiastic support of Singaporeans from different walks of life, the Shell Theatre is now a focus of lunchtime cultural activities in the Central Business District.



PRODUCTION CREW



Ong Keng Sen is the Artistic Director of TheatreWorks. His involvement with drama began in earnest when he was President of the Varsity Playhouse. He has directed many critically acclaimed productions such as *Night Mother*, *Oedipus*, *Beauty World*, *Three Children* (co-directed with Krishen Jit of the Five Arts Centre, Kuala Lumpur), and *Miss Julie*. Keng Sen's last involvement with a devised play was for the Shell Players in 1987.

Cheong Peck Leng, sometime actress, sometime programme seller, often taxi driver for crew and cast is Script Coordinator and Stage Manager for this production.

K. Rajagopal (only 23 years old) has been actively involved with a number of drama groups over the years both on stage and backstage. He has found the devised play approach to be hectic, yet refreshing. He is the Assistant Stage Manager for this production.

Tay Tong is the Production Manager of TheatreWorks. He has stage managed memorable plays, including *Oedipus*, *A Devised Play* and *Beauty World*. His first play as Production Manager for TheatreWorks was *Miss Julie*.



Kalyani Kausikan has lit theatre productions since 1978. Her credits include the Singapore Arts Festival productions: *FOB*, *Bumboat!*, *Dragon's Teeth Gate* and *Beauty World*. She is the resident Lighting Designer of TheatreWorks.

Koh Joo Kim is a keen theatre buff who wishes to discover all aspects of theatre craft. She helped in *Medea* (Asia in Theatre Research Circus, 1988) and was part of the orchestra for *Three Children*. This is her first involvement with lighting.

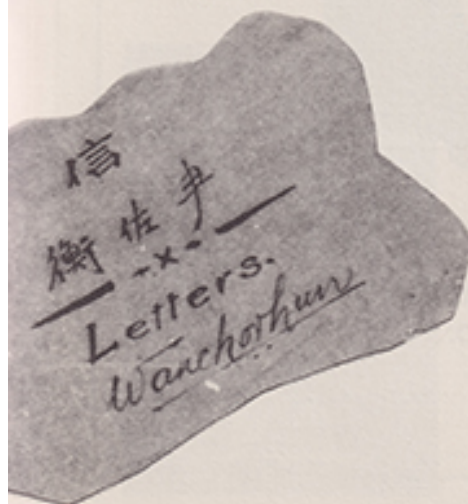
Chan Mei Lian has helped backstage in Junior College productions. Since then, she has assisted in lighting for an item in the Singapore Dance Festival 1988.

Justin Hill is TheatreWorks' resident Set Designer. An architect, he has designed for the Adelaide Festival of Arts and the Darwin Performing Arts Centre. In Singapore, he was responsible for the sets of *Samseng and the Chettiar's Daughter*, *Bumboat!* and *Beauty World*.

Christine Lim is a member of Theatre-

Works' Actors' Ensemble. She has taken numerous lead roles with TheatreWorks and has also been involved in production and backstage work. She has recently returned from a Fellowship for the Arts course in directing in Britain.

Ng Soy Cheng is the Business and Publicity Manager of TheatreWorks. Her first involvement with the company started with *Miss Julie*.



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TheatreWorks was set up in February 1985 by a group of theatre enthusiasts and professionals who believe that theatre and its practitioners have a deserved place in our society.



The company holds that if someone in Singapore has set out to become a playwright, a director, an actor, a stage-designer or whatever related functionary in the theatre, he or she should be able to pursue it full-time and earn a living from it.



With this commitment, the company has provided the public with a regular season of professional performances, created a challenging platform for writers both in Singapore and elsewhere, made available work and a fresh repertoire for actors and actresses, and contributed to related income-earners such as printers, carpenters and the Inland Revenue.



With this production, we close our fourth season. We wish to express our heartfelt thanks to our pioneer sponsors - Tangs Studio and Heineken - for sharing our faith and spirit. Together, we have been able to bring you a full season of memorable plays: the talk-of-the-town musical *Beauty World*, the experimental *Three Children* co-directed by Krishen Jit from Kuala Lumpur, Strind-

berg's classic *Miss Julie* and today's performance of *To My Heart with Smiles*.

Through the last four years, we have been inspired by the creativity and dedication of all who have worked with us. Our hearts are gladdened and we will strive towards a higher standard of relevant and entertaining theatre in Singapore.

Finally, our greatest wish is for your continued support. Theatre should reach as wide an audience as possible and our vital link is with you.



Have a pleasant evening and we look forward to another pleasurable theatre-going year with you.

THEATREWORKS



FOUNDER DIRECTORS

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Lim Siau Chong
Justin Hill

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Ong Keng Sen

RESIDENT SET DESIGNER

Justin Hill

RESIDENT LIGHTING DESIGNER

Kalyani Kausikan

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR/ ADMINISTRATOR

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