

THEATREWORKS

presents



SPH

YOUNG
PLAYWRIGHTS
S E R I E S



parvathi narayan

NEW

SINGAPORE

plays



dana lam



kim ong

tan choon ping



tan mei ching

THEATREWORKS WRITERS' Lab

SPONSOR!

Being supportive of nurturing and developing playwriting in Singapore, the Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) has sponsored TheatreWorks' Writers' Lab for the third year running! We sincerely look forward to their continued sponsorship and support.

HOW THE LAB WORKS!

The Lab is a unique self-help writing programme where playwrights meet, attend workshops and hold readings. The result of the Lab—more Singaporean works, and an increased awareness and recognition of Singapore playwriting. The Singapore model has attracted attention overseas and a similar lab has been set up in Perth, Western Australia.

Members from the Lab meet weekly to develop new writing for the stage. They also attend workshops by visiting foreign playwrights. To help the members develop their works, dramatised readings of their works-in-progress is organised on a regular basis. These readings are called "Lab Reports". At the Lab Reports, the members' works-in-progress are read by experienced actors.

The Lab Reports are free to the public. Through these readings, the playwrights get feedback from the audience, actors and directors. To date, there have been 6 Lab Reports held at The Black Box, and more than 50 plays have been read in these reports.

At the end of each Lab year, three to five of the best plays are chosen to be staged under the SPH Young Playwrights Series. A larger selection of plays are also published as a compendium of new plays.

LAB ADVISERS

Artistic Director	– Ong Keng Sen
1991 Writer-In-Residence	– Desmond Sim
1992 Writer-In-Residence	– David Britton
1993 Artist-In-Residence	– Kuo Pao Kun
1995 Writer-In-Residence	– Robin Loon

WORKSHOPS ORGANISED

Workshops by Foreign Playwrights/Practitioners in the last 3 years:

1. Henry Ong (Singaporean playwright now based in the U.S.)
2. Tom McGrath (Scottish playwright)
3. Tony Perez (Filipino playwright)
4. Maria Irene Fornes (American playwright)
5. Professor Howard Stein (American playwright)
6. Mac Wellman (American playwright)
7. Noel Greig (British playwright)
8. John Clifford (British playwright)

WRITERS' LAB PUBLICATIONS

1. *Fat Virgins, Fast Cars and Asian Values*, a compendium of the best plays from the first year of the Writers' Lab. It includes two Prize-winning plays— *Lest The Demons Get To Me* by Russell Heng and *Three Fat Virgins Unassembled* by Ovidia Yu. Launched in June 1993. It is published by Times Editions and sponsored by Singapore Press Holdings.

2. Writers' Lab compendium 2. The new plays featured in this volume include *Mergers & Accusations* by Eleanor Wong, *Undercover* by Tan Tarn How, and *Dirty Laundry* by Theresa Tan. The book is on sale at TheatreWorks. Please speak to Michele or Leslie at 3384077 for information.

THE DIRECTORS



LOK MENG CHUE

(Cards, Ordinary Woman, Will You Be There?)

Lok Meng Chue has directed *Undercover* (1994), *Where Do You Go Jeremy?* (1994), *Lao Jiu* for the play's tour in the Festival of Perth in 1994, *Watching The Clouds Go By* (1993) as part of TheatreWorks' Directors' Laboratory, *Dirty Laundry* (1993) in the SPH Young Playwrights Series II and *The Complete Space Travellers' Guide to Singapore (Abridged)* (1993). She has also co-directed *Scorpion Orchid* (1994) and *Us In Singapore* (1993) with Krishen Jit. Besides directing, she is also known for her many acting roles in TheatreWorks' productions such as *Trip To The South*, *Fried Rice Paradise*, *The Moon Is Less Bright* and *Three Children*.

"Directing plays by young writers is both exciting and exasperating. New playwrights treat their first works like newborn babes and have been accused of being 'precious' about them. But why shouldn't one be precious about something which may unwittingly reveal more about oneself than one is prepared for?"

There is an exciting element and feeling of rawness and vulnerability about new plays. More so if they are first works by young playwrights. However this often poses a challenge to both directors and actors. The actors and I have enjoyed working on these works with the playwrights and hope that you will enjoy them too. Be kind because we need more brave playwrights who are willing to share themselves with us and maybe even reveal something about ourselves as well..."

Lok Meng Chue

December 1994



TANG FU KUEN

(Will You Please Jump?, The Can Opener)

Tang Fu Kuen is presently a third year Theatre Studies undergraduate at National University of Singapore. He has acted in Theatreworks' productions such as *Longing* (1994), *Scorpion Orchid* (1994), *Sammy Won't Go to School* (1993), *Watching the Clouds Go By* (1993) and *Theatre Carnival On the Hill* (1992). In the field of directing, he has directed two NUS Eusoff Hall productions—*The Waterstation* (1994) and *Children of the Pear Garden* (1993). SPH Young Playwrights Series III marks his directorial debut for TheatreWorks.

"Like tonight's playwrights, I'm young in my craft and excited about my work being received by the audience. The thrill I feel is a mix of fear and pride."

Though short, each play raised its challenge and made rehearsals more questioning than I'd expected. I constantly kept the process very open. What you see tonight is the work of the cast, myself and the playwrights—after much uncertainty, negotiations and trust.

It has been a learning experience for me and I hope you will enjoy the show!"

Tang Fu Kuen

December 1994

PLAYS



CARDS

December - A footnote. A moment of contact. A summation of the year gone by. A recognition of the year ending. It is a peculiar time of the year that can be either celebratory, or nostalgic and depressing. For Shraevani, December means something else. Something even more...

Against this backdrop, *Cards* takes a look at Singapore, life, long distance relationships and stuffed toys.

PERFORMED

by Valerie D'Costa as Shraevani/Eva, Johnson Choo as Man and Janice Koh as Voice of the salesgirl.

DIRECTED

by Lok Meng Chue

WRITTEN

by Parvathi Nayar Narayan, a full-time artist and writer. Her art pieces have been exhibited in several exhibitions here. She also teaches art at Temasek Polytechnic and is a freelance arts correspondent for *The Business Times*. *Cards* is Parvathi's first play for TheatreWorks' Writers' Lab. She is currently working on a new full-length play.

Thoughts... "HAVING MY PLAY PERFORMED FOR THE FIRST TIME produces in me a curious—but I imagine not entirely unexpected!—mixture, of being terrified and thrilled at the same time. Sort of similar to when I had my first art exhibition. Your soul's on display for the world to see—and by that I don't mean the play's autobiographical! I mean that one's essence is revealed in what one paints and what one writes. Yet nothing can quite match the excitement of one's words and ideas taking tangible form..."

LAST READ

by Valerie D'Costa on 12th May 1994 at TheatreWorks' Lab Report 6. It was directed by Lok Meng Chue.



ORDINARY WOMAN

2

Questions the actions of 3 non-exemplar women as they make a non-heroic attempt at breaking the conventions of their lives.

PERFORMED

by Sheila Wyatt as Woman #1, Koh Joo Kim as Woman #2 and Lok Meng Chue as Woman #3.

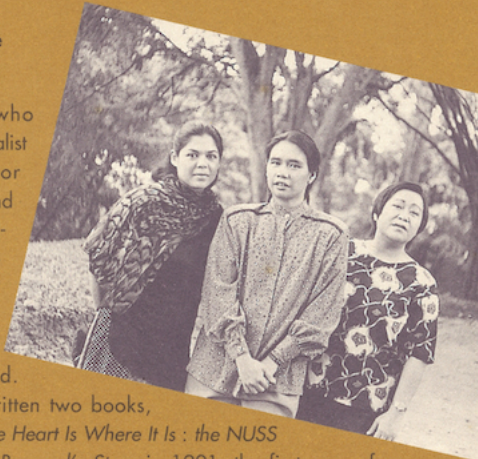
DIRECTED

by Lok Meng Chue

WRITTEN

by Dana Lam who worked as a journalist and a book editor between 1976 and 1985. She is gainfully married — has two children, a supportive mother-in-law and husband.

She has co-written two books, *Pregnancy* and *The Heart Is Where It Is : the NUSS Story*. She wrote *Bernard's Story* in 1991, the first year of TheatreWorks' Writers' Lab.



Thoughts... "This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to any persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. My interest is in sharing the emotional complexities of a human condition. I have written in the feminine voice but this is not a feminist play."

LAST READ

as *Company* by Tan Kheng Hua, Rina Ong and Ida Bachtiar on 8th October 1993 at TheatreWorks' Lab Report 5. It was directed by Lim Yu-Beng.

3 WILL YOU PLEASE JUMP?

A hilarious short piece about the pressures of society and the effects they have on two distinctly different individuals.

PERFORMED

by Khoo Sim Eng as Woman and Johnson Choo as Man.

DIRECTED

by Tang Fu Kuen

WRITTEN

by Kim Ong, a sales executive. She keeps a thick file of literary ideas and aspires to produce creative works and products. Another of her plays, *Top Of The Hill*, was read recently at TheatreWorks' Lab Report 6.

Thoughts... "Will You Please Jump? was inspired by my bungee jump in New Zealand. At first I thought I could do it as they tied the giant rubber band round my ankle. But when I was at the edge of the plank which is 16

storeys high, I hesitated. When I finally did it, the onlookers broke into an applause.

When I was on the plank, I was thinking of an ex-colleague, who plunged off a 10-storey flat, without any giant rubber band round her ankle... The audience's applause also brought to mind of the controversial movie 'The Accused' in which the Jodie Foster character was sexually assaulted in the bar, with the patrons cheering the rapist on.

So the end result of all that mental connection was this short piece on the dehumanisation of humans in this urbanised society."

THE CAN OPENER

4

A prisoner hears the voice of someone who is digging towards him. They both need something the other person has. Can they trust each other to mean what they say? Do they trust themselves to believe what they hear?

A surrealistic journey in search of freedom, trust, a voice. And FOOD.

PERFORMED

by **Khoo Sim Eng** as Omi and **Johnson Choo** as Voice.

DIRECTED

by **Tang Fu Kuen**

WRITTEN

by **Tan Mei Ching**, a writer-producer in a multi-media company. She has received a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University of Washington. She also

won short fiction writing contests in the United States and the works were subsequently published in the respective journals. For her one act play, *Water Ghosts*, she was awarded first prize in the NUS-Shell Short Play Contest (1992). She also received a Commendation Award for her novel *Beyond The Village Gate* (Singapore Literature Prize 1992) which is now published and out in the bookstores. Her latest collection of short stories, *Crossing Distance* won the Merit Prize for Short Stories at the 1994 Singapore Literature Prize. She is currently working on new plays and a collection of short stories.



Thoughts... "HAVING MY NEW PLAY STAGED FOR THE FIRST TIME...Scared. It's like I've created a creature and now it's out in the world. I did what I could, but I still don't know how it will behave. I can only hope for the BEST."

LAST READ

by Lim How Ngean and Ng Chin Han on 11th May 1994 at TheatreWorks' Lab Report 6. It was directed by Lim Yu-Beng.



5 WILL YOU BE THERE?

August 30th 1993. A concert is cancelled amidst speculations of the performer's whereabouts. What does it all have to do with a transvestite? A monologue delving into the psyche of a man trapped in his own fantasy world.

PERFORMED

by Lim Yu-Beng as Diana.

DIRECTED

by Lok Meng Chue

WRITTEN

by Tan Choon Ping who had his first play, *Second Chance*, broadcast as part of the SBC's "Rediscover the Magic of Radio" campaign in 1991. During the day, Choon transforms himself into a mild-mannered accountant and tries very hard to write plays with a calculator.

Thoughts... "Back in 1991 when my first 10-minute radio play was broadcast on air, I remember getting an enormous adrenalin rush listening to the live audience's laughter and applause. The same could be said about the public reading of "Will You Be There?" in May 1994 at the Black Box. These along with my design experience at TheatreWorks have made me realise how important audiences are.

I'm very excited about the forthcoming performance at the SPH Young Playwrights Series, and also thrilled that Meng Chue and Yu-Beng are working on this play again. At the same time, I'm terribly nervous as this marks my stage writing debut."

LAST READ

by Lim Yu-Beng on 13th May 1994 at TheatreWorks' Lab Report 6. It was directed by Lok Meng Chue.

COMPANY MESSAGE

Whenever I think of the Writers' Lab, I am amazed that TheatreWorks has been successful in setting up a programme for nurturing Singapore Playwriting; and that the programme has produced substantial results. I remember the first time in 1990 when TheatreWorks' Artistic Director, Ong Keng Sen, discussed the scheme with me and we were both excited and yet uncertain about the prospects that this programme held. We were never sure that it would go beyond the first year as this was something that was untested and totally new to Singapore.

More than three years have passed since Keng Sen and I met a group of some 30 playwrights at Drama Centre Rooms A & B to explain the programme to them and to encourage them to be part of this process. Today more than 40 playwrights have undergone this programme; close to 60 plays have been publicly read and 20 plays fully produced. A compendium of plays has been printed and a second on its way, and more drafts and seeds of ideas are being constantly germinated in the Lab.

Whenever TheatreWorks speaks of the Writers' Lab to arts practitioners and our colleagues from overseas, we are greeted with the usual response – surprised and impressed. Surprised because Singapore, a country that is often described as being a 'cultural desert', actually has a theatre culture that is thriving, albeit a young one; and that its theatre practitioners believe in the long-term nurturing and development of its own writing. What's more, there are corporations in Singapore that support the same belief and are willing to fund such programmes.

Impressed because the Writers' Lab has yield fruits that are hard to ignore - the number of new plays written and read, the publication of a compendium; the illuminaries from the Asia, United Kingdom and the United States who have come to conduct writing workshops and the comparatively high frequency in which new Singapore works are staged.

This is testimony to the success of the Lab - in-roads have been made and playwriting is not as rare as before. The quality and quantity of the plays written speaks well of the programme. The Writers' Lab is an inspiration to other theatre companies in Singapore and abroad. However, this is not to say that this is where we pop the champagne bottle and pat ourselves on the back, and call it a day. It is just but a step forward and the Writers' Lab programme must continue.

We are proud that TheatreWorks, Keng Sen and all involved have taken the lead to push the boundaries where new writing and young playwrights are concerned. Kudos must also go to all the directors, cast and crew who have contributed so much to make these new plays come alive on stage during the last six Lab Reports and the three SPH Young Playwrights' Series.

Finally, we would like to thank Singapore Press Holdings for supporting this programme so fervently and generously, without which there would be no such progress.

Tay Tong,
General Manager, TheatreWorks

SPECIAL THANKS TO

- Singapore Press Holdings for sponsoring the SPH Young Playwrights Series and TheatreWorks' Writers' Lab.
- All playwrights who were in Writers' Lab Year III, for their contributions to the growth of Singapore Playwriting.
- All actors and crew who were involved in the 1994's Lab Reports.
- Workshops Lecturers involved in the Writers' Lab 3.
- Goh Eck Kheng, Mok Wai Yin and Landmark Books for assistance with the second Compendium.
- Joseph Ng for Hair design.
- Ashley Lim for Make-up design.
- Neo Kim Seng for the playwrights' montage.
- Mona Choo for the T-shirt design.
- All Front of House assistants.
- And everyone who has helped us in this production and the Writers' Lab Year III.

PRODUCTION LIST

Production Manager
Tay Tong

Directors
Lok Meng Chue
Tang Fu Kuen

Stage Managers
Dorothy Png
June Wan

Technical Managers
Mohd Rafaat Hamzah
Dorothy Png

Business/Public Relations Manager
Michele Lim

Assistant to Public Relations Manager
Leslie Lee

Public Relations/Administration Assistants
Adeline Tien
Low Yuen Wei
Cedric Peeris
Ng Tian Chai

Lighting Designer
Yo Shao Ann

Set Designer
Peter Fong

Sound Designer
Matthew Tan

Graphic Designer
Tan Siew Lan

Technical Assistants
Gerard Tan
Michael Tung

Lighting Operator
Tan Keng Hwee

Sound Operator
Paul Chan

Front-Of-House Managers
Low Yuen Wei
Adeline Tien

Stage assistants
Ng Wen Lei
Gerard Tan
Michael Tung
Yap Koi Yim
Jonathan Gwee

Photographer
Tan Teng Teng



Singapore Press Holdings

SPH AND NEW WRITING

THEATREWORKS' WRITERS'
LABORATORY AND THE SPH
PLAYWRITING STUDIO

The power of theatre in identity-building. In evoking empathy, reflecting reality and encouraging discussion, probably no art form can do this more intensively or more potently than drama. In supporting two playwriting programmes – one for English plays and one, Chinese – SPH hopes to nurture artistes who can put the Singapore mark on local drama creations.



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