

CENTRE 42 PRESENTS

THE VAULT

BIG BIRD AND THE CAT

AN EXPLORATION INTO THE METAPHORS OF THE PLAYS OF KUO PAO KUN
BY MARGARET CHAN

PROGRAMME HANDOUT

12 OCTOBER 2015, 8PM, CENTRE 42 BLACK BOX

SYNOPSIS

Kuo Pao Kun (1939-2002) is regarded by many as the foremost Singapore playwright. Before his death in 2002, Kuo told Margaret Chan that his most important play was *The Eagle and the Cat* (1990). This play is, however, less well-known than *The Coffin is Too Big for the Hole* (1984) or *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* (1995).

Associate Professor of Theatre/Performance Studies Margaret Chan proposes that *The Eagle and the Cat* is important because it is autobiographical. It is in this play that Kuo has been most transparent about his artistic vision and mission.

Margaret argues that a key to a deeper understanding of Kuo's oeuvre and artistic direction as a playwright, theatre producer and director can be obtained through an exploration into the metaphors of big bird and the cat which Kuo employed in many of his plays and which take central place in *The Eagle and the Cat*.

Margaret gives insight into Kuo Pao Kun's work both as a theatre academic and as a person who had been privileged to work closely with Singapore's doyen of theatre.

SEMINAR OVERVIEW

A 90-minute presentation by Margaret Chan, interspersed with performances by Margaret Chan, Ali Khan and SMU students.

- Performance 1: Excerpt from *The Eagle and the Cat*
- Performance 2: Excerpt from *The Eagle and the Cat*
- Performance 3: Excerpt from *Lu Xun's Medicine*
- Performance 4: Excerpt from *The Coffin Is Too Big for the Hole*
- Performance 5: Excerpt from *Mama Looking For Her Cat*

Post-seminar chat with the artists over light refreshments.



Ali Khan and Margaret Chan at rehearsals for *Mama, Big Bird, and the Cat* on October 5, 2015. Photo: Tai Jie Xin.

ARTISTS

MARGARET CHAN

Margaret Chan is a pioneering actress in Singapore English-language theatre. She is best known for her iconic performance as the titular matriarch in the monologue *Emily of Emerald Hill*. She was also a journalist and food critic.

Margaret received her PhD in Theatre/Performance Studies from Royal Holloway, University of London in 2002. She is currently Associate Professor of Theatre/Performance Studies (Practice) at the School of Social Sciences, Singapore Management University.

ALI KHAN

Mr Ali Khan is a familiar face on Vasantham TV and Channel 5, but he thinks he is better remembered as "Raj" in the colorectal cancer advertisement of 2011. Mr Khan turned professional stage actor in 1990.

Memorable roles he played include that of Indian nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose in the play *I, Bose* (2009), written and directed by Elangovan. Mr Khan was recently seen as "Kassim" in the Okto movie *Second Chance* with Koh Chieng Mun, Lim Kay Tong, Margaret Chan, and Patrick Teoh.

SMU STUDENTS

HIROSHI KONDO

LOU SHIXUN

PHUA JIE YUN

TAI JIE XIN

TAN LI SHUAN TERRI

NATHAN AL TAEI

COMMENTS & QUESTIONS

If you would like to leave us some feedback or have questions to ask about tonight's seminar, here are some ways to get in touch with us:

Email: info@centre42.sg
Twitter: twitter.com/Centre42
Facebook: facebook.com/Centre42

UPCOMING

MAMA, BIG BIRD, AND THE CAT (NOV 6-8)

Mama, Big Bird, and the Cat is an adaptation by Margaret Chan of excerpts from the plays of Kuo Pao Kun: *Mama Looking for Her Cat* (1988), *The Eagle and the Cat* (1990 Chinese, 1995 English), and *The Evening Climb* (1995).

The production continues *The Vault: Big Bird and the Cat's* exploration of the metaphors of big bird and the cat employed by Kuo in several of his plays.

While the theme of multilingualism continues in this adaptation of *Mama Looking for Her Cat*, Margaret describes her play as bringing new and necessary perspectives to Kuo's seminal play of an old Hokkien woman left behind by her children who are schooled in English and Mandarin. The didactic message of the original text now gives way to a dialectic, where the voices of younger people are given equal hearing.

The production *Mama, Big Bird, and the Cat* is a SMU-X course which emphasises experiential learning through collaborations between students and industry players. SMU students Daniel Lee and Keith Choo direct an ensemble that features veterans of the stage Ali Khan and Margaret Chan working alongside fifteen SMU student performers and nine ITE students in production and technical management. *Mama, Big Bird, and the Cat* is staged under the aegis of Centre 42.

PERFORMANCE DETAILS

Nov 6 (Fri), 8pm / Nov 7 (Sat), 3pm & 8pm / Nov 8 (Sun), 3pm

Centre 42 Black Box

Stay tuned to centre42.sg and [facebook.com/Centre42](https://www.facebook.com/Centre42) for ticketing information.



THE VAULT

THE VAULT revisits and remembers Singapore works dating back to our early theatre years, refreshes them through the responses of artists and collaborators, and retells them in a contemporary manner.

PRESENTED BY



CENTRE 42