

Centre 42 presents  
THE VAULT

# Desert Blooms

The Dawn of  
Queer Singaporean Theatre

30 NOV & 1 DEC 2019  
CENTRE 42 BLACK BOX

**THE VAULT: DESERT BLOOMS  
— THE DAWN OF QUEER  
SINGAPOREAN THEATRE**  
*PRESENTED BY CENTRE 42*

**PLAYWRIGHT/RESEARCHER**  
NG YI-SHENG

**DIRECTOR/SET**  
TAN SHOU CHEN

**STAGE MANAGER**  
SITI SYAHADAH

**CAST**  
REBEKAH SANGEETHA DORAI  
YAP YI KAI  
IZZUL IRFAN  
NG YI-SHENG

**MULTIMEDIA**  
RUZAINI MAZANI

**PLAYWRIGHT'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I'd like to thank Russell Heng, Michael Chiang, Haresh Sharma, Chay Yew, Eleanor Wong, Ong Keng Sen, Ovidia Yu, G Selvanathan, Kok Heng Leun, Otto Fong, Lim Soon Lan and Goh Boon Teck for taking the time to let me interview them as part of my research process, and Grace Kalaiselvi for her transcription and translation of the *Akka* excerpt.

**IMDA RATING: R18 (MATURE THEME)**

# Artist's Message

(Extracted from an interview conducted on 16 Oct 2019)

**F**or queer people in Singapore, we don't have enough of a historical narrative. I think a certain one exists among some queer intellectuals, but it hasn't been mythologised the way, say, Stonewall has. A myth is any narrative that becomes important to the origins of a community, whether it's King Arthur, or Gilgamesh or LKY.



There is a certain mythologisation of moments, like in the films *Tanjong Rhu* and *Bugis Street*. But what I realised as soon as I said I wanted to look at queer theatre from 1985 to 1995, is that this period has got a lot in it. We have the redevelopment of Bugis Street. We have the Marxist Conspiracy. We have Josef Ng. We have the Tanjong Rhu and Rascals incidents.

I want to show people that this was an extraordinary time in Singaporean cultural history, where arts, politics and society were undergoing a profound transformation. And queerness is at the centre of it.

And I would like there to be a sense of heritage. If you're queer and if you choose to see yourself as part of the queer community, you should have a Singaporean heritage to look back on. And literature and drama is a part of how this heritage emerged.

## NG YI-SHENG

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NG YI-SHENG is a multi-disciplinary writer, researcher and LGBT+ activist. His plays include Theatreworks' *Hungry and Reservoir*, Toy Factory Theatre Ensemble's *251*, Musical Theatre Ltd's *Georgette* and Wild Rice's *The Last Temptation of Stamford Raffles*. He has recently focused on creating performance lectures such as *Painted Shadows: a Queer Haunting of the National Gallery* and *Ayer Hitam: a Black History of Singapore*.

His books include the poetry collections *last boy*, *Loud Poems for a Very Obliging Audience* and *A Book of Hims*; the non-fiction book *SQ21: Singapore Queers in the 21st Century*; and the short fiction collection *Lion City*. He spent 13 years organising *ContraDiction*, an annual queer literary evening, and has co-edited anthologies such as *GASPP: a Gay Anthology of Singapore Poetry and Prose* and *Sanctuary: Short Fiction from Queer Asia*. He is currently pursuing his PhD at NTU. He tweets and Instagrams at @yishkabob.

# The Blooming Team

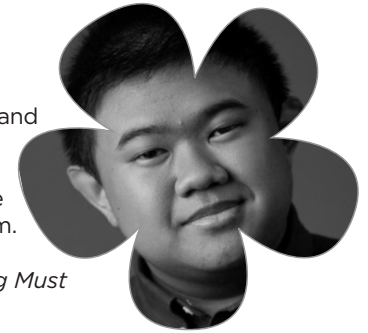


**TAN SHOU CHEN** is a recognised theatremaker from Singapore. His interests lie in the encounters between different cultures across time and space and the traverse between tradition and contemporary. His latest directorial work was a commission by the Singapore International Festival of the Arts 2019 called *Orestes by Ifigenia*, an original interpretation of George Friederich Handel's Baroque opera *Orestes*. Shou Chen made his directorial debut on the main stage with *13.13.13*, part of Theatreworks 2018 main season. It was received with accolades. He is also a recipient of the Singapore National Arts Council Creation Grant, with which he created and performed an original play called *Open Waters*, an international collaboration with Thai artist Jaturachai Srichanwapan. It showed at the Bangkok Theatre Festival 2017 and in Singapore. Earlier this year, Shou Chen also completed an artist residency at Hangar Centro de Investigação Artística in Lisbon (PT).  
www.shouchen.net / IG: @shouchentan

**REBEKAH SANGEETHA DORAI** is an actor, singer and voiceover artist. Recent selected theatre credits including her solo show *Building A Character* at the 2018 Wild Rice Singapore Theatre Festival, *Discord of Discourse* at The Faversham Fringe (UK), the Esplanade Studio's *Miss British*, Theatreworks' *Three Fat Virgins* and *Eloquence*, and Wild Rice's *Merdeka*. Sangeetha also debuted her solo jazz concert — *Sangeetha Sings Sinatra* — live at the Esplanade in early 2019. She is elated to be a part of *Desert Blooms*.



**YAP YI KAI** studied Theatre Studies and Drama in junior college. Her stage and television credits include Tan Tarn How's *Press Gang* (Wild Rice's Singapore Theatre Festival 2018), Wild Rice's *HOTEL* (Singapore International Festival of Arts 2015, Singapore Theatre Festival 2016 and OzAsia Festival 2017 in Adelaide), Euginia Tan's *Tuition* (Twenty-Something Theatre Festival 2016), Wild Rice's *Public Enemy* (2015), Joel Tan's *Mosaic* (M1 Singapore Fringe Festival 2015) and Channel 5's *Baby Bumps* (2016). She has also acted in a short film *To Mum (Love, Me)* by Joyene Nazatul which earned various awards at queer festivals around the world. She has worked with ACT 3 Theatrics as a special needs drama educator and spent some time in legal practice. She earned her Bachelor of Laws (Honours) at the National University of Singapore while also dabbling in hosting, singing, radio broadcasting and voiceover work.



**IZZUL IRFAN** is an aspiring actor, director and playwright. His most recent works include Teater Ekamatra's *A Clockwork Orange* (2019) and *Angkat* (2019) for the M1 Singapore Fringe Festival, both directed by Noor Effendy Ibrahim. He was also part of Young & Wild's graduating performance *Anything Can Happen/Something Must Happen* (2019) under Edith Podesta.

Izzul wrote his first play *Sampan* in 2016 and he has since written an original musical *Runaway* in 2018. He has also directed two productions: *Void Deck* (2019) and *Wilderness* (2019).

He is currently the Creative Director of The Runaway Company, a youth theatre group dedicated to telling stories through the integration of music and theatre.



**RUZAINI MAZANI** is interested in movement and performance texts, and has been researching on ways to deepen his knowledge in the two areas. An actor by training, he is venturing into areas where performance text is mixed with multimedia. He is also currently writing his first full-length play with transgender characters. He holds a BA (Hons) Acting from LASALLE College of the Arts and MA (Coursework) Southeast Asian Studies from National University of Singapore.

**SITI SYAHADAH** has been passionate about the arts since a very young age. She started in dance and music in the early days and stumbled upon theatre in ITE in 2011 during her days in ITE and since then, she has ventured out to freelance as a crew and performance with various companies.

Her background in performance helped her push the boundaries as a Stage Manager by coming up with fast and (sometimes) weird solutions to the problems that are given to her. Her go-to? Glue guns.

She recently graduated from NAFA with a Diploma in Theatre (English Drama) and is saving up to take her degree. Or get married; whichever comes first.



# A Guide to Desert Blooms

In case you're lost, here's a handy timeline of events mentioned in *Desert Blooms!*

## 1985

- 17 FEB** TheatreWorks is founded.
- 10 APR** First case(s) of AIDS is discovered in Singapore.
- 10 OCT** Bugis Street closes for redevelopment.

## 1987

- 27 MAR** Action Theatre debuts.
- 21 MAY** First wave of ISD arrests for suspected Marxists connections.
- 22 JUN** ARMY DAZE by Michael Chiang premieres.
- 20 SEP** Asia-in-Theatre Research Circus is founded.
- 12 NOV** The Necessary Stage is founded.
- 1 DEC** Choreographer Goh Choo San dies from AIDS in New York.

## 1988

- 1 DEC** Action for AIDS is founded.

## 1989

- 13 OCT** RIGOR MORTIS by Haresh Sharma premieres.
- 23 NOV** SAFE SEX: A DOUBLE BILL premieres.  
Comprises JACKSON ON A JAUNT by Eleanor Wong,  
and AS IF HE HEARS by Chay Yew.
- 23 DEC** LIWAT [SODOMY] by Nizam Rahman premieres.

## 1990

- 29 JUN** M BUTTERFLY by David Henry Hwang opens.
- 28 NOV** Goh Chok Tong becomes Prime Minister.

## 1991

- 8 JUN** MARRYING by Ovidia Yu is read.
- 21 AUG** AKKA அக்கா by G Selvanathan premieres.
- 28 AUG** IMAGINE by Ovidia Yu premieres.

## 1992

- 2 JAN** THE FAMOUS FIVE GO ON AN ADVENTURE by Robin Loon is read.
- 14 APR** THREE FAT VIRGINS UNASSEMBLED by Ovidia Yu premieres.
- 15 APR** LEST THE DEMONS GET TO ME by Russell Heng premieres.
- 12 MAY** PORCELAIN by Chay Yew premieres in London.
- 30 JUN** PRIVATE PARTS by Michael Chiang premieres.
- 6 JUL** Theatre Studies programme launches at National University of Singapore.
- 27 JUL** GLASS ROOTS... (DON'T STEP ON THEM) by Haresh Sharma premieres.
- 15 AUG** PECULIAR CHRIS by Johann S Lee is published.
- 21 OCT** ANOTHER TRIBE 异族 by Otto Fong and LIVES ELSEWHERE 生命他乡 by Lee Chee Kin premiere.
- 25 OCT** THE NEXT GENERATIONS 后代 by Lim Soon Lan premieres.
- 7 NOV** POSTERTERNE 英台起诉记 by Goh Boon Teck premieres.

## 1993

- 28 JAN** THE LADY OF SOUL AND HER ULTIMATE 'S' MACHINE by Tan Tarn How premieres.
- 20 MAY** Police raid at Rascals Club, Pan Pacific Hotel.
- 9 JUL** MERGERS & ACCUSATIONS by Eleanor Wong premieres.
- Mid-SEP** Police run "anti-gay" operation at Tanjong Rhu.
- 23 OCT** Josef Ng performs DON'T GO SWIMMING, IT'S NOT SAFE.
- 12 NOV** THREE YEARS IN THE LIFE AND DEATH OF LAND by Haresh Sharma premieres.

## 1994

- 1 JAN** Josef Ng performs BROTHER CANE.
- 30 JAN** BUGIS STREET [musical] premieres.
- 5 FEB** ST report on Alvin Tan and Haresh Sharma attending "Marxist workshop" is published.
- 13 MAY** WE ARE FAMILY by Otto Fong premieres.

## 1995

- 13 APR** BUGIS STREET [film] by Yonfan premieres.
- 20 APR** A LANGUAGE OF THEIR OWN by Chay Yew opens in New York.
- 21 SEP** WILLS & SECESSION by Eleanor Wong premieres.
- 6 DEC** PURPLE by Goh Boon Teck premieres.



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Over the past five years, Centre 42 has been home to more than 150 artists and collectives, supported the development of over 170 new works, archived over 2,000 theatre artefacts dating back to the 1960s, and brought Singapore theatre to over 35,000 audience members in our blue house.

Donate and help us do more in the next five years!

## WHAT'S ON AT CENTRE 42

### THE DESERT BLOOMS [EXHIBITION]

*The Desert Blooms* features nine queer plays created between the years 1985 and 1995. The exhibition details when and how these plays were created, and also touches on any resistance these plays might have encountered when they were first staged. *The Desert Blooms* exhibition runs from 30 Nov to 20 Dec 2019 in the Centre 42 Library.

### IN THE LIVING ROOM: YEAR IN REVIEW 2019

The Singapore theatre community is coming together to chat about 2019. On 8 Dec, we'll be discussing two topics which trended in this year's spate of productions, namely **depictions of sexual violence**, and **decolonisation**. Come join the conversation! Details and registration at [lryip2019.eventbrite.sg](https://lryip2019.eventbrite.sg).

### SINGAPORE THEATRE IN 2019 [EXHIBITION]

For the third year running, Centre 42 is documenting all local productions in the calendar year in a massive timeline! This year's timeline features over 200 shows, the highest number recorded so far. *Singapore Theatre in 2019* runs in the Centre 42 Front Courtyard from 8 Dec 2019 to 31 Jan 2020.



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.

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