

Centre 42 presents  
THE VAULT



29 & 30 JUNE 2018

CENTRE 42 BLACK BOX

## CREATORS' MESSAGE

We came together with various interests in responding to Stella Kon's *Emily of Emerald Hill*. Eugene pored through the structure of both the original and adapted text. Shu Yu tackled issues of performing identities. Sarah meticulously checked and reflected on our process. And Brenda focused on the narrative surrounding Emily and Elisabeth.

While we come from different backgrounds, our efforts are focused on a single question: How does our generation of artists carry on, respond to, or even fight against the legacy of classics? Themes, issues, context, narrative structures and cultural references are all put to the test. We are interested in whether our generation echoes the sentiments of the past or if cultural amnesia is slowly taking place amongst our peers.

Our response to *Emily of Emerald Hill* is a reckoning with the sense of being ever-present in a world that is resolutely set in the past; something that both fading memories and social media archives share in common. Identity becomes a story that is constantly being re-edited to perfection and re-told to the self. With *@thisisemeraldgirl*, we explore how much and how little of this has changed through the generations.

## ABOUT EMILY OF EMERALD HILL

*Emily of Emerald Hill* is a monodrama about the life of Emily Gan, a Peranakan matriarch who resides in a mansion on Emerald Hill. Emily talks about her life, from coming to Emerald Hill as a young bride in 1929, to raising her family and managing her home and social life in the 50's and 60's, to being a lonely elderly widow with modern Singapore coming up around her.

Stella Kon first wrote *Emily* in 1982. With the play, she won the 1983 Singapore National Playwriting Competition – for the third time. *Emily* first came to life on stage in a production by Malaysian theatre company Five Arts Centre. Directed by Chin San Sooi and performed by Leow Puay Tin, the monodrama was staged in November 1984 in Seremban and Kuala Lumpur.

In 1985, *Emily* finally came to the Singapore stage as a commission of the 1985 Singapore Drama Festival. Premiering on 4 September, the production was directed by Max Le Blond, and performed by actor Margaret Chan.



## ABOUT @thisisemeraldgirl

*@thisisemeraldgirl* is a contemporary response to Stella Kon's much-loved play *Emily of Emerald Hill*, featuring Elisabeth Gan, a Peranakan girl, YouTube star, social media influencer and the owner of a glamorous heritage property on Emerald Hill.

*@thisisemeraldgirl* combines new writing, multimedia, and Stella Kon's original text in a monologue exploring family and social life in a social media age.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *@thisisemeraldgirl* team and Centre 42 would like to thank the following parties for their generosity:

- Stella Kon and Stella Kon Pte Ltd for permission to adapt *Emily of Emerald Hill*.
- Margaret Chan, Jeremiah Choy, Orangedot Productions Pte Ltd and National Arts Council for permission to use clips from the 2010 production of *Emily of Emerald Hill*.
- Dr. Robin Loon for his guidance and advice.

*@thisisemeraldgirl* has been adapted from the play *Emily of Emerald Hill*, written by Stella Kon in 1982, and which is a copyrighted work owned by Stella Kon Pte Ltd of Singapore. [www.emilyofemeraldhill.com](http://www.emilyofemeraldhill.com)

Performance clips of Emily in *@thisisemeraldgirl* are from *Emily of Emerald Hill* performed by Margaret Chan at Victoria Theatre, as part of the Singapore Arts Festival 2010. (Director: Margaret Chan and Jeremiah Choy / Producer: Jeremiah Choy).

## CREATORS' BIOS



**BRENDA TAN**

*Performer*

Brenda is an undergraduate in NUS pursuing a BA in Theatre Studies, with a minor in Film Production from NYU. Her latest projects include writing *One Woman*, staged by Buds Theatrical Productions and Dark Matter Theatrics, and performing in *Temporarily Mine*, *Nothing Serious* and *U.N.I.T.S.* She goes by @wordweed online, posting original short films, beauty, fashion and lifestyle videos on YouTube. She is also the host of the wt+ original series, a creator at Bloomr.SG and runs Go Margaux, an online vintage jewellery store.

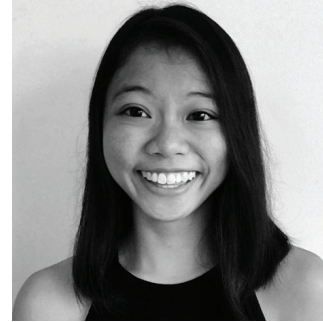


**EUGENE KOH**

*Playwright / Director*

Eugene is an aspiring text-based theatre maker. His recent works include *Project Understudy* under Centre 42's The Vault (2016), *Three Rules of Whore* with Saga Seed Theatre at Centre 42's Late-Night Texting during the Singapore Night Festival (2016), *Bintang Temasek* under Saga Seed Theatre's The Seed Incubator (2017) and *Kalakuta: The Time Puzzle* (2017). He writes reviews occasionally for *ArtsEquator* as well. Outside of his work in theatre, Eugene prizes his various hobbies like constructed scripts and banknote collecting.

## CREATORS' BIOS



**LEE SHU YU**

*Producer / Director*

Shu Yu is an aspiring theatre-maker pursuing a BA in Theatre Studies at the National University of Singapore. She also enjoys stage and production management, design and documentation. Her latest experimentations include *Kalakuta: The Time Puzzle* (2017) by NUS Thespis and documenting *1 Table 2 Chairs Experimental Series* (2017) by The Theatre Practice. She is also one of Centre 42's 2018 Citizen Reviewers.



**SARAH AMALINA**

*Stage Manager / Documenter*

Sarah is a fresh graduate from the BA Arts Management course in LASALLE. She has a breadth of experience in artist management and festival management, which include events such as the Singapore Grand Prix and the 28th Singapore International Film Festival. @thisismeraldgirl is her return to theatre after working with the visual arts and film for the past two years, and she is very excited to be collaborating with her best friends.

Find out more about *The Vault*: @thisisemeraldgirl in our interview with Eugene Koh, Lee Shu Yu, and Brenda Tan.

**How did the idea for *The Vault*: @thisisemeraldgirl come about?**

EUGENE KOH (EK): We were taking the module 'Singapore English-Language Theatre' in NUS [National University of Singapore], and in one of the first lessons we were talking about *Emily of Emerald Hill*. Dr. [Robin] Loon [lecturer and Centre 42's co-founder] mentioned that you can never tell who Emily was addressing: the audience in the 1950s, or in the future, or in the past. And I drew the parallel to YouTube videos, where everything seems like it's happening in the present, even though you know it's made in the past. So it started from that idea.

**What are you hoping to explore through this work?**

LEE SHU YU (LSY): When you look at Emily as a character, there is a lot of debate about whether you should like her or hate her, so we wanted to capture that through Elisabeth and through the lens of social media.

**Do you see *The Vault*: @thisisemeraldgirl as an extension or an adaptation of *Emily of Emerald Hill*?**

LSY: It's a sequel, adaptation, and reinterpretation all at once. It is a sequel in terms of timeline and Elisabeth's relationship to Emily; it's an adaptation because we took our reference from the source material; but it's also a reinterpretation because we took certain themes and moods of each scene but used them in our own way.

**What was your process like in creating this work?**

EK: It was collaborative.

BRENDA TAN (BT): We literally sat in Eugene's room, and he had post-it notes of different scenes from *Emily of Emerald Hill* stuck on his wardrobe door, and we just kind of see how everything fits and which scenes from the original text we wanted to keep.

EK: As for the voice of Elisabeth, most of it came from Brenda. She would improvise certain scenes.

BT: It can be difficult because I also make YouTube videos [in real life], so in many of these instances I am being me and I can relate, but at the same time I have to be very careful and remember that it's also not me.

LSY: So every time Brenda comes up with something, we will take it apart and discuss what's interesting about it, how it's similar to Emily, or why it's relevant to today's life.

**Brenda, you mentioned that you're also a YouTuber in real life. What's that like for you?**

BT: I started making YouTube videos just as I entered university, so for two and a half years now. My videos are about everything from skincare and makeup to food and lifestyle. More recently, I started talking about social issues as well. I've always been a social media baby. I find that it's the best way to make very quick, sincere interactions. I never thought it's fake. It's nice to be able to pour my heart out in front of the camera and find that there's a group of people who feel the same way and actually want to have a sincere conversation about it.

**There's a multimedia element in *The Vault*: @thisisemeraldgirl. Can you tell us more about that?**

EK: *Emily of Emerald Hill* uses a lot of media that was fairly new at the time – things like voice recording or projector slides – to enhance the theatrical illusion of the play. We felt that we should pay homage to that by using social media in our performance as well.

LSY: I think one big thing that kept coming up as we were thinking about it was the staging of it. We have multimedia going on in the background, but we also have a live performer. So which is more 'live' and which is more 'present'?

**What were some of the challenges that you faced during the creation process?**

LSY: The main roadblocks were things like looking for archive footages and going through the paperwork of obtaining them. Thankfully people like [producer] Jeremiah [Choy] and Centre 42 helped.

**Do you feel like your piece is more for the millennial generation, since you're referencing the social media world so much?**

EK: I guess it's for everyone. Those who are more familiar with the earlier stagings of *Emily of Emerald Hill* will pick up more on how things have changed. With the millennial generation, I guess they would recognise the environment that Elisabeth is in and, through that, understand what *Emily of Emerald Hill* is about.

BT: Also, if it piques an interest in people who have never read or watched *Emily of Emerald Hill* to pick up the script to read it, you know, then that's great!

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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.

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