

Centre 42 and NUS Theatre Studies present
THE VAULT

Who's asking? Who's talking?

Responses to Henry Ong's *Madame Mao's Memories*

9 APRIL 2021
3PM & 7.30PM
72-13 MOHAMED SULTAN ROAD

FRAGMENTS

Cheng Xin Rui
Koh Jia Sheng
Lim Ci Xuan
Ng Zhe Ern
Suki Teh

NOBODY ASKED!

Benjamin Lye
Ian Pereira
Sasitharan Gaiatri
Sneha Sudha Sanjay

DRAMATURG

Dr. Robin Loon

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

Eugene Koh

TECHNICAL CONSULTANT

Henrik Cheng

DOCUMENTATION CONSULTANT

Daniel Teo (Centre 42)

PRESENTED BY



WITH SUPPORT FROM

T:>Works



Claire Wong performing as Jiang Qing in the T: > Work's production of Madame Mao's Memories in 1991.

About Madame Mao's Memories

Madame Mao's Memories is a monodrama based on accounts of the life of Jiang Qing (1914 – 1991), former Shanghainese actor, major Chinese political figure, and consort to the Chairman of the Communist Party, Mao Zedong. After the death of Mao in 1976, Jiang Qing was imprisoned for her involvement in orchestrating the Cultural Revolution, a

"The scene is Qin Cheng Prison, China.

A day in the life of Madame Mao.

[...]

**I'M NOT AFRAID OF
HAVING MY HEAD
CHOPPED OFF."**

Opening lines from
Madame Mao's Memories.

violent sociopolitical movement that led to widespread persecutions and killings.

Henry Ong (1949 - 2018) was born in Malaysia and spent his childhood in Singapore. As an adult, he left for the United States for higher education. Ong eventually settled in Los Angeles where he had a prolific and internationally acclaimed play-writing career. Written in 1989, *Madame Mao's Memories* was his first professionally produced play.

“What did I do that was so wrong? My whole life was devoted to the service of the Revolution. It breaks my heart to hear them burning caricatures of me in the street. Such ugly pictures!”

Madame Mao's Memories, p.41.

In 1991, T:>Works staged *Madame Mao's Memories* at The Black Box at Fort Canning. The Singapore debut of the play was

directed by Ong Keng Sen, and the role of Jiang Qing performed by Claire Wong. In the following year, T:>Works brought the production to the Edinburgh Festival where it received international critical praise.



The students taking a silat workshop with theatre practitioner Lian Sutton on 13 Jan 2021.

Message from module chair

In Weeks 1 and 2 of the semester, the nine students conducted research on Henry Ong's *Madame Mao's Memories* and presented their findings. They also went through a series of workshops where they learnt to mobilise their bodies for the stage while responding to different kinds of stimuli and texts.

In Week 3, the students formed their groups and pitched ideas for their presentation. Once I endorsed their pitches, the groups spent the rest of the semester on devising, collaborating and activating their bodies for the stage, creating consecutive drafts of their final presentation.

Each group had six opportunities to present their drafts for comments, out of which two were formally assessed as works-in-progress. As dramaturg, I presented them with recommendations and also commented on the soundness and cogency of their artistic choices.

The students were constantly reminded that they were in full control of the artistic vision of their response. I also reiterated to the students that their presentations must fulfill the research demands of the module.

Each student was required to submit three monthly reflections. These reflections were not to report or record their reactions to the process, but opportunities for the students to step back and



The students attending a documentation workshop on 19 Feb 2021 conducted by Centre 42 Documentation & Communications Executive Daniel Teo.

assess its impact on themselves as performers and researchers.

In Week 6, the students attended a documentation workshop conducted by Centre 42 to learn about documentation. In putting together their final presentations, they were introduced to a technical consultant who offered design and mise-en-scène suggestions and kept track of their progress.

What you see on the 9th of April is a result of 13 weeks of research, workshopping, brainstorming, drafting and re-drafting.

DR. ROBIN LOON

Dramaturg & Module Chair

TS3103 Theatre Lab

NOBODY ASKED! Synopsis



Nobody Asked! confronts and critiques Henry Ong's authorial positionality in dramatizing Jiang Qing's experiences. This response interrogates the authorship and articulates our collective frustration towards the ways in which women's stories are retold, rewritten and appropriated

Nobody Asked! uncovers the dynamic relationship between staging stories belonging to specific cultural-historical spheres and the subjectivity of memories.

NOBODY ASKED! Bios

BENJAMIN LYE previously graduated with a Diploma in Arts & Theatre Management from Republic Polytechnic. He fell in love with theatre at the age of 13 and has gone on to act in various school productions such as *Ah Boy & the Beanstalk*, *Zits* and *The Day I Met the Prince*. His television credits include *Dream School* (OKTO) and recent theatre credits include *Anything Can Happen/Something Must Happen* (WILDRICE), *A Christmas Sketch Show: The Naughty List*, *Mr Dong Guo* (Paper Monkey Theatre). He completed an acting programme - Young & WILD under the mentorship of Edith Podesta in 2019.

IAN PEREIRA is a budding theatre maker and lighting designer. His recent design credits include *Fika and Fishy*, *The Adventures of Abhijeet* (Patch and Punnet), *The Block Party* (The Community Theatre), and *Echoes of Waterloo* (Grain Performance Research Lab). His stage acting credits include *Hurstville: The Heir* (Underground) and television credits include *KTV* (CPF Board). He completed a lighting design programme in 2019 by Arts Wok Collaborative under Suven Chen. He is also an avid musician and enjoys eating sambal kang kong.

SASITHARAN GAIATRI has been performing since she was 3 years old but has since graduated to doing so with proper skills and training. Her love for the arts began with dance when she was a child and she later fell in love with theatre at the age of 13. She performed in and produced numerous school productions such as *The Fantasticks*, *Lady Macbeth* and *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream. Her training also includes ten years of Oddissi dance with Raka Maitra as well as Kalaripayattu courses with Krishnadas Gurukkal.

SNEHA SUDHA SANJAY is a final year student pursuing a double major in Theatre Studies and Business Management. She hopes to amplify the stories of local artists and arts-based companies through her video production start-up, Made In SG LLP. Her first step into the industry was her involvement in *Mixed* (Theatreworks), after which she acted in short films including *Diaspora* (Deirk Productions). Her original works include *CORPUS*, a devised piece, and *Jeté*, a short film she co-produced. Sneha also pursued theatre at Yale University as a Creative and Performing Arts Award recipient, where she directed *Machinal* and played the lead role in *Agnes of God* and *Causation*.





FRAGMENTS Synopsis



Who's talking? Where are we? Who are we? *Fragments* explores the multiplicities of perspectives and positionalities with regard to Henry Ong's *Madame Mao's Memories*. Through the use of fragmented visuals and flashes of memories that make up our understanding of contexts, we establish our truths and uncover ourselves in *Madame Mao's Memories*.

FRAGMENTS Bios

CHENG XIN RUI is a third-year Theatre studies Major in the National University of Singapore. He is pretentious, insufferable and a huge pain, and he seems to make it his life's goal to be all three of those things simultaneously. Sometimes he sings, sometimes he acts, and he occasionally does both simultaneously. He hopes to enter the theatre industry in the future in any capacity that he is able to, and to continue enjoying being involved in theatre-making as much as he currently does.

KOH JIA SHENG is the managing director of Circus of Altrades, Singapore's first acrobatic Circus troupe. His background in acrobatics include competitive gymnastics, dance acrobatics, and Circus arts. He believes strongly in versatility which led him to explore other genres and production work. With prior experience in commercial dance and film work, he hopes to combine storytelling with his movements to discuss contemporary social issues.

LIM CI XUAN is a theatre cat who has a different Circadian rhythm from most people. If you need her, you can probably find her in a Starbucks in the middle of the night, indulging in some literature and theatre work from school. In her not-very-free time, she works with theatre companies, having acted in shows with TOY Factory, Paper Monkey Theatre and Singapore Repertory Theatre. She is the co-founder of literary collective, Matter.Less, an associate artist of Split theatre and a member of ARTivate, the youth wing of Drama Box.

NG ZHE ERN's interest in performing started in kindergarten when she stood on the stage for the first time. Her love for theatre grew after joining her school's drama club in Secondary school and Junior College, where she was mostly involved in acting and being the production manager for a school production. She then decided to pursue a major in Theatre Studies in NUS. She was also honoured to be given an opportunity to build her own set pieces for the annual Sheares Hall production during her stay there. Her experiences on stage include singing in her CCAs in Sheares Hall and NUS Voices.

SUKI TEH is a Year 3 Theatre Studies student at NUS. Though she has little to no performance experience, she has tried her hand in playwriting, directing and stage managing. Suki enjoys research in theatre and has participated in the Undergraduate Research Opportunity offered by NUS to do practice-based research at the Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive.





ABOUT

NUS THEATRE STUDIES THEATRE LAB (TS3103) is a practice-driven module that all final-year Theatre Studies Majors must read. Graduating students apply the knowledge they have acquired and present a creative work that is assured and dramaturgically sound. Most importantly, they must be able to demonstrate research intelligence via a theatrical presentation. The students are also tasked to document their creative processes for critical reflection, and build skills for recording and sharing their practices and experiences.

T:>WORKS is an independent and international performance company based in Singapore. It is an Institute of Public Character. Established in 1985, it is currently led by Artistic Director, Dr. Ong Keng Sen. T:>Works' vision and mission is the pioneering of thought leadership in the arts focused on transdisciplinary, transcultural, and inclusive processes.

Centre 42 and NUS Theatre Studies warmly thank T:>Works for their generous support.

ABOUT

CENTRE 42 is a non-profit theatre development space committed to the creation, documentation and promotion of texts and writings for the Singapore stage. The Centre incubates original writing for production development, provides space for artists and new work creation, and runs a functional archive documenting the histories and processes of Singapore theatre

As a registered charity, Centre 42 relies of public contributions to keep going. If you're able to, please make a donation to support our work in Singapore theatre.



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