

NUS Theatre : Southeast Asian Play Series

3 CHILDREN



Leow Puay Tin



NUS Theatre • Southeast Asian Play Series

Three Children

A Play By

Leow Puay Tin

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Three Children
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Foreword

From all accounts, Leow Puay Tin's *Three Children* is an important contribution to Singapore-Malaysian theatre. It is an impression most readers and audiences are likely to share. First produced in Kuala Lumpur in 1988, the revised version was presented by TheatreWorks early this year in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Yokohama, jointly directed by Krishen Jit (who, like Leow, is a Malaysian) and Ong Keng Sen. This sharing of interest and co-operation which already exists in other areas of the performing arts, augurs well for the further development of the region's theatre whose rich immemorial traditions include one in English as a colonial legacy.

Kept alive for many years by productions of examination texts, travelling groups, TV versions of established as well as experimental work, English theatre in Singapore became so dynamic in the last four to five years that it has now come into its own. We have a number of professional companies which - as they consolidated and gained critical, creative and artistic confidence - developed resources, direction, evolved their vision. In theatre especially, the sources of vitality, sophistication and variety are ultimately sustained by a robust yet sensitive sense of relevance to life. While the most profound themes such as birth and death, joy and tragedy, separation and reunion, departure and return are common, their expression in different cultures is never fully the same. This holds true even where the novel or play is in a variety of an international language such as English. Plays by Singaporeans about Singaporeans and the 'Singapore experience' as exemplified in Moh Hon Meng's *Single*, attract more to the theatre, inspiring in consequence a steady flow of new scripts.

Plays are best seen. Yet published ones have their value, not only between productions or as complements to videos and other forms of visual retrieval, but also for intrinsic reasons. Such texts are portable. Moreover, they allow us to study the play. The stimulation of a performance is exchanged for opportunities of careful, deeper analysis of themes and characters. As we attend to words on the page there is the pleasure of staging/directing the play in our minds. With *Three Children* our interest is stimulated, indeed challenged, by both the playwright's and the directors' notes. Like the play itself, they make fascinating, instructive reading. In launching its Southeast Asian Plays Series with *Three Children*, NUS Theatre has picked a play that contributes significantly, perhaps even uniquely, to the 3 Ps, the main areas of a thriving theatre, namely, Play, Production and People (audience).



Professor Lim Pin
Vice-Chancellor
National University of Singapore

Playwright's Notes

A web of relationships emerged when I began writing the story of three young people recalling their shared childhood in Kappan Road. As they tell their stories, they role-play the characters. Several stories feature recurrent characters, such as their grand-mother, their aunt Ah Kim, their mother and their grandfather, and themselves as children.

Girl 1, Girl 2 and Boy are strongly affected by some of their story characters. As they relate the tales, they consistently play the parts of those people who had made a strong impact on their psyche, for example:

- Girl 2 — grandmother and mother;
- Girl 1 — Ah Kim and a number of 'victim' roles;
- Boy — father, grandfather and a number of mainly ineffectual male roles.

Because of this criss-cross of relationships, the two sisters and their brother become, at various points in the play, different permutations of husband and wife, parent and child, oppressor and victim, etc.

This web reflects the powerful but subtle effects of lives upon lives within families and society. Unless one transcends these influences — this conditioning — the patterns of the past are repeated indefinitely. At birth, one is ignorant of the conditioning to come into one's life. One cannot determine the circumstances of one's birth and the influences that inform one's life. Gradually, as the years pass and one's self-aware-ness matures, one suddenly realizes that one's life has turned out this way or that, whether happily or unhappily so.

So while one's time on earth is singular, reality appears arbitrary. One has no absolute control over one's mind and body, much less over other people's. Thus one suffers in a thousand secret ways...

Pages have been omitted from this book preview.

First Performances

Three Children was first performed in Kuala Lumpur in July 1988. Directed by Chin San Sooi and produced by the Five Arts Centre, it was performed by two casts playing on alternate nights:

Girl 1 : Hanim Hassan/Kee Shih-lene
 Girl 2 : Suhaila Merican/Leow Puay Tin
 Boy : Anthony Pinto/Keith Liu

The play was revised and performed in Singapore in November 1988. It was co-directed by Ong Keng Sen of TheatreWorks and Krishen Jit of Five Arts Centre and produced by TheatreWorks. The performers were:

Girl 1 : Claire Wong
 Girl 2 : Lok Meng Chue
 Boy : Lim Kay Tong
 Narrator : Neo Swee Lin

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3 Children by Leow Puay Tin was presented by TheatreWorks in Singapore on 23 January 1992 at the Drama Centre, on February 12 1992 in Kuala Lumpur at the Dewan Bandaraya, on February 28 1992 in Tokyo's Cocoon Theatre in the Bunkamura and on March 4 1992 in Yokohama at the Nishi Ward Public Hall.

It featured the following cast and crew:

Cast

Girl #1	Claire Wong
Girl #2	Lok Meng Chue
Boy	Loong Seng Onn
Narrator	Tan Kheng Hua (Singapore & Kuala Lumpur) Hideko Yoshida (Tokyo and Yokohama)
Music Ensemble	Mark Chan Sunetra Fernando Koh Joo Kim Lim Yu-Beng

Crew

Directors	Krishen Jit and Ong Keng Sen
Set Designer	Justin Hill
Lighting Designer	Tracie Howitt
Composer	Mark Chan
Choreographers	Joanna Wong (Chinese Opera) Marion D'Cruz (Tari Acheh)
Technical Manager	Lim Yu-Beng
Production/ Stage Manager	Dawn Westerhout

A shorter version of 3 Children by the Five Arts Centre premiered in Kuala Lumpur in July 1988. The full length play premiered in Singapore at the Drama Centre in November, 11, 1988 with a cast featuring Lim Kay Tong, Claire Wong, Lok Meng Chue and Neo Swee Lin.

TheatreWorks (S) Ltd., a registered charity, was incorporated in February 1985 as the first English language adult professional theatre company in Singapore. TheatreWorks is known for its creative innovation and its contemporary theatre which fuses traditional South East Asian performing arts. TheatreWorks provides a platform for initiating and developing Singaporean writers, directors, actors and designers. In 1990, TheatreWorks moved into its new premises at the Fort Canning Centre which includes a flexible performance space, the Black Box. The company has performed in the Edinburgh Festival and the Tokyo International Theatre Festival.

Three Children

Cast:

- Girl 1 : Young woman in her twenties.
Boy : Young man in his twenties.
Girl 2 : Young woman, a little older than the others.
Narrator : Young woman or man.

Stage:

Basic set comprises four simple chairs with backs, and a square/rectangular table, used as beds, moun-tains, doors, etc., in versatile Chinese opera style.

Sounds:

Script notes four places when some sort of uncanny sounds are heard, but audio effects should not be limited to only these four instances. Could be used for the riding sequences, scenes of pursuit, night falling, etc. For simplicity, I have arbitrarily denoted "drums" as a source of sound, but other and more instruments can be used.

Prologue

G2 is riding.

G2 : There was once a something... a something
like a temple on a hill, a well of sweet water
— where is it now?
On my horse, my faith
I ride into the jungle
Ride, ride, ride...
On my horse, my faith
Ride, ride, ride...
Riding among trees
Ride, ride, ride...

G1 stands on a chair.

G1 : Where are you going?
G2 : I'm going deeper into the jungle.

G1 : What are you looking for?

G2 : I'm looking for a something...

G1 : Like a house on a hill?

G2 : Yes, like a well of sweet water.

G1 : So am I! So am I! I've been travelling on my
own all this while. Can I go with you?

G2 : Do you have a horse?

G1 : Yes.

G2 : Come ride beside me.

G1 and G2 : Ride, ride, ride...
 Riding into the jungle
 Ride, ride, ride...
 On my horse, my faith
 Ride, ride, ride...
 Riding among trees
 Ever deeper into the jungle
 Ride, ride, ride...

B stands on a chair.

B : Sisters! Where are you going?

G2 : We're going deeper into the jungle.

B : Ah, so am I! What are you looking for?

G1 : We're looking for a something, a something
 like an entry —

G2 : like a god...

G1 : A something like water to drink —

G2 : like water to cleanse ourselves...

B : I've been looking for that something as well.
 I've walked and run, dreamt and woken,
 hunted and hidden in the jungle in search
 of a something. I've been alone with my
 dreams.

G2 : So had we all...

B : Can I go with you?

G1 : We are doing fine without you. We don't
 want you.

B : But I am your brother!

G1 : Anyway you don't have a horse. You can't
 go anywhere.

B : Yes, I have a horse. Look, here it is.

G2 : Come with us.

B : How can I cross over to your side?

G2 : Climb over the mountain. We'll wait for
 you.

B climbs over the mountain.

G2 : Let's go!

G1, G2, B : Ride, ride, ride, ride, ride...
 Into the jungle
 Ride, ride, ride...
 Looking for a something
 Ride, ride, ride...
 On my horse, my faith
 Ride, ride, ride...
 Two sisters and a brother
 Ride, ride, ride...
 Riding in the jungle
 Ride, ride, ride...
 Away from the past
 Into the something

Ride, ride, ride...
 On my horse, my faith
 Ride, ride, ride, ride, ride...
 Ride, ride, ride, ride, ride...

G1 : What noise is that!

G2 : Who shouts!

B : Who're coming!

G1, G2, B : Look, oh, look,
Horror, oh, horror,
They come chasing after us
They will catch us
They will bring us back
But we shall not return!

G1 : They're chasing us!

G2 : They will kill us!

B : There is no escape!

G1, G2, B : Forward! Forward!
Into deeper jungle
Ride, ride, ride...
Looking for refuge
Ride, ride, ride...
They're chasing us!
They're chasing us!

G1 and B : Jump! Jump!

G1, G2 and B ride up a mountain. They come to a cliff with a river below. G1 and B jump into the river, but G2 holds back, torn between the leap and being caught. G1 and B struggle in the water and drown.

Act 1

Scene 1

N : Once upon a time, there were three children, three children, just like you. But they spent their early years in Kappan Road.

When they grew up, they found it was necessary to return to Kappan Road, a narrow street in Malacca town that ran alongside the Malacca river.

Many years ago, years and years ago, before you were born, there were already people living in Kappan Road. Some of those who lived in Kappan Road were born there. Others moved there from elsewhere, and some of those who moved there had once upon a time lived in faraway villages in old China.

In Kappan Road, there were butchers and blacksmiths; coffin makers and cobblers; goldsmiths; tailors; shit, gunnysack and bottle collectors; people who owned coffee shops, tea shops, opium dens... These were amongst those who lived and worked in the shop houses of Kappan Road.

There were grandmothers and grandfathers, aunties and uncles, great-grandmothers, wife-beaters, drunks — daughter-in-law-

Pages have been omitted from this book preview.

