

CENTRE 42 AND NUS THEATRE STUDIES PRESENT

THE VAULT

REAR VIEW MIRRORS

A triple-bill of responses to
Ken Low & Ming Wong's
Chang & Eng



8 APRIL 2022,
2.30PM AND 7.30PM

BLACK BOX @ 42
WATERLOO STREET

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Place for No One

Avinash Vellavan
Sharlene Lim
Sheryl Wong
Nazreen Coupland

The Mama Medallion

Celine Liew
Cheryl Wong
Chee Jin Ming
Kennice Foo
Nicole Tong

20/20

Georgia Sim
Koh Maan Lin
Melissa Yap
Wang Yingbei

Co-Producers

Nidya Shanthini Manokara
Eugene Koh (Centre 42)

Dramaturgs

Robin Loon
Nidya Shanthini Manokara

Technical Consultant

Henrik Cheng

Documentation Consultant

Eugene Koh (Centre 42)

Presented by



NUS
National University
of Singapore

MESSAGE FROM MODULE CHAIR

This is TS3103's 4th collaboration with Centre 42's *Vault*. The response methodology is more refined and more targeted in this iteration.

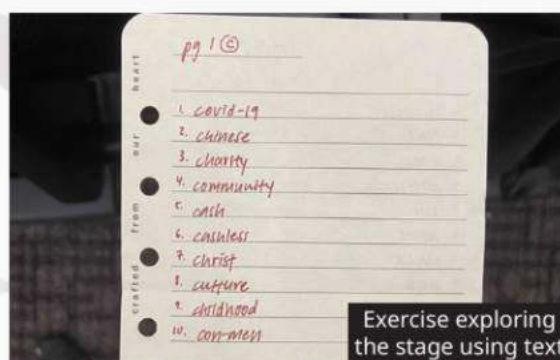
Week 1 saw the students present research reports on various aspects of *Chang & Eng: The Musical*. This has always been a useful exercise for students to explore themes and topics surrounding the play/musical. Week 1 ended with a workshop with Tan Guo Lian Sutton where the students connected their bodies to the kinesic language of the stage.



Workshop with Lian Sutton



Students continuing the exploration with their bodies



Exercise exploring the stage using text

Weeks 2 and 3 saw the students continue their exploration of the stage with their bodies and with text. The students form groups and present their pitches and once that is finalized – the devising begins. The responses must fulfill these criteria:

1. Present a tangible link to *Chang & Eng*; 2. Demonstrate a distinctive point-of-view on a subject/issue explored in the presentation; 3. Offer insight into the issue and into the role of theatre and performance.

Week 5, Theatre Studies Alumni and now C42 Documentation Executive, Eugene Koh gave a workshop on documentation and thereon, the students had 5 chances over 7 weeks to present their works-in-progress with Dr Shan, Henrik Cheng and I providing comments and dramaturgical recommendations.

The students have full control of the artistic vision of their responses. I constantly remind the students that their presentations must fulfill the research imperatives built into the concept of the response.

Students are required to submit 3 monthly reflections where they ruminate on the process and their position vis-à-vis the response-in-progress.

We have now arrived at April 8 2022: after 12 weeks of research, dramaturgical exploration and devising.

DR. ROBIN LOON
Dramaturg & Module Chair
TS3103 Theatre Lab

ABOUT *CHANG & ENG: THE MUSICAL*

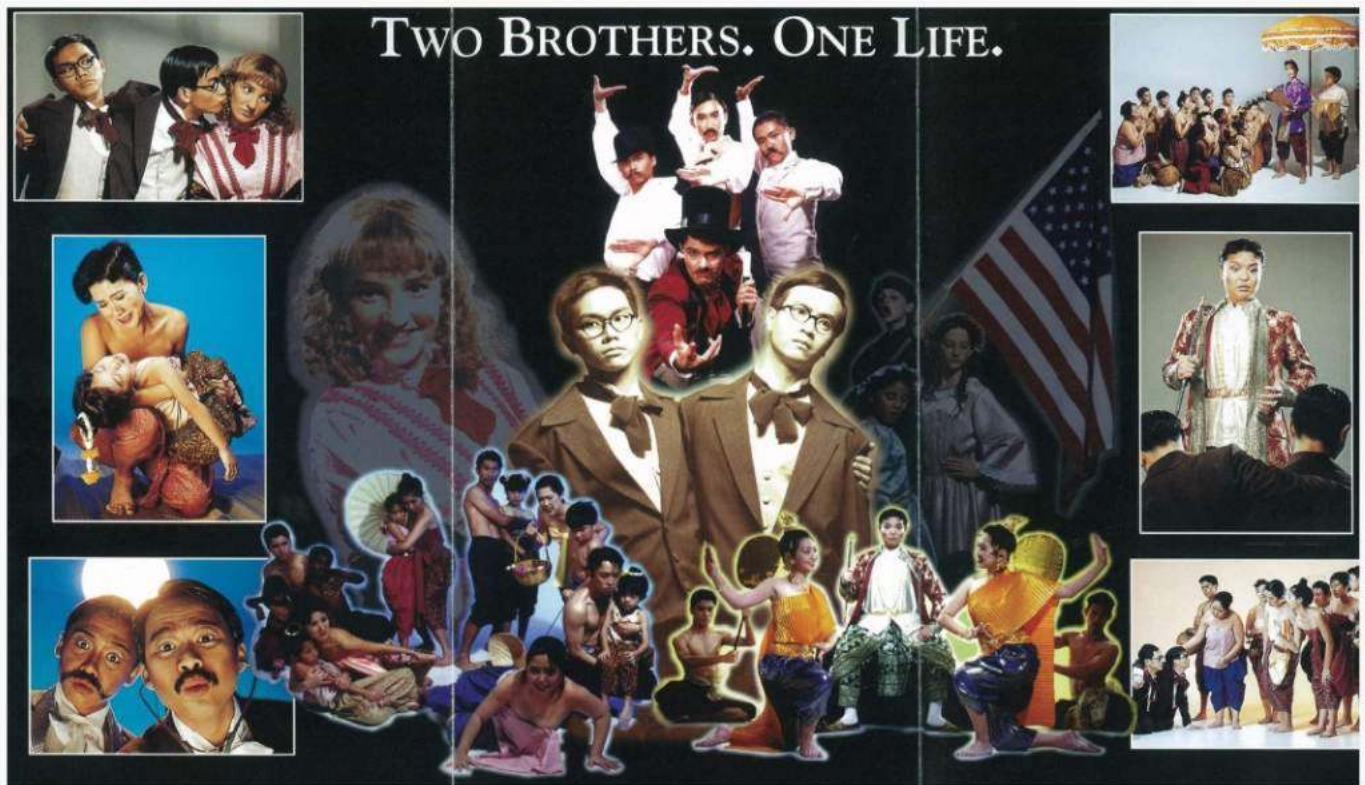


Image from Brochure for *Chang & Eng* (1997)

Chang & Eng: The Musical is based upon the true story of the original Siamese Twins, Chang and Eng Bunker. The musical traces the life of two brothers who were joined at the chest from birth in Thailand, facing discrimination from their society and being condemned as a bad omen. They were subsequently brought to the United States where they were exhibited as special attractions, and later in life became American citizens.

The musical premiered at the Victoria Theatre in Singapore on 19 June 1997 and went on to have many subsequent reruns. At the invitation of the National Opera & Ballet of China, ACTION Theatre presented a season of the musical at the Century Theatre in Beijing, making it the first English-language musical to be staged in China. It continued to be staged at various locations, from an outdoor staging in Fort Canning Park, to the Istana Budaya in Kuala Lumpur, and even the Thailand Cultural Centre in Bangkok, the country where the story originated from.

ACTION Theatre was formed in 1987 from a group of National University of Singapore graduates who wanted to pursue theatre-making in their spare time. It registered as a society in 1988 and turned professional in the 1990s. For over a decade, ACTION Theatre at 42 Waterloo Street would be instrumental in developing local playwriting, primarily staging new plays from local playwrights. ACTION Theatre moved out of 42 Waterloo Street in 2012 and soon after ceased operations.

SYNOPSIS OF *THE VAULT: REAR VIEW MIRRORS*

Place for No One

Responding to Chang and Eng's relationship with their homes, this response explores how it feels to be misplaced in a place that is dear to you. Join four individuals as they bring you along their journeys of resilience and self-preservation. Discover the myriad of ways to confront life and find some hope to bring into your own.

Presented by:
Avinash Vellavan
Sharlene Lim
Sheryl Wong
Nazreen Coupland

The Mama Medallion

Three mothers emerge as the finalists of the prestigious Mama Medallion awards. The prize for the best mother is an enticing, secured, holistic future for their children, and the finale demands only the best show of motherly sacrifice and devotion. Inspired by Chang and Eng's mother, this presentation asks: What more could a mother want, and what more could she be?

Presented by:
Celine Liew
Cheryl Wong
Chee Jin Ming
Kennice Foo
Nicole Tong

20/20

Content Warning: Mentions of childhood abuse and eating disorder

Some say hindsight is 20/20 - perfect vision. Emerging artist C.E. invites you to question this notion in this specially curated exhibition. Through the usage of different mediums, C.E. exposes the intricacies that tie past, present and future to a singular narrative. Step into her life and discover if your hindsight is 20/20.

Presented by:
Georgia Sim
Koh Maan Lin
Melissa Yap
Wang Yingbei

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

May 11, 1811 — Chang and Eng Bunker were born in Siam (now known as Thailand).

1829 — Chang and Eng traveled to the United States. They began to tour major cities in America and Europe.

1832 — At the age of 21, Chang and Eng Bunker went to tour independently, wearing more American clothes and presenting themselves no longer as “boys” but more as men.

1843 — Chang and Eng Bunker married Sarah and Adelaide Yates.

1853 — Chang and Eng Bunker returned to touring, saying that they needed to earn money to support their children.

1860 — Start of the American Civil War. Southern Democrats used the conjoined state of the twins as metaphors for their political messages.

1865 — The twins returned to touring again, presenting themselves now as old men who had their children hurt and captured in the civil war.

January 17, 1874 — Chang passed away, with Eng soon passing on two hours after him.

June 19, 1997 — *Chang & Eng* by ACTION Theatre premiered at Victoria Theatre in Singapore.

December 1997 — *Chang & Eng* was presented at the Century Theatre in Beijing, becoming the first English-language musical to be staged in China.

January 7, 1999 — *Chang & Eng* by ACTION Theatre was restaged at Victoria Theatre in Singapore.

March 2001 — *Chang & Eng* was presented at the Thailand Cultural Centre in Bangkok, Thailand.

March 10, 2002 — *Chang & Eng* presented its last season at the Istana Budaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

February 2, 2022 — Students of NUS Theatre Studies module TS3103 Theatre Lab pitched their preliminary ideas for *The Vault* responding to ACTION Theatre's *Chang & Eng*.

March 2022 — Students continue to devise and craft three responses to *Chang & Eng*.

April 8, 2022 — Centre 42 and NUS Theatre Studies Programme present *The Vault: Rear View Mirrors*.

To view some of the artefacts from ACTION Theatre's stagings of *Chang & Eng: The Musical*, head on over to www.centre42.sg/archive!



INTERVIEW WITH ARTISTS ABOUT THEIR PROCESSES

The students of Theatre Lab devised their responses to *Chang & Eng: The Musical* over the course of ten weeks. In this interview, we chat with Sheryl, Nicole, and Yingbei from their respective groups presenting *Place for No One*, *The Mama Medallion*, and *20/20*, and find out more about their process working towards their final performance showcases.

1. What is your response about?



Rehearsal for *Place for No One*

Sheryl (from *Place for No One*): Initially we saw it as being misplaced: these two brothers are misplaced in a sense that even though they have everything like money and fame, there's still something missing. It is a feeling that these things cannot bring them happiness that they actually desire, like going back to their family. In *Place for No One*, it's the same way for the four of us: we feel that we have everything here, but in spite of that there's this 'blackness' that we all feel. Somehow we feel that we don't fit in, other times we feel that the world is cruel and judgemental. This was our initial response to *Chang & Eng*.

Nicole (from *The Mama Medallion*): Our response is about the performance of motherhood. It's about the pressures and the kind of sometimes unspoken, sometimes explicitly spoken text about what it means to be a good mother. That ideal performance of motherhood that can be really pressurising. And we began to be specifically interested in the way that Chang and Eng's mother had this big musical number that sways the audience emotionally. We were really interested in the way that sacrifice was seen as that height of motherhood because that's how we quantify their love for the child. We began with this focus on the over glorification of maternal suffering in *The Mama Medallion*, after that going on to interrogate the performance of motherhood in general.

INTERVIEW WITH ARTISTS ABOUT THEIR PROCESSES



Rehearsal for *20/20*

Yingbei (from *20/20*): We saw that Chang and Eng's progress through their story started off with innocence, and how their innocence is gradually lost through their journey, especially after they began pursuing their life in America. We wanted to respond to this loss of innocence at first, going into stages of loss and stages of grief. You can actually see the remains of the structure from our first draft in the current draft of *20/20*, representing three stages of loss.

2. How did your group come up with your response?



Rehearsal for *Place for No One*

Sheryl (from *Place for No One*): What we initially wanted in *Place for No One* was to share our personal stories. So it started out rather dark actually; we were sharing our individual stories and how we want to overcome it. It was very dark until Dr. Loon gave us a suggestion to incorporate surrealism into our performance. He asked: why not add a little bit of fantasy into your pieces to make it less dark and more palatable for the audience. We didn't really want to try it, but I said, at this point in time, why not just try and see how it goes? So we tried.

INTERVIEW WITH ARTISTS ABOUT THEIR PROCESSES

But then suddenly, I had to stay away at home due to COVID-19. We couldn't practice in the space. We did the best we could – a lot of drafting and a lot of writing. During the third presentation, I was calling in from Zoom and the rest of my group were in the space. But in spite of that, the presentation of the draft felt rather impactful.



Rehearsal for *The Mama Medallion*

Nicole (from *The Mama Medallion*): At first, we were concerned with a bunch of different social issues. But I remember that as we discussed more after our first pitch to Dr. Loon; we kind of sat around on the LT13 stage, and we were talking and then we started sharing our experiences of our mothers. That was when it became very personal, as each of us was sharing how we conceived of motherhood. We realised how even as children, we were complicit in our idea of what performing motherhood was, because we were talking about how we were sad when our mums weren't home, even though we understood they had to work. We realised that what is acceptable as a mother has sort of passed down generationally onto us and how this is actually an issue that has impacted our lives, because everybody has been a child once. That kind of sparked a new sense of vigour of interest in exploring this in *The Mama Medallion*.

Yingbei (from *20/20*): During the first pitch, we proposed three ideas where one of them was a musical. In that idea, we explored the notion of fate inching forwards, like there's something that controls their destiny, like their past failures. We experimented with this idea of a nonlinear performance where it's structured around a board game. In that idea, someone would throw a dice and whatever tile we land on, we will perform the prompt that is on the tile.

Another idea that we were very interested in was actually the physicality of Chang and Eng. We were wondering how one presents their connectedness when we are unable to be physically connected to each other, due to prevailing circumstances. Our conversation eventually grew into the idea of online vs offline connectedness.

INTERVIEW WITH ARTISTS ABOUT THEIR PROCESSES

3. Was there anything about *Chang & Eng: The Musical* that caught your attention?



Online rehearsal for *Place for No One*

Sheryl (from *Place for No One*): Personally, when I read the script, I felt a strong sense of brotherhood, a strong sense of unity between Chang and Eng. They are so connected with one another, even though they really hate one another sometimes, ultimately they still go through everything together. They still do it as one, not as two separate individuals, but as one unit. I think this scene is very powerful, encouraging and motivating. They're stuck with one another, but because of having to survive, their brotherhood, and their love for each other, they really see through everything, from the moment they are born to their death.



Rehearsal for *The Mama Medallion*

Nicole (from *The Mama Medallion*): My group had multiple things that caught our attention and we realised they were all social issues. One other idea that we were thinking about was the politics of performing disability. We wondered and questioned how actors performed Chang and Eng. So we were using the lens of performance studies, to examine all of these different ways that people perform disability, motherhood, etc. I think that sense of performance is what led us to do a meta-theatrical piece.

INTERVIEW WITH ARTISTS ABOUT THEIR PROCESSES

4. How has your group's process been so far?

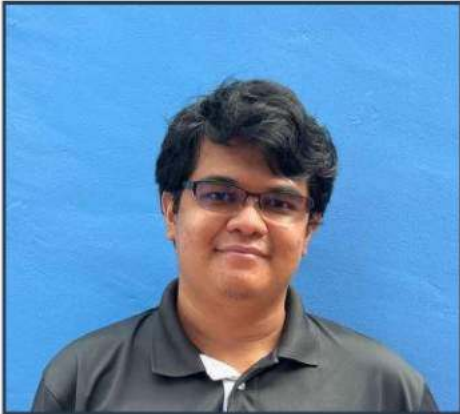
Nicole (from *The Mama Medallion*): I think it's been a productive and bonding experience. I would say it was smooth sailing to me, but we have all had our fair share of difficulty with it not just in terms of coming up with this response, but just in our own life in general. I think it was a sense that we all trusted the process and we could trust each other. We have even cried on Zoom about things not related to the work. We let each other know when one of us is not going through a good time and if that person doesn't know if they can be very present for the next one or two weeks. And that's when we say, you know, it's alright, we've got your back. So I think for us, it was more about our relationships with the process, trusting the process as well and trusting each other. And that's kind of given us a sense of confidence and smooth sailing feel to it.



Online meeting for 20/20

Yingbei (from 20/20): I think our group is very interesting, because every time we have a discussion, we will just be laughing and enjoying each other's company. We bounced ideas off each other very well, and everything was very interesting for me. It was also interesting when we started with floor work and devising our work. But we have this problem of creating and sticking to a plot or a story. Even until last week, we were still changing major parts of the story. I feel like every week we are changing one part of the scene, or if not the whole structure. Every time we changed it, Dr. Loon would point out some things that didn't sound right. So we are trying very hard to amend what is it that doesn't flow logically. It's not difficult, but it's very tiring.

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES



AVINASH VELLAVAN

Avinash began his journey in the performing arts with choral music when he was 13. As a NUS Psychology and Theatre Studies student exploring different forms of theatre and playwriting, he believes theatre is the best medium to explore and make sense of feelings and concerns, and that music is the best way to share emotions and feelings with others. He is looking forward to putting his skills to the test, be it as a singer, actor, or playwright!



SHARLENE LIM

Sharlene Lim is a theatre kid in progress. While she's currently finishing up her last few years as a Sociology & Theatre Studies student at NUS, Sharlene is bringing her artistic and playful side to the forefront after years of being a council kid. Her recent theatre credits include: *The Essential Playlist* (M1 Fringe Festival 2022) and *Dreams of Sushi* (NUS-USP Productions 2021). She's excited to explore how intersections between different art forms could highlight the lesser-explored sides of life.



SHERYL WONG

Sheryl's strong burning passion for Chinese language and culture since young was the motivation for her to pursue a double major in Chinese Language and Theatre Studies in NUS. Her bilingual proficiency in English and Chinese has helped her rediscover theatre as another unique art form to cultivate a stronger appreciation for the arts. With her strong enthusiasm in performing arts, Sheryl aspires to develop her performing arts expertise as a holistic experience and experiment with different aesthetic and artistic devices.

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES



NAZREEN COUPLAND

Through one's art, we find their heart. Nazreen believes that art drives connection and fuels empowerment. She is also credited in a wide array of works, including being the Film Director for the annual Arts Showcase at the College of Alice and Peter Tan (2021), as well as several roles in short films and television dramas. Art has the potential to inspire and effect change, and with her contributions, Nazreen hopes to do just that.



CELINE LIEW

Having graduated from Singapore Polytechnic's Applied Drama and Psychology, Celine is passionate about art-making with the community, for the community. She has thus found herself engaging in drama and theatre work with the young and the elderly, and intends to further expand into the theatre scene as a current NUS Theatre Studies undergraduate. On her days off, you can find her either in a gym bouldering, on the train reading, or in the park cycling to catch the sunset - in search of inspiration for her next piece of work.



CHERYL WONG

Cheryl is an aspiring arts educator who makes a living by rescuing snails from the side of the road. "No thoughts, head empty" is her constant state but she tries her best to develop her competency in drama-in-education. Forever in awe of theatre's ability to nurture empathy, imagination and an expressivity of the body, she hopes to do work that embodies these values. Other than that, she'd really, really like to sit down in a park one day all to herself, drinking tea and looking at grass...

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES



CHEE JIN MING

Jin Ming has a keen interest in studying, watching, and promoting Asian performances which led him to take Cantonese Opera lessons outside of school. Always seeking new challenges, he chose Theatre and Performance Studies as his major because performing, playwriting, devising a performance from scratch are things that he would never imagine he could do as an introvert. He has then discovered philosophies from acting theorists that will stay with him throughout his life.



KENNICE FOO

During her first year in NUS, Kennice was exposed to a theatre module which led her to major in Theatre Studies. Since then, she has been an avid theatre-goer, and has worked on *The Karims* (2021) as script supervisor during her internship with Checkpoint Theatre. Kennice has also been trained in ballet and subsequently, contemporary dance.



NICOLE TONG

Nicole loves to play, to love, and to tend gently to the aching body. For the bulk of her adolescence, she was trained by practitioners in the visual arts, before turning to theatre in later years for the zest of collaboration and the politics of performance. Exposed to mental health practices, and plumped by the care of creatives and faith for healing, Nicole investigates how the arts can be both the medium and impetus for communal and personal healing.

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES



GEORGIA SIM

Georgia is a NUS Psychology and Theatre Studies student who enjoys theatre in all its wondrous different forms. A trained dancer and an aspiring theatre performer, she is especially interested in physical theatre and how movement is a language on its own. Outside the theatre, you can find Georgia curled up with a book, exploring a cave in Minecraft or dyeing her hair in yet another colour. Through 20/20, she is learning to appreciate the art of theatre-making - a process she is thoroughly enjoying.



KOH MAAN LIN

Maan Lin is an undergraduate majoring in NUS Theatre Studies. She is an avid dancer who feels at home in practice studios, where she can spend hours rehearsing or just lying around. Other than that, she loves the method and complexity of behind-the-scenes work, and is grateful to experience it while taking Theatre Lab. Outside of theatre-making, they are just as happy to be sitting in an audience. When she is not drowning in assignments, she likes to watch Netflix and dream about adopting a cat.

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES



MELISSA YAP

Melissa is a year 3 undergraduate in NUS, majoring in both Communications and New Media and Theatre Studies. As an avid lover of the arts, she loves to explore new mediums of art and is interested in the interweaving of media and art. Being part of NUS Theatre Studies has given her many opportunities to work with her classmates in producing theatrical performances. Beyond theatre, she is also actively involved in film; she has been involved in works ranging from TVCs to shorts.



WANG YINGBEI

Yingbei is a year three Theatre Studies student at NUS. She has loved theatre since primary school, and strongly believes that theatre is more than just entertainment. To her, the power of theatre is way more than what you can imagine. This led her to join Batch Three of ARTivate under Dramabox, giving her a brand new insight into theatre. Theatre is something that she will never be bored of.

NUS THEATRE STUDIES THEATRE LAB (TS3103)

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.



ABOUT CENTRE 42

CENTRE 42

Centre 42 is a non-profit arts organisation with IPC status committed to the creation, documentation and promotion of text-based works for the Singapore stage. As a theatre development space and intermediary, we incubate original writings for the stage, support the development of artists and new works, and develop and maintain a functional archive documenting the histories and processes of Singapore theatre.

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

The Vault residency presented by Centre 42, safe-keeps Singaporean works dating back to our early theatre years. The platform does not merely document the past but manifests as contemporary responses to these works. The Centre invites artists and practitioners to respond critically and personally to canonical Singapore classics, lesser known pieces and rarities, reworks and adaptations, and cross-cultural and cross-genres works.



In **PayNow**,
scan the **QR code** or
make payment to
UEN 201403108H

**For more information, please visit our
website and follow us:**

centre42.sg



@centre42



[bit.ly/c42mail](mailto:info@centre42.sg)