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The Critic, Critiqued and Critiques

There seems to be an unspoken assumption somewhere that critics are beyond reproach. I think that is bullshit. Artists themselves are frequently crucified or deified according to the whims of critics. When a critic is challenged, it is assumed that the reaction is emotional and personal. While it sometimes is, surely the same goes for a critique of a work of art - that critiques are sometimes emotional and personal.

In theatre, one sees this more than anything else. Theatre, in its essence, is a confrontation. The confrontational nature of theatre is what differentiates it from television or film, however impressive the latter mediums may be. In a theatre, audiences are confronted with the raw energies of performers and playwrights. They are part of a process, whether willingly or unwillingly. Theatre, in that sense, evokes more reactions than anything else.

A critic confronted in the enclosed space feels his/her worlds being stripped away by the process he/she is forced to participate in. A critic is more vulnerable than your average audience member who paid for his/her ticket. A critic may in fact not want to be in that place but that it is his/her job. Even if he/she is well paid with *fat* year end bonuses, he/she is in a position that he/she did not actively seek out.

That being so, the critic could be said to be in a position where he/she is *forced* to face the doubts that theatre will bring as to the validity of the tenets of his/her world view. The result is often a strong, if not hostile, reaction.

This hostility may spring from an inability to deal with new paradigms, or it could come from a fear evoked by the performance. This could be a fear of his/her inadequacy, ignorance or of the knowledge forcefully (for theatre should not do otherwise) pushed into the critic's face.

Here, I am not making an argument for the 'banning' of critics from reviewing performances or for artists to review each

other's works which some individuals and groups advocate. I believe in the role of critics. But I also believe they should not be so naive or arrogant as to consider their critical pieces as the sacred last word. For this matter neither should artists. The late Nelson Algran testifies to the insidious and damning effects that critics may have on artists. Truly, when one listens to the stupid too long, one starts to believe in the profundity of the stupid. In that sense critics are a necessary part of the scene, but anyone including audiences, artists and funding organisations who take them too seriously are simply promoting the myth of the critic.

The recent Life! Theatre Awards in that sense has a danger of promoting the monolithic position of Life! as the theatre adjudicator of the 'good' and 'bad'. This is especially suspect when three of the judges are Life! journalists as well. One may wonder at their motives in this matter.

When critics deplore the sensitivity of artists to their critiques, they should be ready that their critiques be analyzed and critiqued in turn. This is part of the process. To avoid is either to admit outright one is a coward or that one does not have the fortitude to be a critic.

In this sense one should never forget that in the final analysis the creator is the artist. Critics and academics who cast judgments on artists are only those who make money out of their work. One may say that "those who can't create criticise" or "those do can't create teach". Artist/ideologues such as Brecht, Strindberg and Grotowski are few and far in between.

An interesting contradiction exists here. A book or theatre critic or academic makes a more than comfortable salary out of critising artistic products, whereas the creators of these works sometimes even find it hard to make ends meet.

In this topsy turvey world than, critics and academics can than be said to bite the hand that feeds them. It is truly important to see this, for the general health of all concerned. Truth is beauty and beauty is truth. Falsity creates delusions of grandeur for some and make others short change themselves.

Henirk Ibsen once said if he had listened to critics, he would have been lying drunk in the gutter. Thank god he had the sense!

Missing the POINT - BKs and BQs

I remember back in the secondary school we often had a term for the kids who always seemed to miss the point. We called them Blur Kings or Blur Queens. They would get everything besides the point and every remark except the punch lines. Often these BKs and BQs were academic over-achievers as well. Much mirth and back breaking laughter were derived from the exploits of these BKs and BQs.

One gets a certain feeling of deja vu nowadays when reading some of Life!'s theatre review columns. In particular Clarissa Oon's reviews tempt one to reminisce about happy times long gone.

Vacuity

On the surface level, Oon gives a fair and often balanced review. There is, however, often an air of smugness and a tendency to include clever remarks that mask a glaring vacu-

ity in her writing.

Her judgment of what is considered *good* drama is truly questionable. For example in 1998 she nominated Kuo Pao Kun's *Sunset Rise* as the best play of the year. In a review, she then praised the production unreservedly. Kuo's contribution to Singapore theatre cannot be denied. However, even an ardent defender of Kuo's work could see that *Sunset Rise* was his most sentimental, mawkish and badly written work.

This could be due to the fact that Kuo workshopped the play about old age with a group of relatively youthful performers who could hardly know the bitterness and loneliness of old age. This, of course, was entirely missed by Oon.

Ignorance

In reviewing theatre, one should realise that theatre wasn't created the day one decided to become the Theatre Critic of Singapore. There is a body of knowledge and practices that one should be familiar with. In other words, one should not make the "*if I've never seen it, its never existed before and*"

therefore since I can't fit it in my categories, then it must be bad" mistake.

Oon's standards of "good" theatre can be summed up as follows: it's entertaining, it's snappy and it says something. She displays a preference for one dimensional works, probably because they are neat. She shows an extremely low tolerance for messy and complicated works where one is unsure of what the message exactly is. Works like these are "indulgent". Up to today one can hardly be sure of what exactly is the message of Pirandello's plays or Beckett's "Godot". The complexity of art is a challenge to the maturity of a critic. I would venture to argue that Oon's lack of tolerance for complexity stems perhaps from a lack of clarity. In other words, perhaps she doesn't know what she wants.

Seldom in her reviews does one see her referring to great works of drama and dramatic theory. In interviews she shows an appalling ignorance of such matters. She is always on the watch for sound bites and seeks to pigeon hole a work at the first opportunity. Her reviews show a lack of understanding of staging, writing and dramatic necessities. Her only

gauge is her attention span. In this respect, she reeks of immature writing. I would recommend her and anyone who wishes to understand modern drama, to read Penguin's *The Theory of the Modern Stage* edited by Eric Bentley, a true critic, for a good grounding in drama.

Too much respect for Institutionalized Figures

When one is lacking in knowledge of one's subject, the safest answer is to look to institutionalized figures. The argument is that since so and so had been around so long, he/she surely cannot be wrong. This not only includes, in the example about Kuo's play i.e. giving a good review of a bad production, it also means giving space to these figures.

Oon frequently devotes large spaces to reviewing or critiquing the work of these figures. So called 'huge' negative pieces are actually giving credit where credit is not due. Just because the NAC spends a few millions on a production doesn't mean that it deserves that space. NAC is a bureaucracy and acts with its own brand of bureaucratic logic. If artists and critics allow their agendas to be dictated by a bureaucracy,

they can be said to be engaging in an act of self castration.

Oon dishes out her support according to theatre groups differentiated into 'big' and 'small' categories. In an article last year "Wither Small Theatre Groups" she postulated the question of whether 'small' groups should be supported. Why doesn't she ask whether 'big' groups should be supported? Apparently, she takes size, monetary power, audience reach as a determinant in whether she supports a group at all. The article had an air of condescension in the sense of saying "look at what we are doing for you, when you don't deserve support anyway". The assumption, when one even asks such a question, is that the scale of a performance determines its significance.

In the absence of an original aesthetic judgment, she substitutes size for quality. I think this is awful. We have to understand, we are not engaged in pornography, but art.

A Letter

15 Jan 2001

Attn: Ms Clarissa Oon
Life!

Dear Ms Oon,

I received your letter dated 8 January 2001, being a response to my letter dated 29 December 2000.

I read your letter with a certain degree of surprise. Clearly, you were unable to understand the issues presented, or perhaps I did not explain myself with adequate lucidity.

On what I feel are your inadequacies as a theatre reviewer, let me elaborate.

The Tower of Silence is an intricate psychological drama. It deals with themes of psychological denial, manipulation, paranoia and voyeurism. In the play, we see five characters

with varying degrees of mental illness. Through a meeting, these five people re-evaluate their relationship to one other, to God and to their ideals of marriage, love and justice in the world. You managed to reduce all these to a few lines that condemn the play to being a teen drama. You accuse us of being overly indulgent and having 'run out of ideas'. Manifestly, these themes were never dealt with in our former plays; nor to my knowledge, have not been covered by other local plays. On the contrary these points were not missed by the top arts Website in Singapore, myScissors.com which listed "Tower" as the play of the year.

Ms Onn, how did you manage to miss all these things? My only conclusion is, and I repeat what I said in my previous letter, that you "do not really know the subject of theatre nevertheless continue to write articles that explain nothing to the public while affecting a superior attitude unto the artists involved."

You display an intense ignorance about what drama and art is about. Plays that go beyond a certain duration, you con-

sider indulgent and in need of 'editing'. I am truly glad that you were not the reviewer of Dostoyevsky's novels or American playwright Eugene O'Neill's plays. No doubt, you would have advised Mr Fyodor and Mr O'Neill that their works were indulgent and long winded. Ms Onn, to elucidate a simple point, all great art *are* indulgent. The paintings of Picasso, the theatre of Artaud, the novels of Dostoyevsky. It is the willingness to commit and to go off totally at a certain tangent that makes art what it is. Your desire for neatness in drama, shows not the inadequacies of our work, but your own desire for neat and safe categories in life.

You must understand that art is unlike journalism, where a journalist has to constantly self-censor and come up with neat summaries of events due to market considerations. Art is messy, unwieldy and cannot be 'finished' just because a critic feels he/she needs to think less. No less than an open attitude is required of critics who attempt to critique art. For example you argued in your review of our production *Vermeiden//a(VOID)* that the 'best thing' about the play was that it lasted one hour fifteen minutes. Was the length really such an important consideration for you? Surely in evaluat-

ing art we need more important criteria than such banal considerations.

You argue that we seem to have run out of ideas for our works because we use an 'open form' and therefore it is limited. Whatever that means, in making this statement, you have totally ignored the ideas, internal conflicts and character development of *Tower*. Could it be that the issues such as the hypocrisy of religion, the dual and contradictory nature of love and the true value of friendship dealt with in the play was too much for you to handle and thus you avoided the topic totally? As an artist, I do not flinch from dealing with these themes, even if an audience member or critic wants to avoid them. Perhaps a sheltered (I hazard to guess) existence prevents you from wanting to deal with these issues in a direct and confrontational manner.

On this point, all great drama is confrontational. As a critic, you should either be willing to let yourself be challenged or you should not be one at all. True, plays and writers may be flawed, but also recognise that there may be things beyond your paradigm of considerations.

I should not be the one telling you this but it seems that you have entirely missed the point of drama. Drama that attempt to go beyond the banal should aim at much more than that neatness, and that 'one-and-a-half hour duration'. Drama delves at the truth and of relationships between people, and events. It forces the audience to reexamine their notions of life and death. If you have read your Tennessee Williams, your Samuel Beckett, your Pirandello, then I would have no need to explain this to you.

Williams goes over and over the same territory of sexual and human degradation. Beckett goes over and over the 'navel gazing' issues of the worthiness or worthlessness of human existence by baring the essential elements in human interaction. Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello goes over and over again the fragmented and multiplicity of the human consciousness. German film-maker Rainer Werner Fassbinder's works goes over and over the conflict between love and manipulation.

Williams essentially uses the same lyrical 'Southern' Ameri-

can English and melodramatic plots to portray his themes. His heroes and heroines share a common desperation. Beckett uses the minimal staging techniques and bare and sparse dialogue every time. Fassbinder captures time and again the games humans constantly play with one another.

No doubt, you would have told them that there are 'limits as to how far an artist can go' with the forms they use. Indeed, these artists have been critiqued for their indulgence. Notably, however, these works, not the names of their critics, have survived.

You state that our earlier works have impressed you with our 'integrity and vigour'. I am afraid to say, however, that your statement does not impress me at all. You use words like *integrity* and *vigour* without knowing what they mean. You use them on us in a condescending manner by implying yes they have integrity and vigour, but they have no craft at all. In the very same breath we are very often then condemned for our lack of craft. Please, Ms Oon, save us your condescension.

We have been creating a new theatre language on stage; we have been experimenting with different methods of conflict, various types of dialogue, subtext, different theatrical plots and counter-plots. All these have gone by you entirely.

This is not surprising considering your ignorance on the subject. In a former conversation with myself, you stated that you had an ear for dialogue. Sometime back, I chanced to read one of your early attempts at play writing in an NUS publication. I do not understand what you meant by having 'a ear for dialogue'. I would suggest you read American playwright David Mamet's plays to find out what that means. No doubt you would consider his work indulgent for its 'overemphasis' on dialogue.

You say that it is your role to serve the art and not the artist. I have not and will never expect you to serve me. I would not presume to require such personal service. I would, however, ask you to re-evaluate what you think is a working knowledge of drama. In your critique of *In The Eye of the Storm*, another Aporia production, you used a Susan Sontag quotation talking about Antonin Artaud on our production. In such

a case, it would surely be more appropriate to quote Artaud himself. But perhaps you have not read his *Theatre and it's Double*. Many have considered it an extreme and indulgent work.

You imply that my response to your column "Cut and Come Again" did not offer a convincing argument nor a coherent case. My entire point, however, was that your column did not offer any arguments in support of its condemnation of *Tower* as a teen drama. A reader who has not seen the play would have no inkling of the issues involved. As such, how could I offer any counter arguments when no arguments have been presented in the first place?

Lest it be thought that I am being self indulgent in my arguments in this letter, I have attached two e-mails of audience feedback that I have received during "Tower's" run.

I would take pains to state that these criticisms are not personal. Rather, they pertain to the state of the professionalism or unprofessionalism of your criticism. In offering arguments which critiques your critique, I, as an artist, am creating the

space for discussion. As much as an artist putting his/her work up for public consumption should expect reactions, I would argue that a critic's public critique is, in the same way, opened for criticism.

Of course, an artist does not have the advantage of being published in the most read English newspaper in Singapore and being paid for doing it.

However, we do what we can.

Wong Kwang Han
Aporia Society

Myth Making In the Straits Times - Who is doing the "Mythologising"?

A common criticism of the 'common' people (as opposed to 'uncommon') is that they have a perennial need to pry into the details of celebrities and artists, in so doing they satisfy an emotional fulfillment through 'living' the lives of their heroes.

An interesting and no doubt truthful fact in this age of media scrutiny of the slightest movement of the film/TV and sports celebrities. On the other side of the coin however the lives of artists can shed light on the nature of the work and the creative process, as long it's not what Faye Wong had for breakfast or what kind of toilet paper Dylan used.

The life of American writer Eugene O'Neill for example is tied inextricably to his work. The mark of Oedipal conflict, evident throughout O'Neill's greatest works is undeniably drawn from his strained family relationships. Norwegian dramatist

Henrik Ibsen's obsession with accountability is undoubtedly drawn from an unwanted pregnancy he fostered on a housemaid in his youth. German theatre man Bertolt Brecht's apparently voluminous work makes sense when one finds out that he had his mistresses write his plays for him! Beckett's humanity echoes not only from his work but his life as well.

The creative urge, if anything, is simply a reflection of the emotional, material and intellectual impacts amassed and digested by an artist. An artist is in the end a person, and the impressions he gives can only be as deep as what he has experienced. Experience is of course, not quantifiable. A tiny incident may be insignificant for one yet momentous for another.

Mythologising occurs at many levels, both the banal and the profound. On one hand one can study the life of John Coltrane and ponder how some of the greatest Jazz music was produced, on the other one can read Leong Ching's column on the banalities of married and family life, or Ong Sor Fern's profoundization of her television watching and literary habits or wait with bated breath for the next installment of Sumiko

Tan's endless search for the perfect mate.

Interestingly the media itself is more often than not a victim of the mythologisation process (though on a relatively trivial manner). Instead of 'looks what's happening' it becomes look at *me* saying what's happening. Instead of look at this local band it becomes, look at *me*, "I've discovered this group". Or look at *our* Theatre Awards.

The choice surely is ours. It really depends on what we are looking for. It can be life changing, it can be boring, it can be insipid. We must however look in the right place. As a Persian saying goes "Do not mistake the donkey for the horse" and one might add, if you do, don't complain.

Here ends installment (I).

Audience, Art and Attitude

a few minutes with Kelvin Tan

This is a transcript of an live interview between singer/song writer, playwright and novelist Kelvin Tan and Michelle Chang of Passion 99.5 on 17 Jan 2001. A member of The Oddfellows, Tan has released three solo albums to date being *The Bluest Silence* and *Alone Descending Sisyphus*. He has written five plays including *Tramps Like Us*, *Life is an Angel*, *Goodbye Jennifer* (unperformed), *Flights Through Darkness* (unperformed) and *Vermeiden/A(void)*. He has published one novel *All Broken Up and Dancing* and is working on his second *The Nether (R)*. We would like to thank Passion for their continued support of local acts.

M denotes Michelle - , interviewer of Passion 95 and KT denotes Kelvin Tan

Michelle: Kelvin, you've always enjoyed performing live but you don't think you have an audience in Singapore.

Kelvin: Actually, it's a strange thing- an audience, because you really don't know where they're coming from. If you're a

boy band you have an audience, you know that kind of stuff, a certain genre. But I think for me I don't really play a certain genre and even if there is a genre, it is one that is not accessible to a bigger audience. So I like to take it for granted that I don't have an audience. Then it's much easier for me to do my thing. You know what I'm saying, rather than to cater what I do according to what an audience wants.

(M): So what is it? It doesn't matter that you don't have an audience. You've sort of come to terms with the fact, that your music is not widely accepted but every musician, every songwriter needs an audience in a way. Do you believe that?

(KT): I think that's a \$5 question, I suppose. I take a lot of inspiration from people like Nick Drake & Tim Buckley. A bunch of people, who never had an audience. Well, they had an audience but they were commercial failures so called especially Nick Drake. I always realize that Art is something, which to me is not about those things. I've learned to, kind of like, shut those things out and just create from what I believe in. I think that is the most important

thing for me and to keep on doing it. I think that's most important and have the right intentions, the purity of motives to go on. If not, I think one cannot really survive creating.

(M): I think it's wonderful what you just mentioned because I feel that a lot of artists today or let's talk about musicians in Singapore, they are very impatient. Once they think they can make music, they expect a huge crowd or they expect an audience. They expect to be as big as the other boy bands from UK or US. If there isn't, they start to pinpoint "We're not getting any governmental support. Hey! Local radio stations are not playing our music."

(KT): I think it's very interesting you mentioned this too because I think its very symptomatic of Singapore society. That we live in a society that just wants things fast and wants it now. I don't know if it's a result of policies or what but I think that's very sad, because I think there's such a thing as paying one's dues. And I've met some great jazz musicians who say that they're still paying their dues, which is humbling. So, I think that as long as people do not

take that into consideration and they always want things fast, I think not only will that hamper a so-called pure consciousness in society regarding Art but I think that also hamper a person's Art. (M- That's right) You'll find as the years go by, people fade off. I think that it's very important to be sincere in what you do. If you're not sincere, its no point in doing it.

(M): That's right, because then your motivation is not right in that sense. Your motivation is about money, it comes from greed, you want to be famous, you want to be a boy band, whatever. It should, like what you said, come from inside. You must love making music. It doesn't matter that you're not making any money for the next five years.

(KT): I think that is one of the reasons why I kind of created a code of existence for myself, because I feel that sometimes it's very important to be shrewd and distrustful of what you hear and what you see and the people you meet. Not because you are a distrustful person, I'm very realistic about that. I think it's also because everyone's always trying to sell you something. They have a certain thing to sell to you. To me, if you believe in creating Art, it's

not about selling something to someone. It's really about doing it because you believe in it. And I guess some people look at me and say I'm a naïve idealist, but the thing is, if I'm naïve, then why am I still doing it? I could have just stopped years ago and I wouldn't be having this conversation with you. I'm still doing it while a lot of people have sort of given up. So in the end, to me, it's really the work. The work is what justifies everything. It's not how you dress or how you look, not whether your hair's dyed or something. I think people need to realize those things.

(M): With that in mind, do you think that the local music scene is heading in the right direction or the wrong direction or do you think it's heading towards a positive direction? I'm talking about now.

(KT): I think it's strange, for example, somebody who is told to bring some tourist to Singapore and asks for the university and this guy brings him to this and this building and the tourist asks where is the university? So to me, that's what's going on here. There's a lot going on here and yet where's the Arts? This is very controversial, I'll say one thing, I've

always presumed the scene never existed, that I created the scene for myself and I think that's true. This whole notion of community and scene to me has to be questioned again. To me, you can't create a scene. A scene evolves through time. I've come to a point in my life where I realize that I've accepted the fact that, even if there's no scene, there's still me. So I deal with the / in my works and all that. That's where I create a certain consciousness for myself. And that's as far as the scene goes for me. Media and all that kind of thing, they are really apart from what I do. So my answer to your question is that I really see it not going many places, not because of the same reasons that these people said, no funding, this and that, but because the intentions are not right, people are not pure about what they do. It's a donkey and carrot thing, I give you some money, you move. On the other hand, I find that there are a lot of groups like us, Aporia. We've been doing a lot of work but we've not been very well-funded.

(M): Why do you think you're not well-funded?

(KT): There's not enough research done on the ground and I think basically, with due respect to groups of people who

are run by bureaucracy, I think bureaucracies are sometimes blind to the idea that you can't be a bureaucrat to see what's real. Sometimes down on the ground, you've got to go out there to see for yourself and there are a lot of groups out there who are very sincere about what they do. But somehow, they don't get funding because they are not out there to make a sale. They are not out selling themselves, they are out there doing their work. So I'm hoping that in the future, government bodies will go deeper down to see what's going on. You'll see that there are a lot of people who are sincere about what they do and what they don't need is sympathy, like I don't need sympathy. In fact, I think it's condescending when someone sympathizes. What you need is a person to really go down and understand those things and to give the proper support, that's all.

(M): What you just said brings to mind an article I read in this month's issue of Juice magazine. One of the persons interviewed said that there is no airplay for local music here in Singapore. Local radio stations are not supporting local music. This is a very strange answer to me because I

interviewed this person many times and this person knows for a fact that Passion 99.5 exists. Why do you think that musicians after being interviewed by me, still perpetuate this myth that local radio stations refuse to support local music.

(KT): I'll put it very bluntly, but before I say it, let me say this that, Michelle, I've always been appreciative of what you have done for my music by playing my stuff and I've always been appreciative of Passion 99.5. I've always been appreciative of Perfect 10, Glenn Ong, Jeremy and company they've been very good to me, playing my songs, so I can be very honest about that. And let them answer this, I find that sometimes people are just more hip than they are intelligent. They like to say hip things, cynicism is in now, it's hip to be cynical. You watch *Trainspotting* and it's so hip to be cynical. A lot of them just fire off without really thinking and to me, I won't take these things seriously.

I think people don't realize that for example a lot of countries, let's talk about politics here, post-colonialism. The whole idea that Singapore became a country, independent by itself, too many years of striving and fighting as you

know the whole history of Singapore, very beautiful. Fighting to create our own sense. I think to me that's what we're doing here. It's a young nation and I think the last thing we want to do is really misunderstand the situation. These things take time but they don't realize that with time, come also the sincerity and intentions, to see the bigger picture what Singapore society is and ask yourself the question. Look, it's not time, even if it is time, one shouldn't be arrogant about such things. One should just keep on doing one's thing because one is sincere. If one makes it, fine, but if one doesn't, one doesn't. A lot of great rock stars and classical musicians that I read about took years and they've never even talked about fame. I saw a very beautiful and moving documentary of a great Russian pianist, Richter, who I really admire. Here's one guy who won the adulation of millions of people and yet, he never had interest in fame, he wouldn't mind living under his piano if he had to because all he had was the passion for the music. So I think what these people need to do, is a lot more homework. Have a wider knowledge of music and a wider knowledge of their own sense of themselves and learn a lot more egolessness I suppose.

(M): Speaking of the Juice magazine, your name was mentioned alongside Humpback Oak, Jason Tan and Kace Woo, this guy said that you are one of those people who are doing important stuff, musically-speaking, here in Singapore. I'm sure you would want to believe and to think of your work as very important. How would you define important stuff?

(KT): That's a very good question because to me, there's too much self-importance in Singapore. I'm a big advocator of criticism for that. I don't think Art should really be too self important. Recently this guy just interviewed me, he told me "Don't you think art is elitist?" and my reaction is, all Art is elitist. I mean, one of the reasons why we can't memorize Shakespeare is because it is elitist Art. I mean Art is in a way a luxury, so I have no illusions about that. To me, I don't look at my work as being very important so I don't know whether I agree with this guy. I look at my work as something is important to me. It is vital for my living, my survival and I do it because I believe in it. And I'm quite moved by the small group of people to whom my music has made a difference and that's good enough for me. I just saw the "Making A Difference" documentary yesterday where they were helping all these disabled children and I

could see the joy in these people when they help them out. I was very inspired by that, I told myself, these people are doing more important work than me, they are actually helping people out there. I'm just playing music. In spite of the fact I'm doing something so much less important, so to speak, I still manage to make a difference to some people and that gives me joy. I think a lot of people need to look at it this way. That the more sincere you are about things, the more it gives you that certain joy and meaning. Unfortunately, I don't think that's so in Singapore. I think people are linking materialistic and egotistical gains with the whole notion of creating Art, and that elevates it to a very unnecessary high art image which, frankly speaking, is not even Art to me because there's no foundation of any branch of knowledge there.

(M): Speaking of music, how long have you been in this area, making music? A long time?

(KT): Not really, I started writing songs very late. I joined the Oddfellows when I was 27 but I started writing songs only when I was in my early thirties. That's why I have a lot of respect for someone like Lesley (Humpback Oak)

who wrote songs at such a young age. I started song writing very late but I've been writing and I've been doing all kinds of different art forms since my late teens.

(M): Besides writing songs, you are also working on a new novel.

(KT): That's right. I'm quite excited about that because it's a total change from *All Broken Up & Dancing* in 1992. Just doing the proof reading right now. The other thing that I think is very important is I think they kind of bitch too much. They should really just do their own thing, they should release their own stuff and this and that. Going independent is a good thing, because I think with that, at least you get your work out there. I think people should just stop talking about all this and just do your work and just let your work be the justification for yourself.

(M): Let your work speak for itself.

(KT): I think that's the way it should be because I think there are people who hate my work too and there are people who like my work, frankly speaking, I'm pretty indiffer-

ent to that now because in the end, to me, you have to have your intentions straight. Without that, you get affected by people, get self-conscious because then the intentions are not there. It's just your ego talking. I've learned that.

(M): It's been really great talking to you, Kelvin.

Aporia Society
PRESENTS

An Original Play

KUNDABUFFER

Venue: Guinness Theatre, The Substation

Date: 3rd to 6th May 2001, 8 pm

Tickets at \$12, available at
Substation Box Office. Tel: 3377800

