



the peranakan

april – june 2002

quarterly newsletter of the peranakan association www.peranakan.org.sg



THE
PERANAKAN
ASSOCIATION
SINGAPORE

flowering season!

the association's cultural
development group leads the
way with a flowering of colourful
events and activities reaching
out to the public.

INSIDE

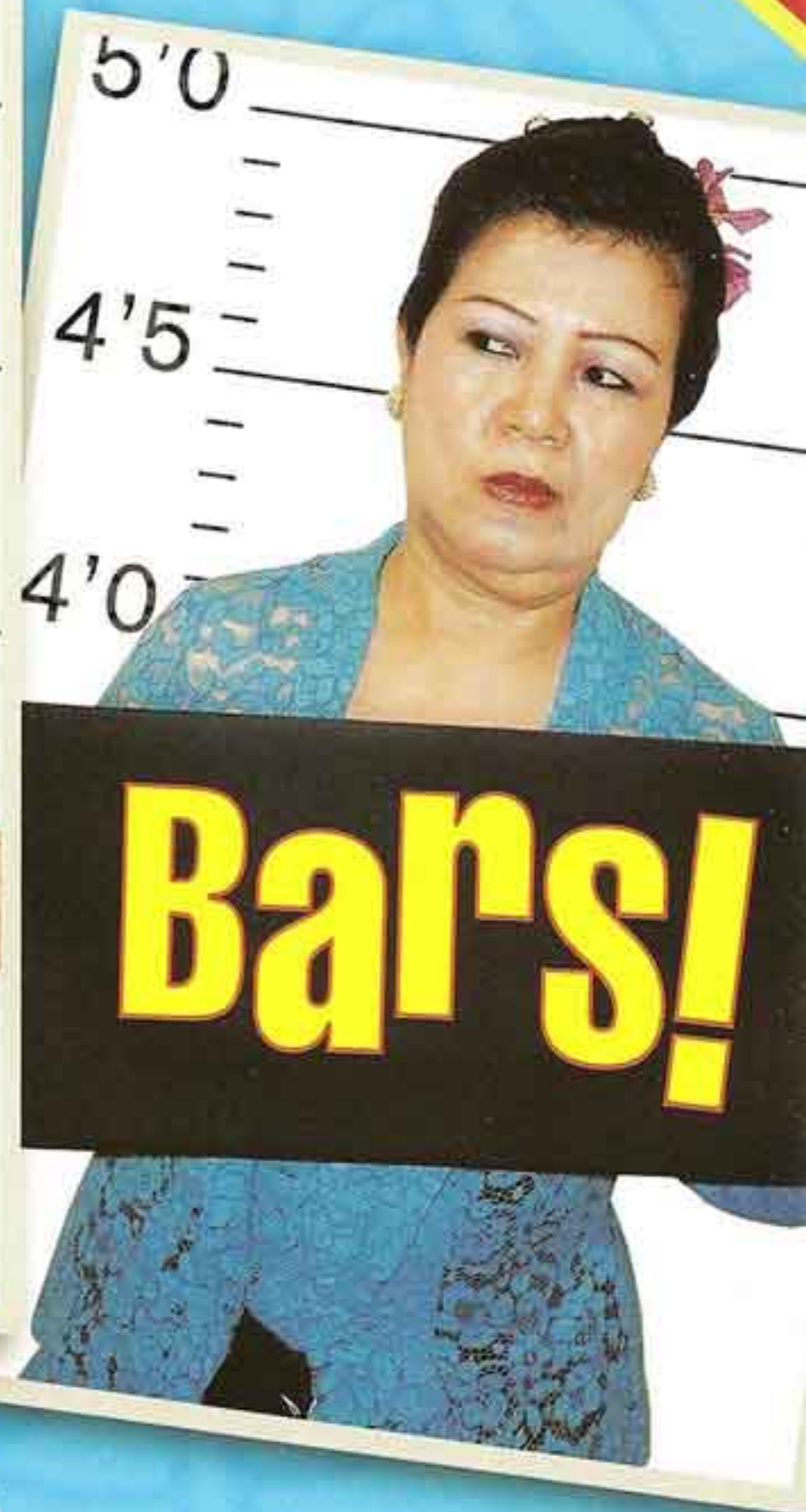
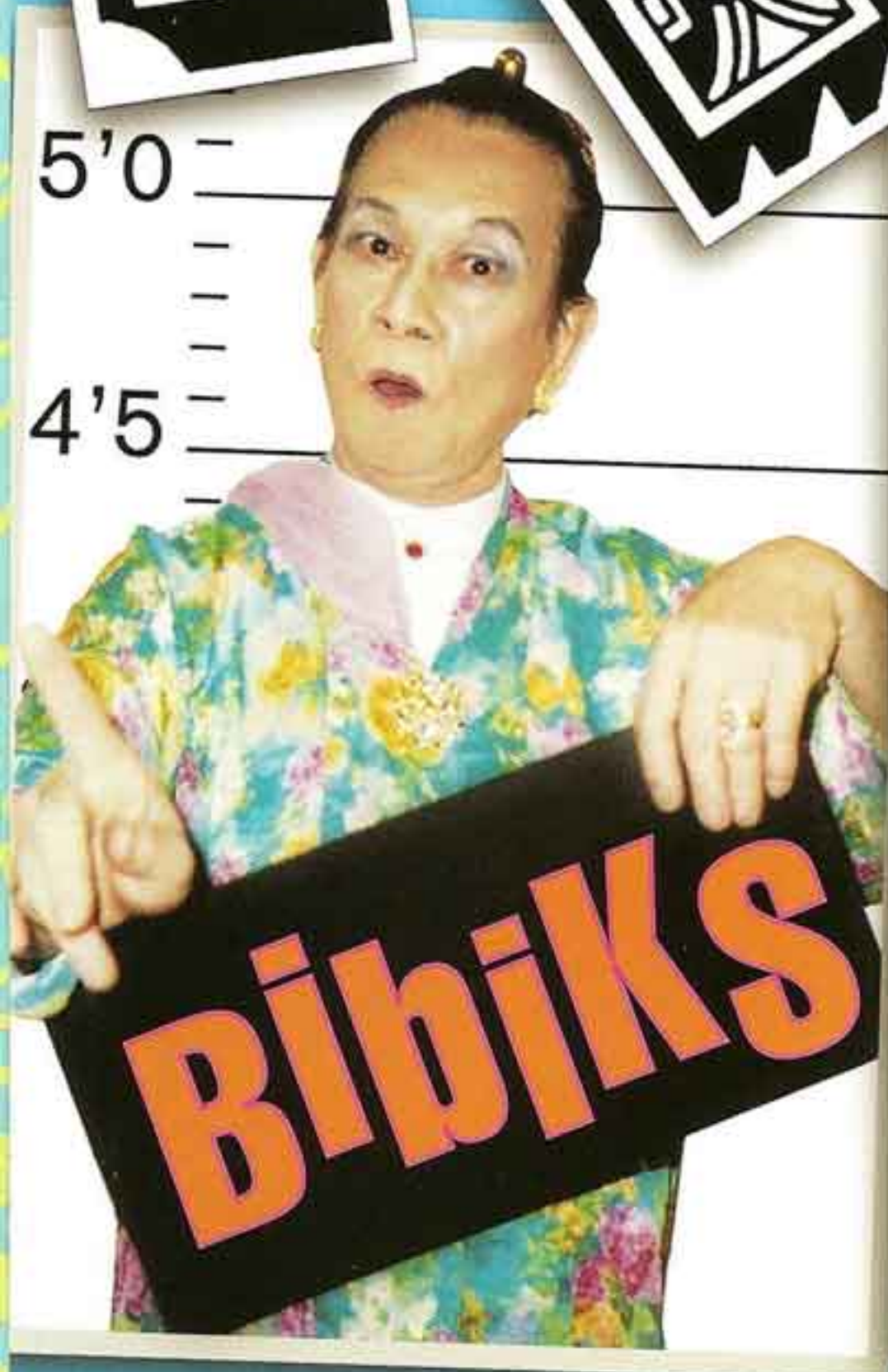
AGM elects a new committee

Borneo Diamonds!



THE
PERANAKAN
ASSOCIATION
SINGAPORE
presents

**SENTENCE
EXTENDED!**



**A hilarious comedy
about how an
innocent game of
cherki gets a party
of Bibiks and
Nyonyas in to a
string of madcap
situations! Aiyee,
kus semangat!**

Kallang Theatre
12 & 13 September 2002
8 PM

GET YOUR TICKETS NOW AT ALL SISTIC OUTLETS!!

\$20, \$30, \$40

(excludes SISTIC's \$1 surcharge)

10% discount to Peranakan Association members.

case
file

**IF YOU MISSED IT THE FIRST TIME,
SENTENCE has been EXTENDED!**

After the successful SOLD-OUT performances
@ The Marine Parade CC the skit has been revised
and expanded into a full-length Peranakan play!

More songs! New music!

Who would imagine that a group of harmless
looking bibiks would be hauled into a Black Maria
(police van) and arrested for illegal gambling in
their home-sweet-home!?

So who complained, ah?

Will these sweet lovely ladies be able to wriggle,
cajole, sweet-talk and scold their way
out of a sticky situation?

So come! Join us! And let the
Peranakan Association Cultural
Development Group's perANAKAN WAYANG,
The Peranakan Voices & Dancers entertain
you with some new and some familiar
Peranakan favourites!



ANNUAL
GENERAL
MEETINGOur leaders for
2002/2004 take office

Their unanimous re-election reflects members' endorsement of their capability in leading the Association

ANTHONY QEI AND PETER LEE

THE PERANAKAN ASSOCIATIONS

102ND Annual General Meeting on 23 March elected the General Committee for 2002/2004. The top leadership with the exception of Alan Koh as the new Hon. Treasurer, remains the same, with Lee Kip Lee as President, Peter Wee as 1ST Vice President, Thomas Tan as 2ND Vice President, and Lim Geok Huay, as Honorary Secretary.

Lee Kip Lee, who is related to Lee Keng Liat and Tan Cheng Lock of the Malacca association, starts his fourth term as President. He has seen the membership grow from 647 in 1996 to the current figure of 1,632, and under his presidency, the Association has witnessed the vast changes that try to make our heritage relevant in the new millennium. Peter Wee, great grandson of Tan Keong Saik and grandson of Tan Cheng Kee, continues to hold his post as 1ST Vice President. Mr Wee who has been responsible for keeping the heritage alive over the last twenty to thirty years with his talks, demonstrations and museum-quality displays at his heritage home, Katong Antique House, has also been in charge of many aspects of the Association's activities, especially the fairs, conventions and events connected with the National Heritage Board.

Second Vice President Thomas Tan, a building products company director who is a descendant of Tay Kim Yong of Klebang Besar, Malacca, has been an invaluable contributor in fine tuning many

of the Association's policies over the years, and has been responsible for refining the Association's constitution. Honorary Secretary Lim Geok Huay, who runs her own golf business, is regarded by many to be the backbone of the Association, being the longest serving member of the committee since the time of former president, the late T W Ong, and has facilitated the smooth transition of policies as well as the efficient administration of the Association since 1990.

Their re-election, which was unanimous, reflects members' endorsement of their capability in leading the Association. Certainly, it ensures continuity of policies and programmes.

The AGM also saw one of the largest turnouts for many years, which was most heartening. More than fifty members attended, double the number seen last year.

President Lee promised that he and his Committee would do their utmost to bring more good things to members in the coming years.

OUR REPORT CARD

Indeed, the past year had been full of activities highlighted by President Lee in his Annual Report for the year ended 31 December 2001.

The 101ST Annual Dinner and Dance and the 14TH Baba Convention in Malacca aside, the most significant new cultural achievement was the rib-tickling play,

Dah Sa Chupak Tak Boley Sa Gantang. This was our first foray into the performing arts. It was hugely successful and helped us raise money for the Asian Women's Welfare Association.

The Cultural Development Group launched the first in a series of Peranakan roadshows with a multimedia presentation at St Andrew's Junior College. Our models paraded in their *baju panjang* and *kebaya*, while the Peranakan Voices entertained the audience through popular Peranakan and nostalgic songs.

Peranakan Voices also sang at a Save the Children event at the Grand Hyatt, and for the elite Club 200 at At Sunrise Restaurant, organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Singapore Tourism Board respectively. Members presented a Peranakan fashion show. The Cultural Development Group also helped at the reception and backstage during the performance of Emily of Emerald Hill at Jubilee Theatre.

In addition, we worked closely with, and supported, organisations promoting our heritage. They included a theatre company, a TV production company and the Asian Civilisations Museum (where our committee members gave talks on various Peranakan topics).

Further building up our ties, about eighty members and friends of the Museum and the Peranakan Association went on a heritage tour of Malacca. We took this opportunity to renew friendships with our Malacca counterparts.

June 20 must rank as a special day for The Peranakan Association when members of the General Committee and Sub-Committees had dinner at the Istana with President S R Nathan and Mrs Nathan. It was a great privilege for us.

The Youth Group continued to encourage members to sign up for the free yahoogroups network. Over one hundred subscribers have benefited from this convenient way of sharing updated information about coming events, new Peranakan restaurants and products, and even to discuss our Peranakan identity in relation to Singapore society.

Among their other activities, the Youth Group organised learning sessions on Peranakan food, folk art and the history of Nyonya dress. They also supported the staging, production and presentation of Ivan Heng's *Emily of Emerald Hill*, at the Annual Dinner and Dance, and for an upcoming TV series on Peranakan culture. Many of the Group's members participated in the Malacca Baba Convention and joined the Association's three-day cruise aboard the *Superstar Virgo*.

Efforts continued to be taken to improve the format and editorial content of *The Peranakan*, to make the quarterly newsletter a more effective medium of communication.

Likewise, our website was refined during the year, enabling it to increase its archive of images and news updates, as well as the posting of the newsletter in its entirety. It continues to play an important role in taking Peranakan heritage into the new world of technology.

THE NEW TEAM

Re-elected members of the committee comprise Isaac Chan, Alan Koh, Peter Lee, Bebe Seet and Richard Tan. Malacca-born Isaac Chan, an architectural animator whose father, Robert Chan Yew Tiong was the Vice President of the Persatuan Peranakan

Cina Melaka for a long time, will continue to represent the Youth Group as he has been actively doing for the last few years. Alan Koh, an entertainment company director who has served as chairperson of the Social subcommittee and the Centennial Celebration subcommittee in the past, will besides being the Hon. Treasurer, also be looking after a new department—Special Events. Peter Lee, the Assistant Honorary Secretary, co-author of *Rumah Baba—Life in a Peranakan House* and son of Lee Kip Lee, also continues his previous responsibilities as the chair-person for the Research & Information subcommittee, looking after the website and newsletter. Bebe Seet, the renowned beadwork specialist who runs her own Peranakan craft and fashion business, has headed the Social subcommittee for the last two years, and will continue to

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maintain her position. The Cultural Development group will also continue to be chaired by its incumbent, choreographer and event management consultant Richard Tan, who has overseen many of the recent cultural events and programmes including the Peranakan Voices, last year's *Dah Sa Chupak Tak Poley Sa Gantang*, and the recent *Bibiks Behind Bars*.

The President warmly welcomed three new committee members—Khoo Poh Neo, Gavin Ooi, and Rita Bertrand-Tan. Mrs Khoo, the author of the lavish book on Peranakan furniture, *Brown and Gold*, is a Nyonya descended from the

Baba tycoon Ong Ewe Hai (1830-89). Lawyer Gavin Ooi, whose grandaunts include the famous Nyonya cookbook writers Mrs Leong Yee Soo and Mrs Lee Chin Koon, has recently been actively involved in the organising subcommittees of social events, most notably the recent Dinner & Dance, where he was the master of ceremonies. Rita Bertrand-Tan has for a number of years been very closely involved with a number of Association projects including the recent food fairs, and she has also been the advertising representative of *The Peranakan* for a number of years.

The Association also thanks former honorary treasurer Ann Chiang and committee members Maureen Lim and Irene Oei for their invaluable contributions throughout their terms of office. Ann Chiang, director of International Relations at the Singapore Polytechnic,

has been a very meticulous Treasurer over the last few years and was also the chairperson of the hugely successful 12th Baba Convention 1999 in Singapore. Former teacher Maureen Lim – sister of Alan Koh, and a descendant of both Bedok landowner Koh Seck Lim and the auctioneer Cheong Koon Seng – headed the membership subcommittee and was responsible for revamping the application forms, membership cards as

well as the recent survey forms mailed to all members with the previous issue of *The Peranakan*. Homemaker and Peranakan cuisine expert Irene Ooi, the mother of Gavin Ooi, was actively involved in various subcommittees, including several food fairs and dinner and dances, and was most recently seen on stage as Mrs Lim Chuan Chuan in our production of *Bibiks Behind Bars*.

We wish the new committee success in all their endeavours to make the Association one that can contribute to our national heritage and to our social ideals. ✦



Borneo Berlian

PETER LEE



Diamonds from Kalimantan, long-favoured by the Peranakans, make an international come-back.



IF YOU EVER HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO INSPECT AN HEIRLOOM piece of Peranakan jewellery with a large-enough diamond, you may notice quite often that the gem may be of slightly yellow hue, and of good clarity. Collectors have said that it is the preferred hue of the Nyonyas; white, or the almost blueish white of the best diamonds being too closely associated with the colour of mourning. Many large *kerabus* (ear studs) and *kerasangs* feature such stones. Collector and jewellery expert Edmond Chin features a whole page of them in his book *Gilding the Phoenix*.¹ If you visit the *Peranakan Legacy* exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum, you can also see that the larger stones of the jewels on display have the same characteristics.

Most of the stones found in Peranakan jewellery are thought to come from the only mines in this region: Banjarmasin, southern Kalimantan, which have deposits said to be even more ancient than that of India. Christie's has described the particular hue of yellow as *warna ayer chempaka*, or the aqueous hue of the *chempaka* flower.² However the reference to the *chempaka* is in fact more mundane: the primary diamond mines in Banjarmasin are located in the Chempaka district, 8 km from the town of Martapura, which itself is 36 kilometres from Banjarmasin.

Various categories of diamonds are found in this region: petrous diamonds (yellow and of low quality), black diamonds, white diamonds and pink diamonds. There are a few famous stones from these mines. The 77-carat rough diamond, Banjarmasin, which had belonged to

the Sultan of Banjarmasin, was appropriated by the Dutch in 1859 when the sultanate ceased to exist, and moved to the Netherlands in 1862 where it was recut and polished to 40 carats. It has lain forgotten in a government vault for a long time and can now be seen, together with a number of important Indonesian jewels from the

National Museum in Jakarta (including diamond-encrusted krises, the crown of the Sultan of Siak, betel boxes), in the fabulous exhibition, *Diamants*, at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris from 10 March to 15 July 2002 (<http://www.mnhn.fr/expo/diamants/index/english/ukindex.htm>).

Several other large stones were found in Banjarmasin, including the 160-carat Trisakti diamond unearthed in 1965, and a 77-carat boulder found in 1999.

Most of the Banjarmasin stones were sent to Antwerp for cutting (rose cuts being the most



popular up to the turn of the 19th century) and returned to the Dutch East Indies where they found a ready market. In 1898 at the investiture of Queen Wilhelmina, when she assumed the full task of government at age 18, the Sultan of Kutai (in Kalimantan) presented her with a valuable gold and diamond tiara made by Van Arcken & Company in Batavia, which included a number of sizeable Banjarmasin diamonds. This is still worn by Queen Beatrix today.³

Oei Hui Lan, the daughter of sugar baron Oei Tiong Ham, claimed in her memoir *No Feast Lasts Forever* (1975) to have been given at the age of 3, a necklace with a pendant featuring an 80-carat stone! ⁴ In April 1996, an amazing jewellery collection, which formed part of the dowry of a member of the Oei family, appeared for sale at Christie's in Hong Kong. It included a number of very large stones that undoubtedly came from the Banjarmasin mines.²

Just last May, a fabulous collection of rare Indonesian diamonds appeared for sale at



Notes

1. Edmond Chin, *Gilding the Phoenix*, National Museum, Singapore, p. 97
2. Christie's, *Important Jewellery and Watches*, Hong Kong, 29 April 1996, pp. 112-113
3. Rita Wassing-Visser, *Royal Gifts from Indonesia – Historical Bonds with the House of Orange-Nassau (1600-1938)*, Waanders Publishers, Zwolle, 1995, p. 110
4. Madame Wellington Koo, *No Feast Lasts Forever*, Quadrangle, New York, 1975
5. Christie's, *Magnificent Jewellery and Jadeite Jewellery*, Hong Kong, 30 April 2002, pp. 130-147



1. Diamond necklace (largest centre stone 15.46 carats), Lot 1412.
2. Fancy yellow diamond pendant (45.81 carats), Lot 1418.
3. Pair of diamond ear pendants (total weight 25.74 carats), Lot 1409.
4. Diamond bracelet, Lot 1413. Diamond ring (11.73 carats), Lot 1414.
5. (top to bottom) Diamond ring (20.78 carats), Lot 1416. Diamond ring (20.16 carats), Lot 1417. Diamond ring (26.38 carats), Lot 1415.
6. Diamond necklace (largest centre stone 19.74 carats), Lot 1405.
7. Pair of diamond earstuds (total weight 13.94), Lot 1411.
8. Diamond ring (14.29 carats), Lot 1410.

Christie's Hong Kong, and fetched astronomical prices.⁵ Comprising sixteen lots, the jewels form perhaps the largest group of Banjarmasin diamonds ever to appear in the international auction market. Lot 1404 was an amazing necklace comprising a series of nine enormous stones connected by a fine link chain. The smallest stone was a whopping 5.35 carats, graduating to an enormous 19.74 stone at the centre. Estimated at HK\$2 million-2.8 million, it went for HK\$3.374 million, and is rumoured to have belonged to an old Indonesian lady. The collection also featured six enormous solitaires ranging in size from 14.29 to 26.38 carats, two pendants with stones above 20 carats, one 45.81 carat fancy yellow diamond pendant, and another enormous necklace and matching bracelets, altogether with eighteen stones

ranging in size from 2.78 to 15.46 carats, the majority being on the larger side. The highest price reached was HK\$3,924,100 for a 22.78 carat H colour pendant (estimated at HK\$1,600,000 – 2,200,00). One interesting piece was a 28 carat fancy yellow diamond that, according to one dealer, may have originally belonged to one of the Javanese sultans.

It seems quite evident that many of the larger stones from Banjarmasin made their way to Java and the wealthy communities there, up to recent times. Some of the settings of the jewels in this collection are clearly modern, perhaps from the 1950s or later. However their fate remains uncertain. Most gem dealers find another intrinsic value in them—most will be recut to enhance the intensity of the yellow hues, thus turning them into far more precious fancy yellow stones. +



The PROOF is in the PERAK



The new Sterling Proof Coin set pays tribute to the peranakan culture



Special effect : Latent imaging on the \$5 coin

THE STERLING SILVER COIN SET WAS ISSUED PAYS

tribute to the Peranakan culture. Proof coins have a mirror-like finish, and are thus considered collector's items. The Mint has been marketing this series of proof coins sets for a rather long time, and their latest is significant for two main reasons. It will be the last set to feature the silver one-cent coin, in conjunction with the discontinuation

of the last circulation coin since 1 April. Expect your change to be rounded up to the nearest 5 or 10 cent coin! The other reason, more pertinent to us, is that it is a tribute to the Peranakan community. The coin set comes with a cupro-nickel (whatever it is, it is nice and shiny!) ingot with a certificate of authenticity minted on one side, and a Peranakan-themed image on the other, which is a collage of a view of the peranakan residential area, Emerald Hill Road in the



1950s, some decorative tiles typically found on the walls of Peranakan homes, and a genteel Nyonya standing next to her rather smart-looking car. The set is priced at \$128.

(Limited Edition: 10,000 set worldwide)

The Singapore Mint is also issuing a special cashcard set with a Peranakan theme (\$36 for two cards). A combined purchase of coin and card set costs only \$168.



This is to certify that the
2002 Sterling Silver Proof Coin Set
Is issued by the
Board of Commissioners of Currency, Singapore.

LAU KIM BOO
Chief Executive Officer

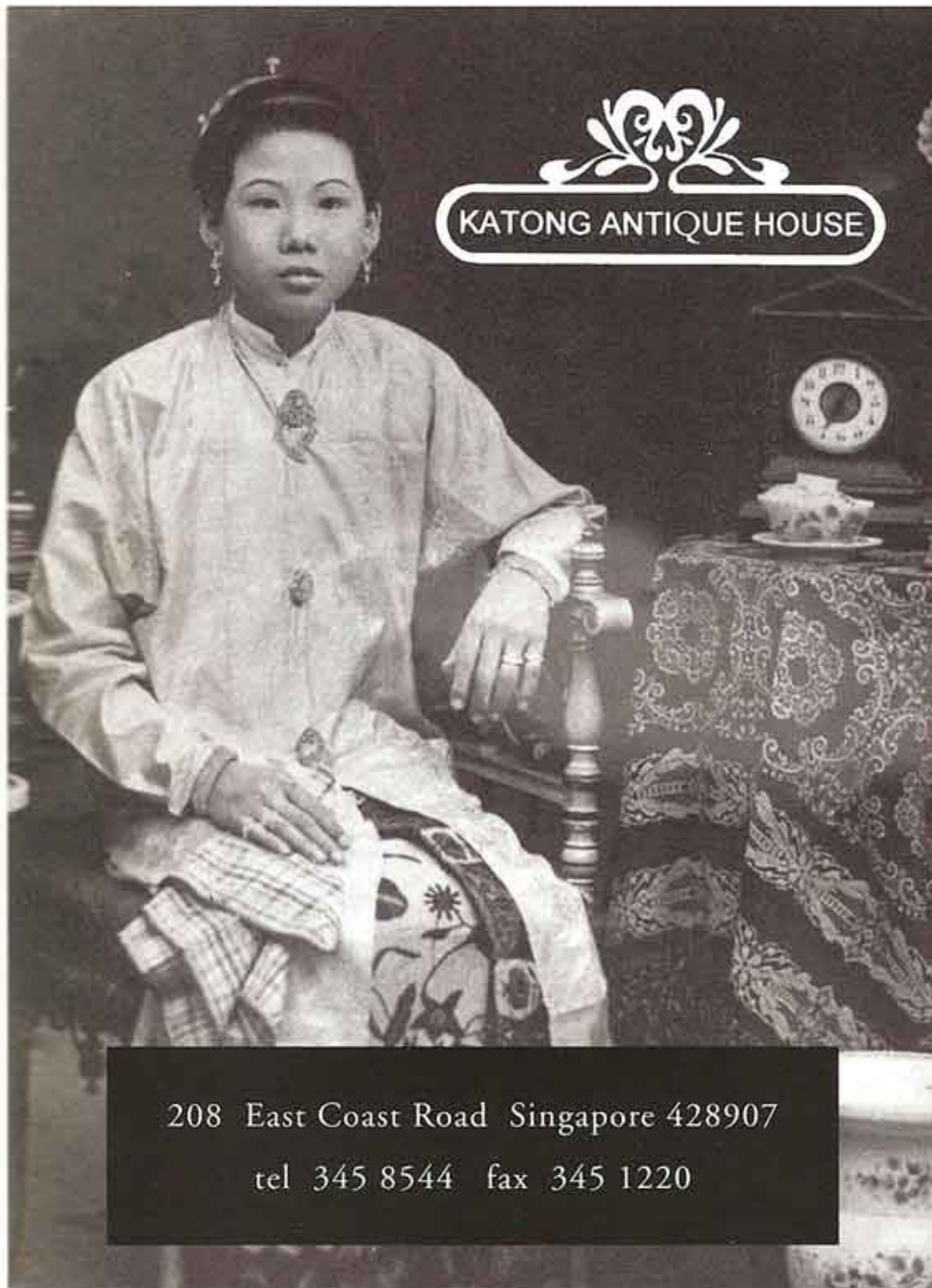
TEO CHUEN SENG
Director (Currency)

Footnote: Coins depicted are not in actual size

Stocks of this limited edition Sterling Silver Proof Coin Set is indeed running out fast at this stage! Therefore stock availability is on first come first served basis, while stocks lasts

For enquiries and on-line orders,
please visit their website at www.mint.com.sg

With every purchase of the 2002 Sterling Silver Proof Coin Set, if the Peranakan Association member shows the membership card upon payment, they are able to purchase a rose dipped in 24k gold, at only \$8.00 (UP: \$108). (While Stock Lasts)



KATONG ANTIQUE HOUSE

208 East Coast Road Singapore 428907

tel 345 8544 fax 345 1220

Sharpen your wit and pencil!

The First Song Lyric Writing Competition is on!

Ever wonder that you can do better to the words of a certain song? Old ditties and favourite tunes sometimes get new text to become revitalised hits. Test your talent and bring out our unique Peranakan Malay-English-Hokkien patois to full expression by re-working on the lyric of a popular melody.

You don't have to be a trained musician, just show your brilliance with words and originality in your approach. Start with a song whose tune you know well and work on the verses and refrain. Which song to work on? You might start your selection from the Peranakan Association's 'Lest We Forget,' a compilation of songs from the 30s to the 60s. Gather your friends to make the lyric-writing a group effort if you like.

The winners of the top five winning lyrics will receive prizes (to be announced later) and the honour of having their achievements performed by the singers from our Cultural Group during our Association's annual dinner and dance November 29 2002. This crowning glory is to have the "rewritten" songs recorded in a CD currently produced by the Association's Cultural group. Judging will be done in strict confidentiality.

You may send in as many compositions as you like but each will have to be in an individual folder with the suggestion "lyrics to be sung to the tune of the original song-title." You may include instructions for singing, for example, as a male-female duet or other arrangements. Please include in block print your name, address, phone numbers, fax numbers and e-mail address.

Closing date for the competition is 30th September.

Send entry to: The First Song Lyric Writing Competition
The Peranakan Association,
Raffles City PO Box 1640
Singapore 911755.



equinox art & design

76 Taman Warna
Singapore 276394
☎ 6227 8896
☎ 6227 5009

The Big Bash

Our 101st Anniversary & Annual Dinner & Dance



ABOUT 800 MEMBERS AND THEIR GUESTS GATHERED AT THE BALLROOM of the Mandarin Hotel in Orchard Road on Friday 2 November for our annual bash which last year had the theme *Lagi Satu Kali Berjumpa* (See You Once Again). The Peranakan menu included such favourites as *ayam buah keluak*, *babi panggang* and *hee-peow* soup.

The evening's entertainment was provided by Danny Koh and his big band, our *a cappella* group, Babacapella, which sang an original arrangement of *Widuri* and a Peranakan version of the golden oldie *Tea for Two* entitled *Teh Tarek*, Dick Lee who sang his 'national song' *Bunga Sayang*, and our choir, Peranakan Voices, which presented a selection of original songs written by Baba William Gwee Thian Hock as well as their own version of *Bunga Sayang*. Our MC was



the energetic Gavin Ooi, who entertained the crowd with some original 'heritage' quiz games. The success of the evening was evident when many of the party-goers stayed on long after the raffle draw to waltz and *joget* the night away.

The organising committee, chaired by Bebe Seet, comprised Kevin Aeria, Richard Tan, Lim Geok Huay, Christine Ong, Rita Bertrand-Tan and Gavin Ooi. Alan Koh acted as adviser. +



Welcoming New Members 19 April 2002, ACM

MAUREEN LIM



When the life membership fee was raised to \$100, the general committee was pleased to find that the tap did not 'dry up'. Our membership increased by about 200. To get to know the members on a more personal level, the committee implemented something new – a 'getting-to-know-you' event. So it was that on 19 April, new members were invited to the Asian Civilisations Museum for a buffet dinner, followed by a tour of the *Peranakan Legacy* exhibition. They could not have had a better guide than our Vice-President, Peter Wee, with his personal anecdotes and first-hand knowledge of the displays. The newly-elected committee was, of course, present. In his welcome address, our Association President, Lee Kip Lee, invited the new members to make known their interests and encouraged them to offer suggestions 'so that we may utilise your expertise in subcommittees organising various events.' He highlighted the 15th Baba Convention in November and other upcoming functions for which 'we need the active support of members.' Several members promptly responded by remaining behind, long after the tour had ended, for a spontaneous musical evening. A member with a talent for the harmonica kept hands clapping and feet tap-ping until it was time to close the museum doors. Seems like a promising start to a fine relationship! ✦

PERANAKAN - The Youth Group

A Diary of New Perspectives

In today's society, everyone is encouraged to seek new perspectives, to search for new horizons and experience new ideas. *Heather Ong* reviews the Youth Group's share of new experiences in the last few months.

march

Naan, tandoori chicken and fish *tikka* took on a new perspective for us, when twenty young Peranakans gathered to enjoy an Indian buffet at a restaurant on 16 March. Several new faces joined our table, and Indian food tasted right at home amidst the easy banter in Peranakan patois.

Some who attended were not members of the Association, but curious young Peranakans who had logged on to our yahoogroups mailing list and took interest in our activities. We were happy to see our efforts pay off, as we welcome members & non-members. Do encourage your younger relatives and friends to subscribe to our free e-groups service. Just send an email to: peranakan-subscribe@yahoogroups.com At the end of the evening some new friends filled up membership forms! ✦

Introduction to CHERKI



april

Half-turn, quarter-turn, pose! Terms that we never thought we would need to know, until a group of us volunteered to be trained as 'models' for a fashion show at the *Pesta Peranakan* co-organised by the Association at Tampines Mall from 25 to 28 April. Nelson, a familiar face at many PA events, recalled his days as a fashion model, and gave us a crash-course on correct posture, turns and catwalk etiquette. After weeks of practice, we blossomed and gracefully showed off our vintage *baju panjang*, *sarongs*, *kebaya* and accessories in their full glory.

Those who refused to subject themselves to Nelson's strict instructions were taught to manage the interactive stalls instead. After they had learnt the basics of games like *chongkak* and five stones, they were sent to encourage visitors to have a taste of our traditional pastimes. The re-enactment of a traditional Peranakan Wedding by our Malacca counterpart was also an eye-opener for many of us. ✦

may

Yeo-manek, *kow-ban*, *lau-chien*. These terms meant nothing to us youth, until we learnt how to play *cherki*. The first thing we noticed were the cards — thirty designs comprising unique arrangements of geometric shapes. The illiterate old *bibiks* were experts of the game, instantly recognising the patterns on each card.

We had a great time learning the basics of *cherki*, under the expert tutelage of seasoned players like Aunty Kim Choo, Nelson, and Baba Cedric from Malacca. There was much laughter and shrieking, amidst excited table thumping and cries of 'game!' The buoyant mood continued into the evening, when we adjourned to watch the Association's production of *Bibiks Behind Bars*, a hilarious comedy about the misadventures of a group of *cherki* addicts. It will take us a while to get to that stage, but if you hear some young Peranakans shrieking and laughing behind closed doors, it could well be a *cherki* game in session! ✦

Keep up to date with coming events, posted on yahoo groups and on our website, and experience a youthful perspective on our old traditions. ✦

THE CARDS A *kepala* (pack) consists of 60 cards, of 30 different designs. One *kepala* is sufficient for 2 players.

Each pack has 3 suits:

- *Ban*—the Chinese character *wan*, meaning 10,000
- *Batik*—a design resembling Chinese coins with a central hole
- *Manek*—a design resembling beaded birds

Each suit has cards of numerical value 1 to 9: *yeo* to *kow* in Hokkien.

THE GAME At the start of the game, each player has 14 cards. (Banker has 15 cards).

The objective is to form 5 sets of 3 cards, including one *mata*.

The sets can either be 3 identical cards (*mata*), or 3 cards, in any combination of designs, of the same numerical value, for example 3 *yeo* cards, or 3 sevens

Each player can either *makan* (add to his hand) what the preceding player throws, or he can draw a fresh card from the stack. Play continues until a player's set is almost complete. He then needs to tap the table loudly, to announce that he is 'calling', and wait for the appropriate 15th card to complete his game.

After he obtains the final card, the value of the winning hand is then calculated, and scores are settled. The players take turns to shuffle, deal and start the next round. ✦



Flowering Season!

If you think the culture is wilting, well think again! The Association's Cultural Development Group leads the way with a flowering of events and activities over the recent months.



Nyonya Ikebana

5 April 2002, Stamford Ballroom, Raffles City Convention Centre

Richard Tan has fun getting our Nyonyas ready for the Ikebana International Convention, which had a Peranakan theme.

IKEBANA ENTHUSIASTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

gathered in Singapore for their convention and were entertained with a gala dinner that had a Peranakan theme, chosen because it is regarded to showcase something that is uniquely Singaporean. Our First Lady, Mrs S R Nathan opened the show at the Stamford Ballroom, Raffles City Convention Centre, which was followed by dinner at the Raffles Ballroom. Over 600 guests (local and overseas delegates) were dressed up in *kebaya*s, *batiks* and every imaginable ethnic motif ...and there were orchids galore!

Katong Antique House presented a Peranakan style Ti Kong (Emperor of Heaven) *samkai* altar table with its unique arrangement of fruits and flowers, plus a traditional bridal *sireh darah* arrangement (a symbol of the bride's purity), all of which the delegates found very fascinating.

Our Peranakan Voices were invited to open the evening's entertainment with a half hour segment of songs and dances, which was a great success! And since there were so many ladies dressed in *baju kebaya*, we opted to *pakey baju panjang* instead. We never like doing things halfway, so dressing up in the old style became an art in itself. The ladies started to *naik sanggul* from 2.30pm. A *chemara* (long false hair piece) was first

attached to the back of the head, and then *leelek*-ed into a bun with three golden *chochok sanggul* pins that fastened the chignon. Then lastly, a row of *bunga chot* (jasmine) was neatly tucked under the bun. *Sudah pakay sarong* and the white *baju dalam*, came the organza *baju* pinned with three *kerosang*. The ladies slipped on their *kasot manek* (beaded slippers), and to complete the look, a *sapu tangan* (handkerchief) was draped over the left shoulder. *Tadaah! Sudah transformed lol*

Our Babas were also equally smart and they all looked very good in their matching gold and black *baju batik* and black pants (*tak mo kala orang!*). So, *toksa chakap banyak banyak lagi*. Just look at the photos here! +



✿ Sikit Atas!

18 April 2002, Tower Club

At the Malam Peranakan organised by the Tower Club at the 62nd floor of Republic Plaza, the Peranakan Voices were invited to add that extra touch of authenticity to the event. While Nyonya Violet Oon's sumptuous menu filled the guests' stomachs, we sang and stole their hearts! ✿



✿ Baba by the River

10 April 2002, ACM



At the *Incentive Isle Singapore!* event hosted by the Singapore Tourism Board and travel agency World Express, The Peranakan Association presented the entertainment—featuring the Peranakan Voices and a fashion parade. Held at the viewing deck of the Asian Civilisations Museum at Empress Place, the event was part of an incentive programme for tour operators from Europe. The Peranakan cuisine was prepared by Blue Ginger Restaurant. As we were aware that there would Spanish-speaking guests, the Peranakan Voices added *Besame Mucho* to their repertoire, which brought the house down. Guests started singing along and in no time were doing the *joget*! The Staff and CEO of World Express, Mr Tan Chee Chye, joined in the merry making. Mr Tan is a member and ardent supporter of our Association ✿

✿ Voices at the Museum Festival

26 May 2002, Suntec City Mall

In support of the Asian Civilisations Museum, The Peranakan Association gladly arranged for the Peranakan Voices to lend a little musical touch to the annual Museum Festival event at the atrium of Suntec City Mall. ✿

Pesta Peranakan!

25 – 28 April 2002,
Tampines Mall

RICHARD TAN

In conjunction with The Singapore Food Festival 2002, CapitaLand invited our Association to collaborate in their *Pesta Peranakan @ Tampines Mall*, a festival showcasing the glorious wonders of Peranakan cuisine, handicrafts, and our colourful culture in music, skits and dances!

It turned out to be a grand and super *lao jiat* event. The turnout was overwhelming! Tampines Mall being a high traffic shop-ping mall got even more crowded, attracting *bibiks*, Babas and Nyonyas from all over the island (some taking MRT from as far as Jurong, Woodlands and Toa Payoh!). Curious and interested HDB heartlanders from the area also came in droves. Many stayed on and waited for the next show, while others came to shop for *kebaya*s, handicrafts, trinkets, cook books or just to see our ladies *jait kasot manek!*

THE MAKAN! | Within twenty minutes of the Nyonya *kueh kueh*'s presentation on the counter each day, all *sudah* sold out! Blue Ginger's *ayam panggang* and *otak otak*, were also hot favourites! And there was nothing left of the *mee siam* and *kueh pie tee*, even though they all were replenished at different intervals over the few days. The jolly ambience and mesmerising entertainment must have got the crowd going into a frenzy of makan and shopping!

We were visibly *terperanjat* at the enthusiasm of 'hungry' aunties and *ah sohs* all clamouring to watch Baba

Nelson's demonstration of *ayam kai luak*, *ayam tempura*, *sambal sotong* and *kueh* like *kueh bengka* and *kueh koh swee*. His special mouth-watering *sambal udang kering* canapes were a hit! At the end of his cooking demonstrations, he distributed the savouries, which were all gone in sixty seconds! Maybe because *ada freebies*?

THE MUSIC! | Nyonya Alicia Ang and Jessie Cheang together with Baba Alvin Oon, tickled the crowd with some light-

hearted comedy, before presenting our Peranakan Voices in sumptuous *baju kebaya*, who sang their hearts out. Two extra shows were added to the evenings as people came up requesting for more. There was even a Malay *makchik* who enquired if the songs were available on CD! '*Lemak lembut semua lagu-lagu nya, especially itu lagu Teh Sama Kopi!*'

THE BAJU! | Choreographed and styled by Baba Nelson Li, this elaborate fashion

pageant showcased some authentic and antique *baju* and *sarong* ensembles. Some of the *kebaya biku*, *kebaya sulam* and the *baju panjang kasair gelair* were more than fifty years old. The Baba models wore the colonial *baju tutup* and the *baju lok chuan* to match the Nyonyas.

THE PAGEANTRY! | Baba Cedric Tan and his entourage presented a lively and educational reenactment of a wedding ceremony, starting

from the wearing of the bridal headdress, to the unveiling of the bride. After that Baba Cedric sang some *dondang sayang* and Peranakan favourites, much to the delight of the crowd who by now had filled all four levels of the Mall's atrium. The *bibiks* who had been waiting patiently for this show, stood in front of the stage. They automatically took the cue to join in the *joget*. *Macham* reunion party!

THE GAMES! | Our volunteers from the Choir and Youth Group also helped to bring back our good old kampong games like five stones, *chongkak* and *kuti kuti*! The five stones challenge was held on a special





platform where our resident champion Andy Tan (Stage Manager) taught some of the young children how to play like a pro. It was lovely to see the quick hands of the older 'Aunties' as they were able to recall their skills at a game of *chongkak*. We truly created a homely atmosphere, just like the good old days.

SHARING OUR HERITAGE! | At the end of the day, the organisers and the Association volunteers truly had a wonderful time. It was a pleasure to share our culture and heritage with so many. The weekend surely must have in turn, brought joy and a chance for other Babas and Nyonyas to congregate in this community-bonding event with people from all walks of life. It was a wonderful opportunity for the Association to realise its vision and mission in a meaningful and joyful way. ✦



NEXT UP: Baba & Nyonya Go Tang's! (mid August 2002)

BIBIKS BEHIND BARS!

Richard Tan takes us through his experiences with the Association's latest drama production.

18 – 20 May 2002, Marine Parade Community Centre

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Maybe we have an old *bibik* to thank for all this to happen. Sometime ago, this lady made comments on the recent plays she had been watching, '*Sudah chukup tengok Wayang Peranakan! Selalu pergi balek, rumah gua, rumah lu!* And still the same Matriarch versus Maid, same faces, same sets and same domestic squabbles! Can we see some changes, some new refreshing themes?'

What started as a joke about looking for a story depicting the lighter side of our Peranakan lifestyle, soon sparked off the inspiration to find an unlikely but true story of times gone by! I remember Baba Peter Lee coming up with this hilarious *Bibiks Behind Bars* title as we discussed the rough storyline and the true-life experiences of our Aunties, Grandmas and Ee Pohs (grandaunt). We also discovered that many have also heard about their relatives being ushered into the 'Black Marias' (Police Vans) and how they all had spent the night in a lock-up! Certainly not fond but vivid memories here!

Next, we tested out this show title on people we met, and to our amazement

it brought smiles and giggles to their faces. '*Alamak! Really-ah! Is that so?*' And it prompted them to find out more about the matter. We definitely felt that we had a great title.

Then, the real research began. We went around asking the old folks whom we knew were 'caught up' in such a real life situation! They were most accommodating and quickly warmed up to our 'research' and fact-finding hunt! Best of all, they were very amused by our enthusiasm and so, encouraged us to get the show on the road! '*Aiyah, don't be scared, just make it funnier, ya?*' quipped my *cherki* expert Ee Poh. And that was in June, last year. Then came the wonderful task of turning fact into fiction. For me, it was the beginning, the birth of our *perANAKan* WAYANG troupe.

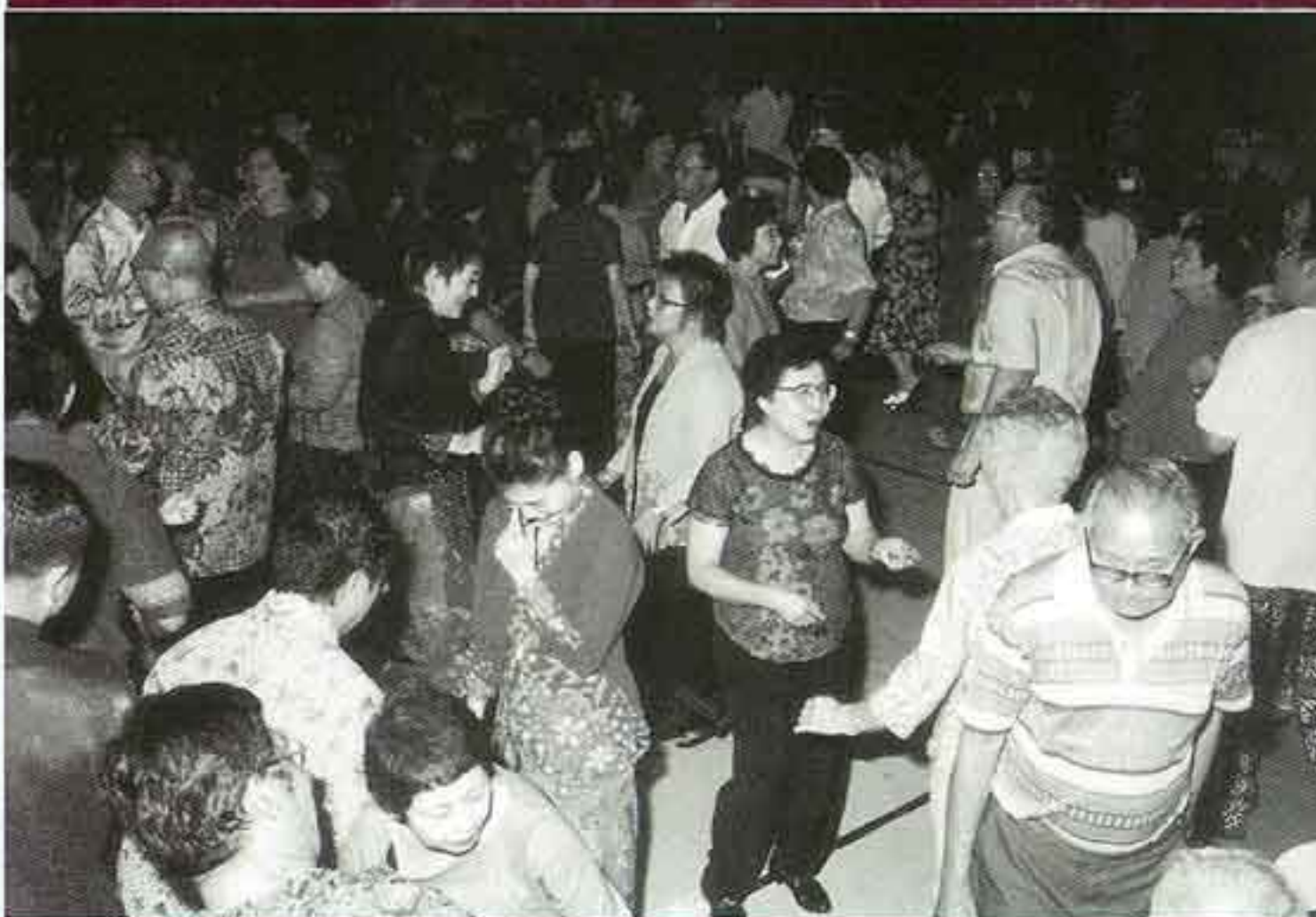
FINDING THE CAST

We began to find a cast of new faces and especially to *charik* an authentic matriarch. From the Peranakan Voices came veteran actresses like Jessie Cheang (Ah Nui, the Maid), Shirley Tay (Auntie Esther), and new faces like Alicia Ang (Nyonya Rosie the sexy bombshell)

and Irene Ooi (Mrs Lim, 'Orang Got Got'). Adding to the cast, other veterans like Mabel Lee (the Sister-in-Law) and Tony Quek (Superintendent) were also invited together with our newcomer Nelson Li (Police Sergeant)! And through Nelson, we rediscovered a retired veteran actor from the days of The Oleh Oleh Party Troupe!

Oh, what a gem of a find! It turned out that he is none other than Uncle Georgie Lee, a familiar face we had seen at Peter Wee's place. When we approached him he was at first reluctant but accepted the role of the matriarch after much sweet words and encouragement. I was pretty sure there would be much we could learn and share from his experiences and how our acting forebears managed to stage the plays and *bangsawans* in the years gone by. To top it all off, Uncle Georgie spoke elegant Peranakan patois.

By September 2001, Sunday rehearsals began at Dance Circle Studios. We had gathered lots of stories and facts, but there was still no script. This brought about the revival of an old approach to the staging of a Peranakan play—the



scriptless approach!

According to Uncle Georgie, this was how it was done in the good old days. They assembled their plays and skits – loosely based on a brief outline, where the actors were required to ad-lib and let the story develop as they went along. I found this 'workshopping' technique most intriguing and definitely an excellent way to train the actors to focus and be alert on stage. This meant that the cast would always have to be attentive and ready to ad-lib without going out of context! By December 2001, we knew that we pretty much had a show.

With the Main Committee's advice to turn this project into an outreach programme for our Peranakan heartland (i.e., the eastern part of the island) and to other communities, we approached the Marine Parade Community Centre. In a quick response, the Centre's Senior Citizens Executive Committee agreed to collaborate. So the rest, as they say, is history.



THE FABULOUS SHOW!

The show started as a Dinner Theatre event, Peranakan style, at a mere \$35, and then moved down into the Theatrette for a Sunday matinee at only \$10 per ticket. Being an outreach programme, it was

decided that the ticket price should remain incredibly affordable. Within two weeks, all tickets were sold out! So two more extra shows had to be added to the Sunday evening and Monday night. Still, all sold out!

Our Guest of Honour on opening night was the Mayor of the Southeast CDC, Mr Othman Haron Eusoff. The Melodians from Malacca provided great entertainment on opening night, and our reliable Peranakan Voices presented lovely musical interludes. But most of all, everyone who came had a great time. The most rewarding part of it all was to see smiling, happy faces as they slowly strolled out of the Centre.

But there were still many more who complained they were not informed early enough about the show. Some said there was not enough publicity. Many more complained that tickets were all too quickly sold out.

SO HOW?

For all of you who have missed it:

The Peranakan Association will be re-staging *Bibiks Behind Bars* again this coming 12 and 13 September 2002 at the Kallang Theatre!

But this time, with a difference! It will be expanded into a bigger production, with more musical numbers. With constructive and invaluable feedback from the Marine Parade run, this show will have more characters and extra scenes written into it. I will not give the game away by revealing the script at this point. I am sure it will even be worth to come back again and see the differences the second time around. We also hope to keep the ticket prices affordable.

'So, don't say I never say!' Get your tickets from all SISTIC outlets from July!



✿ NYONYA & BABA GO WEST!

5 May 2002, the Ballroom, Pan Pacific Hotel

MARLENE FOO



✿ FOOD MARATHON

13 April 2002,
Parkway Parade

RICHARD TAN





THE STRAITS CHINESE HAVE ALWAYS enjoyed good food, good music and dancing. In an attempt to maintain this mix of interests, the Cultural Development Group created the theme *Nyonya & Baba Go West!* for a lunchtime event on Sunday, 5 May 2002 as a new way to promote the Peranakan culture. A concerted effort had been made to balance the mix of East and West in every aspect of the programme, from invitation card to room decorations, from the bazaar stalls to the repertoire of music. The foyer of the Pan Pacific Hotel Ballroom was also set up with nine colourful bazaar stalls selling Peranakan wares, *kueh-kueh*, *batik*, western pastries, accessories and clothing.

The 440 guests were welcomed by the delightful sounds of The Melodians, a six-piece band from Malacca.

In no time everyone was on the dance floor doing the *joget* and line dancing among others. Soloists Nyonyas Shirley Tay, Jessie Cheang and Sally Gan sang some popular songs. Other highlights included a comedy skit *Jodoh Taon Kuda* and a performance by the Peranakan Voices. A good mix of the guests dressed in their richly embroidered *sarong kebayas*, smart *batik* shirts, cowboy attire with hats and boots. It was a record turnout for an Association social event (not counting the gala annual dinners) and everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves to the fullest!

We hope to travel eastward next year with *Nyonya & Baba Go East!* ✦

THE ASSOCIATION WAS INVITED BY THE South East Community Development Centre (SE CDC) to set up a food stall at the SE District Food Festival on 13 April, which aimed to promote inter-racial appreciation through food culture. At the Parkway Parade Waterfall Plaza, there were rows and rows of brightly decorated food stalls selling delicacies of every kind. So naturally, for our stall we presented the best *kueh-kueh*, *mee siam* and *kueh pie tee*!

At 12:30pm, the Mayor of SE CDC, Mr Othman Haron Eusoff, flagged down a row of buses to take us all on a Food Marathon! We (Alicia Ang, Irene Ooi, Shirley Kua, Ooi Eng Teck, Peter Wee and me) all jumped on the bandwagon and we were off to a food journey hosted by Channel I's *Makansutra*! We stopped at Haig Road Food

Centre for its famous, succulent satay and rich, fragrant peanut gravy. Next stop, Glory at Bedok Avenue 3 for the best crispy *prata* (better than Jalan Kayu!) with a magical fish curry. Then to Joo Chiat Road's Casa Bom Vento, the only authentic Eurasian restaurant, we were told, where we sampled their *ayam buah keluak* (a thick black paste of the nut over tender chicken) and *kachang botol* among many other dishes. It is one great *makan* place not to be missed. We next landed at Simpang Bedok for the sweet slurpy *cheng tng*, which we packed back for our friends who were manning the stall at Parkway Parade!

Perhaps we can also organise our own Association *makan* journey round Katong? We really should not wait until next year's festival for this *yow kwee* trip... ✦

102ND ANNIVERSARY AND ANNUAL DINNER & DANCE

FRIDAY 29
NOVEMBER
2002
7 PM TO 2 AM
MANDARIN
HOTEL
ORCHARD ROAD
MORE DETAILS TO
BE ANNOUNCED

15TH BABA CONVENTION

29 November – 1 December 2002

THE THEME FOR THE 15TH BABA CONVENTION, TO BE HELD

from 30 November to 1 December 2002 and organised by The Peranakan Association of Singapore, will be *Peranakan Expressions in the 21st Century*.

The Convention's forum, *The Peranakan Talk Show*, a departure from the formal seminar, will be held at the auditorium of the Asian Civilisations Museum at Empress Place in the morning of Saturday 30 November.

The talk show will review the result of a survey specially conducted by the Association on the distinctiveness of a Peranakan in the present age. We will see and hear the 'voices' of the community and others through a survey conducted prior to the November date. Other exciting segments trailing the talk show will echo the current sentiments of the revitalised Peranakan. Lunch and coffee breaks are included in the talk show session.

Guests and members of the various associations will gather for an evening by the Singapore River with an informal dinner and line up of cultural performances by the participating groups from Malacca, Penang and Singapore. The social event takes place on the viewing deck and hall of the ACM Empress Place Museum overlooking the river, historical Boat Quay and towering sentinels of modern commerce in the background.

On the morning of Sunday 1 December, there will be a private tour of the *Peranakan Legacy* exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum at Armenian Street for foreign delegates.

The Peranakan Association together with the Singapore History Museum, will be holding a Food and Craft Fair open to the public at its premises on Stamford Road for the Sunday. A lunch hosted by The Peranakan Association is scheduled at the SHM inner courtyard to bid 'Adieu' to friends and guests until the next Convention in Penang. ✦

Please look out for more details and announcements in the coming months.

TRAIL OF THE PHOENIX

Six Episodes, Every Sunday at 9.30pm from
9 June to 21 July on Arts Central

AN EXCITING NEW SERIES OF HALF-HOUR EPISODES

on Peranakan culture goes on air in June, produced by Nyonya Joan Chee, with contributions from many members of the Association. Like our Association, the series takes as its symbol, the phoenix, so beloved in Peranakan ornament. The series begins with, well, *Beginnings*, and the rise of the Babas in Malacca, and the cultural heritage of the old city, with its mix of Malay, Indian, Portuguese and Dutch influences, ending with a glimpse into the home of Tan Kim Seng. The second episode looks at *The Homes*

the Babas Built, with visits to the residences of Tun Tan Cheng Lock in Malacca, Dr Geh Min in Emerald Hill Road, Peter Wee in Katong, among others. Episode Three, *In a Baba Household*, reveals the trappings of a household and all the finery of the good life, as well as elements of cuisine and the kitchen including the all-important *belachan*.

The next episode, *Nyonya Manis*, introduces the Nyonya's wardrobe and the world of fine embroidered kebaya and ostentatiously elaborate sarongs, as well as the living tradition of beadwork. Following that is *All That Glitters* which pays tribute to the wonderful array of jewellery and gold and silver ornaments. The final episode *A Marriage Made In Heaven* focuses on the phenomenon of the Baba wedding and all the expensive finery associated with it, now lovingly preserved as heirlooms in many private collections as well as institutions. Can the phoenix only be found in static, old objects? Or is it in the spirit of all our new activities? ✦

For more information, please visit <http://artscentral.mediacorp.tv.com>.

Noticeboard

New Members

We welcome the following 10 new members whose addition increases our roll to 1632 members:

Ms Chee Chean Choo Phaik Joyce

Ms Chia Sok Har Maureen

Dr James Khoo

Dr Ho Kee Hang

Mr Reggie Ismail

Mrs Kessler Corinne

Dr Kho Hang Neo

Dr Lim Chin Heok

Mr Lim Kheng Choon Valentine

Ms Denyse Tessensohn

ADDENDUM

The article 'Joget Night' in the January-March 2002 issue of *The Peranakan* (p. 14) was mistakenly attributed to Heather Ong. The actual contributor was Noreen Chan. Our apologies to the author.

Condolences

It is with great sorrow that we record the death of Mr Kenneth Cheo Kim Ban and extend our deepest sympathy to his family on their sad bereavement.

Mr Kenneth Cheo Kim Ban was a leading literary figure of the Peranakan community and a well-respected authority on Baba matters having written *A BABA WEDDING* and co-authored *BABA FOLK BELIEFS AND SUPERSTITIONS*.

He was born and raised in the Baba heartland of Malacca, had been a teacher and publishers' representative and was with a merchant bank before his retirement in 1981.

He was an active member of The Peranakan Association and had contributed to

THE PERANAKAN a critical comment on the Peranakan segment of the TV series "Masters of The Sea," as well as an informative account of the Melaka Chitty.

Besides that he was also a guest speaker at our bi-monthly dinner-talks when he delighted enthralled audiences by, on one occasion, taking them step by step through the intricate procedures of a BABA WEDDING and, on another evening, by unravelling the mystery behind the almost forgotten "YOKE TUA - the traditional Peranakan herbal prescriptions."

At the 8th Baba Convention in Malacca he delivered a talk on the current state of affairs in our community and he had also translated a series of hymns into Baba Malay. +

Joint Secretariat office for the Peranakan Association(PA) and the Cairnhill Community Club Malay Activities Executive Committee (MAEC) at Cairnhill Community Club

The Peranakan Association has, through the good offices of Mrs Dorothy Chan the Chairman of the Cairnhill Community Club Management Committee, been offered space to share a joint secretariat with the MAEC at the Cairnhill Community Club at No.1 Anthony Road.

To mark the occasion there will be a combination of events - reflecting the Malay and Peranakan cultures and heritage, including food and dances - to be held at the CCC on Sunday 27 October 2002 from 12 Noon. Details will be announced later.

This development will enable the PA not only to work with the MAEC to foster closer relationship between the Malay and Peranakan communities but also to create a centre of Peranakan activities at the Cairnhill Community Club (CCC).

To that end the CCC has extended an invitation to members of the PA to join the CCC for a membership fee of \$15.45 for a term of 3 years.

The facilities available to members of the CCC include the use of badminton courts, basket ball court and activity rooms (on an hourly basis); kitchen (on a 3-hourly basis); multi-purpose hall (on a daily basis); fitness centre and karaoke lounge (on a commercial basis).

There are also a multiplicity of courses which members can enrol in - line dance; jazz dance; aerobics; karaoke singing; cooking; cake-making; yoga; karate; responsible money skills for children; managing expectations, self-assessment & planning; writing & interviewing skills; my expert architect; and French language. +

For more information and for CCC membership forms please contact our Hon Secretary, Mrs Lim Geok Huay, Tel. 62550704.





THE
PERANAKAN
ASSOCIATION
SINGAPORE