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# editoria Anthony OEI AND PETER LEI

# Crossing cultures and boundaries

We Peranakans have our own style of speaking that has become our trademark, which those outside the community recognise instantly, be it in English, Malay or Chinese. One Nyonya, for instance, tells me she is never surprised when people she meets for the first time straightaway say, 'Ah, you are a Peranakan, right?' even if she is not wearing the traditional garb. I am sure our brothers and sisters in the clan have also experienced such instant identification.

The way we speak is part of our culture, along with our *sarong kebaya*, *kasut manek*, cuisine, cultural shows and all the rest of it. If all these contribute to the vibrancy of Singapore's cosmopolitan society, we are more than happy. But we are not stopping there. Being nimble, our Association as we all know has now entered the performing art scene in a big way, with our very first all-Singapore production, *Bibiks Behind Bars*. Much to the delight of the producers, the comedy skit played to full houses at its first performance at the Marine Parade Community Centre a few months ago. They have revised and extended it into a full-length play for re-staging at the Kallang Theatre in September. The Marine Parade Community Club Management Committee has been exceptional in supporting our efforts.

This is our new contribution to the multi-cultural life of Singapore. But it is not just another Peranakan play that offers only entertainment value, as those who have seen and enjoyed it will testify. It is an expression of our long and continuing relationships with the various communities of Singapore, a cross-cultural spirit that is now more than ever considered a vital element of our national identity. Our multi-racial cast comprises Chinese, Eurasian and Malay *dramatis personae*. Moreover, some of the songs exude this flavour: for example, the tune of *Tea for Two* with lyrics in Baba patois!

The theme of the play is based on a real social problem in the Peranakan community at the turn of the last century, when many respectable ladies were getting into trouble for gambling illegally! In this issue we look at the controversy through contemporary writings, setting the background from which one can really enjoy the antics of these Bibiks crossing the boundaries of the law.

We also look at the phenomenon of cross-dressing in Peranakan theatre. Female impersonators have a long history in many Asian theatrical traditions, especially the dan of Chinese opera, and the onnagata of the Japanese kabuki.

The Association hopes that *Bibiks Behind Bars* will contribute towards greater cultural understanding and racial harmony and interaction. We need to be relevant with the times, and to share this spirit with Peranakans and non-Peranakans alike. So laugh your heads off at Kallang Theatre in September and at the same time see cultural fusion in action.



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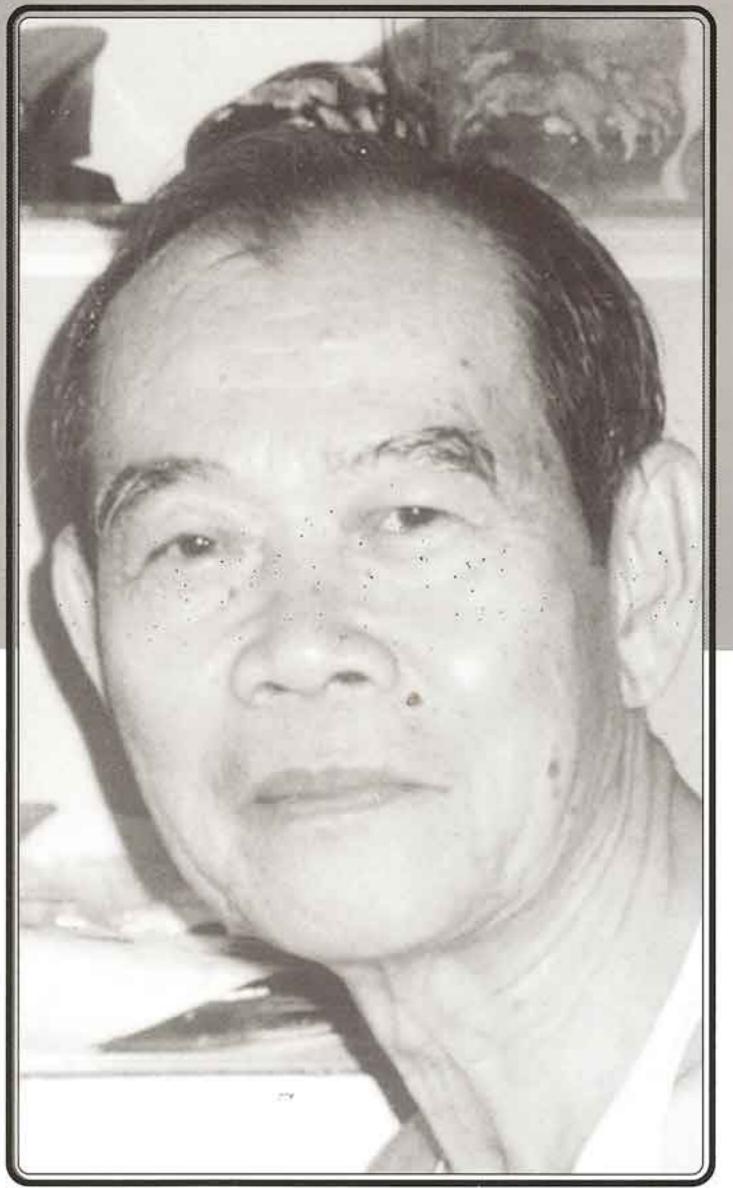
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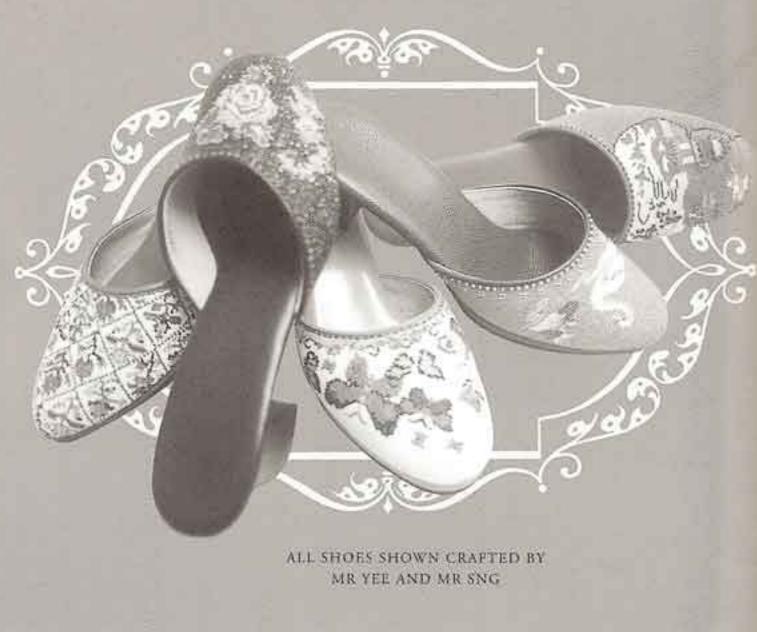
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The Merrilads' production of The Stepmother, late 1930s

ONE UNIQUE ASPECT OF OUR PERANAKAN HERITAGE IS THE SURVIVAL OF THE FEMALE IMPERSONATOR IN PERANAKAN THEATRE. IT MAY BE A TRADITION THAT'S DYING OUT, BUT IN TRUE SPIRIT, IT'S DEFINITELY GOING WITH A BANG! Peter Lee investigates.

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THE EVER POPULAR

emale impersonators have dominated the stage in Japan and China for centuries, and have created intricate and highly stylised art forms. As in these traditions, female roles have also been played by men in the Peranakan bangsawan. The reason behind this - that it had been considered inappropriate for women to appear on stage - is now of course no longer valid. However, unlike in China where the dan roles are now usually played by women, and in Japan, where the onnagatas are a rare breed, the female impersonator in Peranakan theatre still lives on!

Since Gunong
Sayang's production of
Buang Keroh Pungot

Jernih in 1985 (just one year after the revival of the Peranakan play with Felix Chia's Pileh Menantu), the female impersonator has been de rigueur in all productions. Everyone knows G T Lye and the young KT as well as Malacca's Kenny Chan and Chee Hood Siong. Ivan Heng gave the concept a new twist with his version of Stella Kon's Emily of Emerald Hill, which has been performed all over the world since premiering in Kuala Lumpur in October 1999.

BIRTH OF A POPULAR ART FORM The

beginnings of the Peranakan bangsawan are however, lost in the mists of time. What is certain is that this genre developed from the Malay bangsawan that rose to popularity throughout the Straits Settlements, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies from the 1880s. This subject has been extensively studied by Tan Sooi Beng in his book Bangsawan: A Social and Stylistic History of Popular Malay Opera (Oxford University Press, 1993).

The earliest Chinese-owned bangsawan troups could well have been Wayang Yap Chow Thong (Straits Echo, 14 May 1904), and Opera Stamboul owned by Tay Boon Teck (Straits Echo,

November 1904). The performers were also 'generally mixed' comprising 'Malays, Eurasians and sometimes Chinese players! (Straits Echo, 20 October 1928).

The first mentions of Peranakan bangsawan in the press seem to be reviews of productions in the late 1910s by the same troupe: Princess Nilam Chahaya for the China Flood Fund at the Anglo-Chinese School Union Building, Penang (May 1918), followed by Nyai Dasima (1919) and Ginufifah (1920). Nyai Dasima, a perennial favourite, is a tragic Betawi (Jakartan) tale about a lady who falls in love with an Englishman, but is tricked into divorcing him by another man who eventually kills her for her money. Two versions of the story were written during colonial times. The earlier version by G. Frances (1896) in Betawi Malay was set in the year 1800. The second version was written in Dutch by A T Manusama (1926).

The earliest performance by women took place in 1926 when the Penang Nyo Nya Bangsawan presented Jula Juli Bintang Tiga, Nyai Dasima

and A Merchant of Baghdad in Penang in 1926. As many Peranakans attest, it was considered highly unseemly for Nyonyas to appear on stage. However, as in many Peranakan performances, this one also claimed, 'nett proceeds are to be devoted to charitable purposes'. Perhaps these gracious ladies were brave enough to risk their reputation for the sake of charity. Box seats were priced at \$6, Reserved seats at \$3 and First Class seats at \$1. Ladies Upstairs seats were \$2 (Straits Echo, 21 December 1926).

In the 1910s entrepreneur Baba Cheong Koon Seng founded the Star Opera, a Malay bangsawan troupe, which performed at his own theatre, Theatre Royal in North Bridge Road. 'My mother would take us down to see the shows in our own theatre on Friday nights,' remembers his daughter Mrs Koh Kiong Tuan. Khairuddin (or K Dean) was the star of the bangsawan (there is a road named after him in Opera Estate). 'Quite a favourite of the bibiks. They used to give him jewellery. I remember in particular the chichak berlian.' (The chichak berlian was a jewel in the shape of a lizard).

Malay women used to take part in the bangsawan. Khairuddin's wife Tijah was equally popular. 'She had the most beautiful soprano voice,' Mrs Koh remembers. So how was it that Nyonyas were not allowed in Peranakan productions? 'It wasn't considered right,' Mrs Koh affirms.

#### MUSICAL ASSOCIATIONS AND THE BEGIN-NINGS OF FEMALE IMPERSONATORS All the

Peranakan plays were staged by the Peranakan musical groups, which were exclusively male organisations. Even until recently Gunong Sayang Association was also a strictly all-male group. The Peranakan Association was also an all-male enclave until the early 1950s. Naturally when female roles were required, they were played by the male members of the group.

The Oleh Oleh Party was founded in January 1932 and was one of the first to produce a Peranakan play with an all-male cast. The Wales Minstrel Party performed *Greed, Repentance*, and *Nyai Dasima* in aid of charity in 1934. (*Malaya* 











clockwise from top left Ong Guan Bock 1962, a scene from Kaseh Ibu Tiri at Happy World Stadium September 1958, a scene from Tidak Berdosa at Singapore Badminton Hall December 1957, William Tan as Alice in Tidak Berdosa 1957, Ong Chwee Kim 1960



Tribune, 28 August 1934). The Merrilads Musical Association, formed in the 1930s, met regularly in the home of Dr Chia Keng Hoe in Sea Avenue, and performed in productions such as *The Stepmother* in aid of the China Relief Fund (established by Tan Kah Kee in 1937). Interestingly, from a photograph of that production (courtesy of Mrs Koh Kiong Tuan), female impersonators are clearly seen seated in the first row, as well as young girls in cheerleader-like costumes standing directly behind the stars. 'Oh they were students from the Chinese schools who performed at the extra-turns, not Nyonyas,' Mrs Koh explains. Mrs Koh's husband played the mandolin and was a member of The Merrilads.

With the devastation of the Japanese occupation, theatrical performances seemed to have experienced a lull until the late 1940s. In 1947, one of the troupes staged Kurang Preksa and Ah Fatt the Pork Seller. Three years later the popular Malay folk story Bawang Puteh, Bawang Merah was performed and in 1956, Li-Ko Mia, a tale about the family troubles of a monk. From 1957 until the early 1960s, Peranakan plays saw a short revival. One of the most respected stars of that period is the retired actor William Tan, an honorary life member of our Association. Since 1957 when he performed in his first drama Tidak Berdosa at Happy World, he has been actively involved in Peranakan cultural activities. 'When I was young I used to follow my father to watch these shows, but I did not have much interest in them. Only when I was older and when friends and seasoned performers encouraged me to learn that I became interested in acting, he remembers. 'After some time it automatically became

natural for me to walk and talk like a woman. But during my first show, I was so kaku!

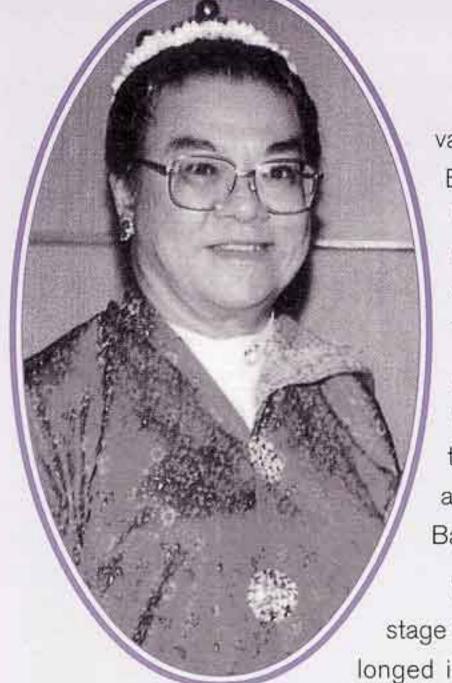
Baba William immediately caught the attention of the public for his singing and beauty. Following in quick succession were Nyai Dasima (1958), Naga Berapi, Kaseh Ibu Tiri (1959) and Ayer Mata Ibu (1960). He also recalls several veterans of the stage

Ong Guan Bock of the Oleh Oleh Party and Lee Cheng Kim of the Merrilads Musical Party, both of whom played the mature roles, but must have played the young heroines before the war. 'Ong Guan Bock lived in Katong with his wife, two sons and a daughter, and worked at the Singapore Turf Club, selling tickets at the weekend. He was also very good at embroidery and was commissioned to make *kebayas* for many ladies. He was also a very good actor and dancer,' remembers Baba William Tan. 'Lee Cheng Kim was also a good actor although he could not dance. He lived in Telok Kurau with his wife and children.'

'He was the only one who could do ballet. His impersonation was very genuine,' recalls G T Lye, doyen of the Peranakan stage. Somehow, though, the idea of a pirouetting bibik boggles the mind...

But it was Ong Chwee Kim who seemed to have been the grand impresario of Peranakan dramatics in the 1950s and 1960s. 'He taught me how to act and sing,' remembers Baba William Tan. Once described as 'Singapore's most versatile female impersonator', he was an accomplished singer of dondang sayang and was a star and director of many productions. "He was a good singer, and very ladylike, and played only, tragic, victimised characters' says Baba G T Lye.

'They were all self-taught and they had their own talent. You must have talent. Each person had their own character and was good at specific roles: ser-



G T Lye, doyen of the Peranakan stage vant, mother, or daughter-in-law,
Baba William remarks.
'In those days one actor
monopolised one character.
Wong Chiang Wah and Sonny
Tan, for example, were only
good at dancing at the extra
turns. Story lines were so thin
that they had to have dances
and sketches in between.'
Baba GT Lye remembers.

William Tan retired from the stage in the 1960s owing to a prolonged illness, and concentrated on dondang sayang, which he is now considered one of the few Peranakan masters of. 'Of course now I sing in my natural voice,' he says. (Please see Maureen Lim, 'For

William Tan, Life is a Song', *The Peranakan*, July-September 1998.)

As in the old days, these productions of the late 1940s through to the early 1960s were all staged to raise money for charity. The venues were the Singapore Badminton Hall, New World, Great World and Happy World, and the beneficiaries were the St John's Ambulance Association Building Fund, Cheshire Home, Red Cross, among others. Prices of tickets still remained at \$1 to \$3.

almost 20-year Iull. Then things began to change with Felix Chia's *Pileh Menantu* in 1984, which was a roaring success and rekindled interest in Peranakan theatre. The main innovation of Peranakan theatre of the 1980s was the introduction of women in the cast. Although women had already made forays in such plays in the late 1950s (Daisy Chan — whose daughter Irene Poh is a member of our Peranakan Voices — and Nancy Kow had small roles in the Peranakan Dramatic Party's *Kehidopan Si Buta* in 1958), they were still exceptions to the rule.

There were, however, a few milestones in the development of women in theatre. In June 1956, the Siglap Girls' Club staged a Peranakan wedding pageant for charity, with its members and matrons play-

ing both the male and female roles (even Mrs Loke Yew, mother of Loke Wan Tho, played the bride's father!). Felix Chia's Rempah Lemak in May 1996 created an important first — an all-female cast.

G T Lye brought back the whole tradition of female impersonators in 1985 in Gunong Sayang Association's first play, Buang Keroh Pungot Jernih, acting the role of the archetypal matriarch. G T, who grew up in Katong, is the son of the dondang sayang master Gwee Peng Kwee, and grew up surrounded by all the culture and music. However he never ventured into acting till the 1980s, as he was too young at that time. 'My parents were very strict and they wouldn't allow me to be involved! The Association had difficulty finding a lady to play a convincing matriarch for its first production. I volunteered to impersonate, but the whole committee refused to accept it because I had never done it before and they feared the community would not accept female impersonators.' But the then-President of GSA Kwek Choon Chuan was the only one who believed he could do it. So a compromise was reached. Baba G T proposed that he would rehearse the role until they found a matriarch, but they could not. Thus, a star was born! The rest, as they say, is history. (Please see Maureen Lim, 'The Curtain Rises on G.T. Lye', The Peranakan, April-June 1998.)

The major shift in emphasis with the female impersonator of today and in the past is that whereas in the past, the impersonator was limited to playing only one stereotyped character, today's impersonator is a living repository of Peranakan matriarchal culture. Imbued in the matriarch is a style of walking, talking, even sitting, and of course, wrapping *sireh*, that no longer exists and which the impersonator is so adept at imitating. 'I've mixed with the very wicked as well as the very kind matriarchs. I've observed how they walk, talk, the way they sew and how they put the *sireh*. That's why it's very easy for me to do these roles,' G T Lye once said in an interview (*The Star*, 7 January 2000).

'To impersonate you have to behave in the genuine way of the ladies. You have to cheat the

## people to make them forget you are impersonating?

So who was his greatest inspiration? 'There was a lady who used to come to my house during birthdays and weddings. Her dressing, language and mannerisms were extremely refined. A perfect Nyonya, and very garang! Everyone was afraid of her, but deep inside she was a kind person, always giving a hand to others. She was famous for making nasi kunyit. And very kewat (fastidious) in every aspect.'

Baba G T has also taken his roles to a much higher level of expression than his predecessors in the total of eighteen GSA productions he has acted in. And he has played all kinds of women from the tragic to the comic, from aggressors to victims, and sometimes both extremes in one! He has since moved on. Chueh It Chap Go (2000) was the first time he wrote, directed and acted in a GSA production. He did the same for Hujan Balek Ka Langit (2001).

At the same time, Malacca actors Kenny Chan and Chee Hood Siong were also beginning to gain attention with their skits and shows, which culminated in their own sitcom on Malaysian television, Baba & Nyonya. Chan plays the matriarch to Chee's

1980s met with disapproval

Cantonese amah. In the Chan also performed at Peranakan Place. Last year they performed the lead roles in our Association's production of Dah Sa Chupak Tak Boley Sa Gantang. Chan has always been a 'ham' in his roles, and unlike G T Lye, has made his mark in parody, as though he were winking to the audience that it was all in fun. This has

Lawrence Au, Chee Hood Siong and Kenny Chan in Dah Sa Chupak Tak Boley Sa Gantang, 2001



Young actor, KT, carrying on the tradition

among the more conserva-

tive members of the Peranakan community, who see in the earnest portrayal of the Nyonyas and Bibiks of old, a sort of respect for our past and our traditions, and an art form to be taken seriously. On the other hand others see it as enormous fun. and it cannot be denied that Chan is extremely funny and entertaining. But in this latest production he allowed himself to get into the character beyond the usual laughs.

WAYS AHEAD Only one young person seems to be studying this dying art of impersonating the matriarchs of old - KT, who is in his 30s, and has studied under G T Lye, but being one more generation removed from the real thing, he has the unfortunate and difficult task of learning his role only from second hand experience. He has acted with great applomb in GSA productions such as William Gwee's Kalu Jodoh Tak Mana Lari (1996), and G T Lye's Hujan Balek Ka-Langit (2001), playing a very important and noble part in keeping alive our past and our memories.

Ivan Heng has taken female impersonating to the new millennium with his portrayal of Emily in Emily of Emerald Hill, which was emotionally and techni-



Ivan Heng in Emily of Emerald Hill, 2001

of Emerald Hill, which was emotionally and technically complex and an acting tour de force! In relating the life of Emily, Heng portrayed a young girl, a coy daughter-in-law and a matriarch with both humour and seriousness. Heng has performed his interpretation of Emily in Malaysia, Singapore and Australia, and will be taking it to more international festivals. This sort of complex role seems to be the way ahead for Peranakan theatre.

INTRODUCING TWO VETERANS! For the moment though, The Peranakan Association is producing a revised and extended version of its tradi-

tional-style Wayang Peranakan, Bibiks Behind Bars at Kallang Theatre on 12 and 13 September. The show features two veteran female impersonators who have not been on stage for almost forty years!

Baba Georgie Lee was seen earlier this year in our staging of *Bibiks Behind Bars* at the Marine Parade Community Centre.

Lee grew up in Geylang in the home of his Baba father and Teochew mother, whom he was exceptionally close to, and learnt cooking and many household skills that prepared him for his short stint on stage. Although initially reluctant, he was persuaded to join the Oleh Oleh Party in the 1950s and began performing small parts. His first was in Anyot Diri followed by Li-ko Mia, where he played the role of a nun. At that time he was working in a trading

firm known as Scott & English as a storekeeper. 'My father was worried as I was working and he advised me to stop acting

female roles as I had to keep long hair, Lee remembers. Very reluctantly, Lee stopped performing. Many years on, he has now been persuaded to return to the stage to showcase his own interpretation of the bibik of old.

Georgie Lee, late 1950s

Francis Hogan, whose father is Eurasian and mother

Georgie Lee and Francis Hogan dressed for *Bibiks Behind Bars*, 2002

Nyonya, began his career at a very young age. He was spotted by Peranakan stage veteran, Seow Peck Swee. Hogan and Seow's son were both students at Choon Guan School in Katong. Seow gave the young Hogan an opportunity of a lifetime: to write and star in his own production - Nasib Anak Tiri which was presented by the Peranakan group Hiburan Bintang Baru and directed by Seow in 1958, in aid of the Kramat Shaikh Ismail Building Fund. 'The audience's response was very good, particularly to my rendition of all the sad songs - I had to cry from beginning to end - so my parents encouraged me, says Hogan. There followed eight or nine productions until the mid-1960s, many of which he scripted, acted and directed in, including Kehidopan Si Buta (1958, in aid of the Red Cross), Anak Noraka, Nyai Dasima, and Ayer Mata Ibu (1960 in aid of St John's Ambulance Brigade). Many of these were presented by the Singapore Peranakan Dramatic Party, and were reviewed in the English and Malay language press. Thereafter Hogan also retired from the stage. I stopped acting. I got very tired as I was also working in the PSA, Hogan explains. Bibiks Behind Bars is his first performance since the mid 1960s, and he is extremely excited. I am very thankful to Georgie for pushing me forward, and to the Association and especially director Richard Tan for giving me a part in the show.'

Photographs courtesy of Mrs Koh Kiong Tuan, Georgie Lee, Francis Hogan, William Tan, G T Lye, K T and Wild Rice Productions.

Nyai Dasima Play

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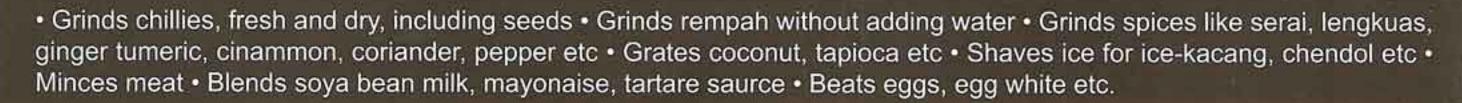
Francis Hogan, late 1950s

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AT THE TURN OF THE LAST CENTURY,
THE ISSUE OF ILLEGAL GAMBLING
AMONG NYONYAS WAS ONE OF THE
MOST SENSATIONAL AND SCANDALOUS

TOPICS DISCUSSED AMONG ANGST-RIDDEN MEMBERS OF THE PERANAKAN COMMUNITY. PETER LEE COMPILES SOME OF THESE OUTSPOKEN VOICES FROM THE PAST.

In the charge sheets and records of our Police Courts, do we not sometimes find the names of our Straits Chinese girls as prisoners in gambling cases? I believe it has sometimes happened that when a raid is made on a house where gambling is suspected to be going on, the people therein are arrested indiscriminately, and the young unmarried girls are packed off to the police station, although they may not have been gambling. Anyone who has the slightest knowledge of our habits and customs must be aware that where elderly ladies and young, married women squat down in a group for a spell of gambling, it is considered most improper, if not actually rude, for a young unmarried woman to join the company!

LEE SEW FAH,

'STRAITS CHINESE MAIDENS',
THE STRAITS CHINESE MAGAZINE, VOLUME VI, 1902

'They become selfish and careless and ignorant, with a propensity for gambling and some even for drinking for the sake of something that gives them temporary excitement, and in some cases, apparently preferring now and again to have an audience of the Police Magistrate rather than to be occupied with the training, moral and mental, of their children...I cannot blame them, for they are objects rather of pity than of censure. They are the products of a system for which their fathers, husbands and brothers are responsible.'

SONG ONG SIANG,

'THE POSITION OF CHINESE WOMEN',
THE STRAITS CHINESE MAGAZINE, VOL 1, 1897

'Quite recently an exceedingly interesting discussion was carried on in the Straits Times on the subject on which I am now writing. There was one letter signed by "a Nyonia" which contained some good remarks on the subject. Referring to our Nyonyas she said, "the penchant they have for *chap-ji-ki* and *che-ki* is certainly reprehensible." If the writer were a Nyonya, she would qualify that general remark by saying that there is one thin silver lining in that black cloud. The writer of that letter ought to have mentioned the pleasant fact that not only is gambling not indulged in by the Christian Chinese women, but that there

of course try by cutting down their wives' pocket allowance, but that will be of no use, for these women at a pinch may pledge their jewels and so find the money to satisfy this awful craving.

are Nyonyas, who are not Christians, to whom the gambling craze does not appeal at all. Let us be ready to give honour to whom honour is due. This gambling "penchant" of the Nyonyas is certainly reprehensible, but can nothing be done to remedy this evil? The writer welcomed the suggestion for a Committee to reform the "pernicious gambling habits" of our womenfolk. She however went on to suggest that the proposed Committee should begin with the Babas first. Where is the advantage gained in the pot calling the kettle black? If gambling is reprehensible, it is reprehensible whether indulged in by the Babas or the Nyonyas.

So far as our Nyonyas are concerned, there is no doubt che-ki gambling has become an indispensable adjunct of Chinese wedding festivities. So much so that a hostess would give great offence if gambling were prohibited in her house on such an occasion. The festivities in connection with a Chinese marriage continue for four or five days and female guests are invited day after day from ten in the morning to about five in the afternoon. What entertainment is it that the hostess can provide for her guests, composed of pretty nearly the same people from day to day, which does not pall? It is gambling. As long as the practice lasts of making a Chinese wedding a thing of weariness and of enormous and, for the most part, unnecessary expense, I think that it will be exceedingly difficult for any Reformer or Reform Committee to devise some other kind of entertainment for these ignorant female guests.

Time was when the presence of the older women acted as a check on the younger women who felt shy to join in the gambling circle, but unfortunately the barrier was broken down and young women who have a long purse are encouraged to gamble with the elder folks. These younger women are the people who should be saved from themselves. The trouble is, how it is to be done. Rich husbands may of course try by cutting down their wives' pocket allowance, but that will be of no use, for these women at a pinch may pledge their jewels and so find the money to satisfy this awful craving. What is wanted is no discrimination by the Police in raiding houses in which gambling is going on. The fact that the persons arrested for gambling were guests at a wedding party should be absolutely no excuse for breaking the law. If gambling is an offence against the law here, it should be an offence demanding punishment against all persons indulging in the vice and on all occasions. If the police take such a keen interest in keeping down gambling among the poor rickshaw coolies, is it too much to ask them to show the same amount of interest in our Nyonyas? A vigorous crusade resulting in the appearance of our Nyonyas from day to day in the Police Courts will make some impression on the Nyonyas themselves. It will also stir the Babas up to do something.'

Another form of gambling which is very common among our Nyonyas is chap-ji-ki. The ruin that chap-ji-ki has brought about in many a home is fearful. Chap-ji-ki is like the plague in our midst, it tempts young and old alike. It is a more popular form of this vice because a person can indulge in it without having to go out of her house. There are respectable stake-collectors to whose house you must go or send your stake from day to day. There are also stake-collectors, and these are more in number, who go their daily round from house to house and collect the stakes of the inmates of each house visited. These stake-collectors become familiar figures to the young members of the household. The excitement of seeing the mother or aunt getting back her stake and nine times as much again from the collector at the end of the day induces the girls in their teens and the girls still attending school to try their luck. The craving once established is hard to repress even in a young gambler. It has become a disease in the old gambler. There is even an "amah" in the service of my mother who stakes in chap-ji-ki everyday. She gets ten dollars a month, and I know for a fact that the whole of her wages goes to satisfy the craving for chap-ji-ki. For some time I gave her some pocket money for her "tiffin", but I found that she would stint herself that midday meal and stake the money on some chap-ji-ki character, and I therefore feed her instead.'

NEO PUAK NEO,

'GAMBLING AMONGST OUR NYONYAS',
THE STRAITS CHINESE MAGAZINE, VOL. XI NO. 3, SEPTEMBER 1907

CASE NO. 12/13092002

# BIBIND BEHIND BARS

DATES OF OFFENCE: 12 & 13 September 2002

LOCATION OF OFFENCE: Kallang Theatre, 8 p.m.

#### FIRST INCIDENT REPORT :

Following an anonymous telephone complaint lodged at 8.30 p.m. on Friday, 13th September 1962 regarding illegal gambling at 338 Joo Chiat Place, Singapore 15, Sgt. Samuel Seng of the Joo Chiat Police Station conducted a raid at the said premises at 9.30 p.m. and discovered nine ladies engaged in the said offence. Upon entry, five ladies were caught gambling with the card game "cherki":

Madam Tan Kim Choo, Madam Tan Kim Neo, Madam Rosie Tan, Mrs Lim Chuan Chuan and Madam Esther See. Four other ladies were caught gambling with "mah jong": Madam Sally Wee, her sister Madam Candy Wee, Madam Gan Pu Teh and Madam Anna Chow.

The "mahjong" tiles and "cherki" cards were confiscated and all nine ladies were led out of the house via the back door into the station's "Black Maria" van. They are being remanded for questioning for an indefinite period pending further investigation.

Sgt Samuel Seng

Joo Chiat Police Station

11.30 p.m.

Friday, 13th September 1962

PRESENTED BY





SUPPORTED BY





## CHARACTER WITNESSES

#### President's Message



The overwhelming success
of 'Bibiks Behind Bars' as a
comedy staged at the Marine
Parade Community Club in the
Peranakan heartland in

May 2002 encouraged The Peranakan Association to evolve the wayang into a much more ambitious production.

After months of planning and revisions,
The Peranakan Association, in collaboration
with The Marine Parade Community Club, is
now proud to present our extended version of
'Bibiks Behind Bars' - our very first
Peranakan Musical comedy with specially
composed songs and lyrics.

We hope you will enjoy the laughter, music and a rather humorous if somewhat 'embarrassing' part of our history. However we also hope that this production will be remembered as a cultural effort that reaches out to, and includes, not only the members of the Peranakan community but also to the members of the Malay, Eurasian, Chinese and Indian communities. By sharing our heritage through this medium of the performing arts we are confident that we can continue to play our part in bringing closer together, under one roof, our various communities.

And hopefully, the more spacious
Kallang Theatre will provide those who were
unable to obtain tickets for the previous
shows the opportunity not to miss it this time.

I must thank the extremely hardworking members of The Peranakan Association's Cultural Development Group led by Baba Richard Tan for their untiring efforts and zealous enthusiasm in the planning and production of this project, and to pay tribute to them for their wonderful support and the unstinted dedication with which they have addressed themselves to the arduous task of ensuring not only the success of 'Bibiks Behind Bars', but also the continuing development of a century of Peranakan theatre.

#### LEE KIP LEE

#### President

The Peranakan Association

#### Chairman's Message



In line with our vision of making Marine Parade Community Club the Centre of Excellence for Performing Arts, Marine Parade

Community Club Management Committee is jointly staging a musical comedy with The Peranakan Association entitled 'Bibiks Behind Bars'. This entertaining and hilarious comedy attempts to relive the days of old when such shows were common and also aims to bring to us, the same kampong spirit of unity in fun and laughter. This musical reminiscent of the Peranakan culture and heritage should more importantly remind us of our unique cultural diversity and racial harmony that prevails in Singapore.

Marine Parade Community Club will continue to provide for more of such delightful performances not only to stay relevant in the arts scene but also bring to our members and residents of Marine Parade quality shows to enhance our cultural and artistic heritage.

Mayor Othman Haron Eusofe for his encouragement and strong support, the artistes for their talented performances and the organising committee for their untiring efforts to bring to you this entertaining musical comedy.

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#### Mayor's Message



My congratulations to The Peranakan Association for its successful staging of the comedy 'Bibiks Behind Bars'. My wife and I thoroughly enjoyed the earlier version, which was staged at the Marine Parade Community Club.

I am sure that this new extravaganza, with specially composed music and lyrics, will provide a more enjoyable and memorable experience.

Beyond the comedy and hilarity, this performance makes an important contribution to help promote more understanding of Singapore's rich cultural heritage. I believe that it will facilitate more understanding, sharing and appreciation of the Peranakan heritage. As more members of the many communities that make Singapore show their commitment and keen interest to earnestly learn and share the cultures and heritage of their neighbours and friends we will move forward confidently to be a more strong, vibrant and cohesive nation. Our multi-culturalism is a valuable asset, a deep repository of varying experiences and ideas, which we could continuously leverage on to boost our capacity and competitiveness.

My best wishes to The Peranakan Association for more success in all its endeavours.

UTHMAN		HARON	EUSOFE	
Mayor	of	Southeast	District	
		10-110		

MP for Marine Parade GRC

COMPLAINT

#### NAME: BABA RICHARD TAN

Artistic Director & Chairman of the Cultural Development Group The Peranakan Association

In just over two years, The Peranakan Association's Cultural Development Group has been making waves with their cultural performances and outreach programmes. They have entertained foreign and local dignitaries, tourists and of course our local community in schools, charity homes, shopping malls, and many private functions. With strong volunteer support from dedicated members, we started with a Choir - The Peranakan Voices. Today, we also have a pool of actors, singers, dancers and musicians. Looking at the number of application forms to join the Group, things will be getting even better!

'Bibiks Behind Bars' is based on interviews of the older generation about true stories from the past. Taking artistic license to turn it into a musical comedy, we hope that this production will not only bring out the lighter side of a long-gone Peranakan way of life, but also express our rich culture and heritage in music, drama, song and dance. With the rediscovery of two Wayang Peranakan veterans from the 1960s - Baba Francis Hogan and Baba Georgie Lee - this production has benefited from their invaluable experiences and advice. Moving away from the usual theme of domestic family squabbles, this production's cross-cultural appeal reaches out to a larger community of fellow Peranakans - the Malay, Indian and Eurasian communities - and non-Peranakans. With celebrity guests stars Noorlinah Mohamed, Nora Samosair, Karen Lim, Darren Seah and Tony Quek, I am sure we are all in for some surprises!

I would like to thank our sponsors, the organising committee, and each and everyone of you who has contributed and supported us. (And you know who you are!) To Babes Conde and John Lee: WOW! The music and new songs are fabulous! To Uncle Kip Lee, Peter Wee,

Peter Lee: 'Kam Siah lah!' for all the guidance and invaluable help! To Andy Tan, Marlene Foo, Irene Ooi and Nelson Li: I could not have done it without you!

And now, just sit back, relax and have a great time!!!

# LIST OF ACCUSED

## Accused Alias

Bibik Tau Yu (Matriarch upstairs)

Bibik Tan Kim Choo (Matriarch downstairs)

Molly (Tau Yu's daughter in-law)

Wong Ah Nui (Kim Choo's Maid)

Nyonya Tan Kim Neo (Kim Choo's sister-in-law)

Esther See (Rosie's Best Friend)

Rosie Tan (Kim Choo's younger sister-in-law)

Mrs Lim Chuan Chuan (Kim Neo's Cherki Kaki)

Mrs Anna Chow (Chap Jee Kee Ah Soh)

Nyonya Sally Wee (Mahjong kaki 1)

Nyonya Candy Wee (Mahjong Kaki 2)

Police Sergeant Sam Seng (of Joo Chiat Police Station)

Ah Tur (Police Warden)

Cappucine Neo (La Paloma Hostess 1)

Bibik Putch (Mahjong Kaki 3)

Inspector Ivan Chew (of Joo Chiat Police Station)

Stanley (Tau Yu's only grandson)

Amy (Kim Neo's daughter)

Rose Chan (Star of La Paloma)

Kim Novak (La Paloma Hostess 2)

Police Constables

Francis Hogan

Georgie Lee

Cynthia Lee

Jessie Cheang

Mabel Lee

Shirley Tay

Alicia Ang

Irene Ooi

Irene Lim

Irene Poh

Veronica Ong

Nelson Li

Gilbert Yap

Rita Bertrand Tan

Shirley Kua

Tony Quek

Darren Seah

Noorlinah Mohamed

Nora Samosair

Karen Lim

Samuel/Wee Leong/Benji

#### INSTRUMENTAL OVERTURE

#### BIBIKS BEHIND BARS!

The Peranakan Voices

#### ACT ONE

## In Bibik Kim Choo's house (downstairs)

MAID SAMA MATRIARCH

Georgie Lee & Jessie Cheang

### In Bibik Tau Yu's house (upstairs)

ALA DONDANG SAYANG!

Francis Hogan

#### By the staircase

LAGU CHINTA, BABA NYONYA

Darren Seah & Noorlinah Mohamed

## In Bibik Kim Choo's house (the gambling den!)

TEH SAMA KOPI!

Irene Poh, Veronica Ong, Irene Lim, Shirley Kua, Alicia Ang, Mabel Lee, Georgie Lee, Shirley Tay, Irene Ooi & Jessie Cheang

#### --- INTERMISSION ---

#### ACT TWO

At the La Paloma Club

CHEEK TO CHEEK, IT HAD TO BE YOU, BABA NYONYA CHA CHA MEDLEY

The Peranakan Voices & Dancers

# In the Joo Chiat Police Station Remand Cell

MEN!

Karen Lim, Rita Bertrand Tan, Nora Samosair, Shirley Tay, Irene Ooi, Alicia Ang & Mabel Lee

#### In the Inspector's office

THE LAW IS THE LAW!

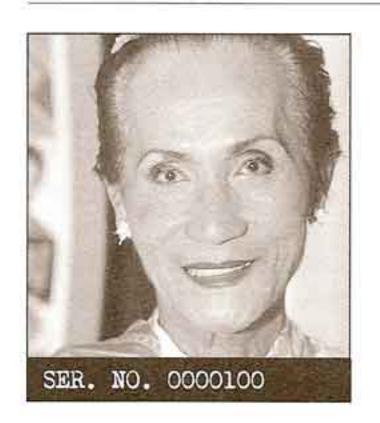
Tony Quek

## In Bibik Kim Choo's House

BIBIKS BEHIND BARS! (REPRISE)

Full cast

# PROFILES OF ACCUSED











#### Bibik Tau Yu | FRANCIS HOGAN

Baba Francis Hogan will finally make a grand comeback to the Wayang Peranakan stage! A well-respected popular anak wayang of the 1950s and 1960s, Francis has over those early years, starred, directed, composed and co-produced numerous Wayang Peranakan classics! Some of his glorious moments on stage were in long forgotten classics like 'Nasib Anak Tiri', 'Anak Noraka', 'Kehidopan Si Buta', 'Ayer Mata Ibu', 'Janda Kaya', and 'Nyai Dasima'. The Peranakan Association is most honoured that Francis has come out of retirement to share with us, his vast, rich experience of the Wayang Peranakan, which we hope will open up our culture to new routes of artistic expression.

#### Bibik Kim Choo | GEORGIE LEE

Baba Georgie Lee's passion for the stage proves that after all these years, he has never lost his stage magic and dynamic persona. Off stage, he is often 'in character', always teasing and cajoling his fellow actors with improvisational pantuns (verse forms) and witty repartee in the Baba patois. Among the last of the special breed of anak wayang from the 1950s and 1960s, Georgie has played numerous roles, ranging from an 'extra turn' dancer, to a 'li ko' (nun) in Peranakan plays such as 'Anyot Diri', and 'Li Ko Mia'. His sharp and witty portrayal of Bibik Kim Neo brought the house down during our earlier version of 'Bibiks Behind Bars' at the Marine Parade Community Centre in May this year.

#### Myonya Molly Gan | CYNTHIA LEE

Another veteran actress of the Wayang Peranakan, Cynthia has been in numerous Peranakan plays since 'Pileh Menantu' in the 1980s. Aside from being a mother of two with a hectic work schedule, Cynthia's escape from the real world finds her here playing the role of a mother who is hard at work! I guess you can say that art imitates life?

#### Ah Mui | JESSIE CHEANG

Nyonya Jessie's total commitment to being a better actress in whatever role she portrays has taken her on a joyous theatrical journey playing varied characters - from Auntie, to sister and now, as maid! Her comic timing is impeccable! Watch out for her equally charming 'Ah Sum' role, in the upcoming ArtCentral cooking show and sitcom, 'The Ways of the Matriarch' this November!

#### Nyonya Tan Kim Neo | MABEL LEE

A school teacher by day, and a part time actress of the Wayang Peranakan, Nyonya Mabel Lee's stage confidence and focused high energy is truly the mark of a veteran anak wayang! Always ready to support her fellow actors and share with them her 'tricks of the trade', she is an inspiration to many other up and coming anak wayang wannabees!











SER. NO. 0000109

#### Nyonya Esther See | SHIRLEY TAY

Another seasoned anak wayang, Shirley's real skills lie in her Peranakan cuisine! A full-time chef with the Swissotel Merchant Court, she still manages to find time for her other passion - Line Dancing! On stage, her comic timing and stage presence has found her a fan club following of other Nyonyas and aunties who completely relate with her stage persona. Look out for her leading role as the Matriarch in the upcoming ArtCentral series this November! As Nyonya Esther See, she will send you into stitches of laughter as she rushes to the loo...

#### Nyonya Rosie Tan | ALICIA ANG

A new face to the scene, Alicia Ang started out as a soprano in the Association's choir, the Peranakan Voices. A natural born leader, she has also been appointed co-ordinator of our perANAKan WAYANG Drama group. Her animated, yet charismatic elegance became the seed of a budding talent ready to blossom, given the right artistic nurturing. So it is only apt that her role of Rosie will further affirm her dream of becoming a professional stage actress.

#### Mrs Lim Chuan Chuan | IRENE OOI

Irene's larger than life character is no farther from her everyday self. As this is her very first encounter performing in a Peranakan musical comedy, the boundaries of her reality have been blurred playing the role of Mrs Lim Chuan Chuan, which allows her to ham it up even more! And having found a new playground where she can express her 'real talent!', she is now able to combine all her favourite pastimes into one! That is, having a game of mahjong and cherki, and doing it all on stage!

#### Anna Chow | IRENE LIM

Another member of the Peranakan Voices, this charming lady, who simply loves all things Peranakan, has been immersed into our culture more than some Nyonyas born into a Peranakan home. Her boundless energy and positive enthusiasm are also her winning trademarks that will propel her glorious rise into the world of Wayang Peranakan as a great actress in the making!

#### Myonya Sally Wee | IRENE POH

Irene's very first experience on stage in a Wayang Peranakan at the age of six as a flower girl in a Peranakan wedding pageant has left a deep impression with dreams of maybe one day returning to acting again. She was only a little girl when she was involved in a play starring Diva Francis Hogan. So after 40 years later, they are both once again united on stage in this show!



SER. NO. 0000110



SER. NO. 0000111



SER. NO. 0000112





SER. NO. 0000114

#### Nyonya Candy Wee | VERONICA ONG

Nyonya Candy, a cousin of Nyonya Sally (Irene Poh), has the mahjong fever! But in real life, both ladies are close friends who enjoy a good game of mahjong and karaoke-ing! Both belong to the Alto section of the Peranakan Voices. This is her very first foray into a Peranakan musical comedy. She may at first appear shy, but be assured that when the ladies are together, it is like one big happy noisy family.

#### Sergeant Sam Seng | NELSON LI

Jack of all trades, Baba Nelson is also our resident chef who caters only for special and private parties! He is also our very own inhouse Peranakan fashion pageant advisor and co-ordinator, training our Youth Group models and dancers in the finer points of fashion grooming and deportment. But here, you will only know of him as Police Sergeant Sam Seng.

#### Warden Ah Tur | GILBERT YAP

Gilbert is currently a resident actor with the Bukit Chandu Museum interactive theatre programme. He is also juggling between rehearsals, filming for the second season of Mediacorp's drama series 'First Touch'. Some of his past productions include 'Ah Kong's Birthday Party', 'Growing Up' and 'True Files'. His cameo role as the Police Warden may be small, but his voice will surely be heard when he performs with the Peranakan Voices during the play's intermission.

#### Cappucine Neo | RITA BERTRAND TAN

There can only be one Rita around! Her fascinating and colorful outlook easily takes you by storm! Rita is all about inventing your own sense of being 'stylo-mylo'. Her unique sense of mix and match fashion fusion between the old and new, traditional and modern never fails to astound you. So her role of Cappucine is going to keep you equally spellbound, reviving the days and ways of a nightclub hostess with the mostest!

#### Bibik Putch | SHIRLEY KUA

Nyonya Shirley's start in the performing arts happened a mere two years ago when she joined the Peranakan Voices as a soprano. But her natural singing and acting talents soon became apparent to all. Bibiks Behind Bars marks her first involvement in a Wayang Peranakan. She will soon be seen in a new ArtsCentral series, Ways of the Matriarch, airing this November, where she plays the mother-in-law of the matriarch.

## EXPERT WITNESSES









#### Inspector Ivan Chew | TONY QUEK

A drama insructor (in primary and secondary schools and ITE) and an actor with 17 years of experience, Tony has worked with numerous theatre companies in Singapore, and has also appeared in a number of Peranakan plays. He is currently our perANAKan WAYANG Group's drama consultant. Tony has also appeared in TV productions such as 'A War Diary' and 'Under One Roof' among others, and has recently starred as the lead actor of a multi-media movie for Sentosa's new Maritime attraction. The creation of the character of the Police Inspector in this production stems largely from his very own comic and spontaneous improvisations.

#### Stanley Gan | DARREN SEAH

Winner of Mediacorp's 'Talentime 2001', Darren is a new force to be reckoned with. Like many well-known actors and singers, he nurtured his talents at the Singapore Armed Forces' Music & Drama Company during his years in national service. Since 1997, Darren has travelled with the hit musical 'Chang & Eng' from its Singapore runs to Beijing, Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur. He is now rehearsing for his role as the young emperor in 'Forbidden City' at the Esplanade. You may have seen him in Mediacorp's latest sitcom, 'Oh Carol'.

#### Amy Tan | NOORLINAH MOHAMED

Noorlinah lectures part-time at the National Institute of Education (Voice Production and Acting). Since 1988 she has been active in the theatre scene performing with companies like TheatreWorks, The Necessary Stage and Action Theatre, and has worked with children with special needs and introduced drama outreach programmes to schools. A recipient of the Shell-NAC Arts Scholarship in 1998, Noorlinah pursued a Master of Arts in Performance Studies at the acclaimed Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. The productions she has been involved in include 'Beauty World', 'Sunrise Sunset', 'Trojan Women', 'Longing', 'Mortal Sins', 'Mail Order Brides and the Oriental Takeways', 'Lear' and 'Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral'. This is Noorlinah's first guest appearance in a Peranakan musical comedy, playing a young daughter in love with Stanley, the grandson of Bibik Tau Yu.

#### Rose Chan | NORA SAMOSAIR

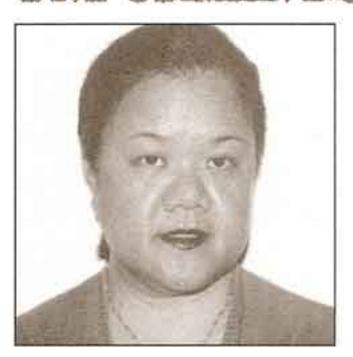
Nora Samosir has acted on stage and screen and enjoys them both. She is currently appearing as Mrs Fernandez in the Channel-i television series 'Ah Girl' but she is perhaps better known for appearing on 'Pyramid Game' and 'Masters of the Sea' as Lillian Tan. Her many stage performances include Agnes in 'Asian Boys Vol. 1', Yente in 'Fiddler on the Roof', the title role in 'Miss Julie', Hecuba in 'Trojan Women', the Wigmaker in 'Rashomon', the older woman in 'Untitled Women #1', Amanda Lam in 'Mixed Signals', the cabaret Mummy in Beauty World, Sally in Scorpion Orchid, the Warhorse in 'Lao Jiu', and Aunt Aggie in 'Ah Kong's Birthday Party'. In 1999, she played Madame Chan, the nightclub owner, in Apple Films' film noir 'Shanghai Lily'. Her 'day job' is teaching Drama with the Visual and Performing Arts Academic Group at the National Institute of Education. In this production she plays 'Classy Rose Chan' who has some wise advice for the Bibiks Behind Bars!



#### Kim Novak | KAREN LIM

A well-known stage and TV actress, Karen also directs, scripts and compose for school and corporate events. Director of Arts Education with DramaPlus Arts, she is also a piano and music teacher. You must have seen her recently in Mediacorp's new sitcom, 'Oh Carol' with Darren Seah. She has also appeared in Alterasians II - 'Man in the Cupboard', '3 Rooms', 'A War Diary', 'Triple Nine', 'Shiver' and 'Restless', a new upcoming show. On stage, she was in, 'A Twist Of Fate', 'Ah Kong's Birthday Party', 'Breast Issues', 'The Crucible' and 'Land of a Thousand Dreams'. This being Karen's first Peranakan Musical comedy, it is strangely her way of rediscovering her 'mixed up' Peranakan heritage.

## INFORMANTS



#### Musical Director and Composer | BABES CONDE

A very well respected and much sought-after musical doyenne in the Singapore scene for more than 20 years, Babes Conde is the cultural and musical advisor and choral director of our choir, The Peranakan Voices. She has collaborated as musical director in several major Singapore musicals such as 'Beauty World' and 'Fried Rice Paradise' and is a singer, music arranger and composer. Her hits include 'Funny' (which still receives copious air time) and the theme song of the TV series 'Extraordinary People'. Aside from juggling between her work at LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts, and as a private vocal trainer for celebrities such as Fann Wong, Donita Rose and Kit Chan, her dedication and invaluable contribution to The Peranakan Association's cultural activities has inspired and raised the standards of our Choir and now, of our ambitious musical venture.



#### Director | RICHARD TAN

With all his years of experience in staging concerts, corporate events, charity shows, musicals, national events and Peranakan plays, Baba Richard Tan is currently one of the Peranakan community's greatest cultural assets. He was from 1983 to 1998 the artistic director of the SAF Music & Drama Company. He has also directed and choreographed numerous productions including 'Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance' (1990), 'Godspell' (1991) 'Sing to the Dawn' (1997), and was on the National Day Parade committee from 1985 until 2000, and is still on the Chingay Parade committee as a creative consultant. He has been instrumental in developing the Association's cultural programme, including the development of The Peranakan Voices, our dancers, the recent plays, as well as a cultural and educational multimedia roadshow for schools and local communities. He is also artistic director of Dance Circle Studios.



#### Choreographer | RICHARD CHIA

Another true Baba, Richard Chia has, in spite of his busy teaching and show rehearsal schedule, put aside time for our culture and will be choreographing some of the dance sequences in the musical interlude, opening before the second act. His many performances have included roles in 'Nutcracker Suite' (1988, 1994), 'West Side Story' (1986), 'Beauty World' (1992), 'Mortal Sins' (1995) 'Godspell' (1993), 'Rent' (2001). He is currently busy with 'Forbidden City', the musical that premieres next month at The Esplanade.

# PERANAKAN VOICES



Established in July 2000, the Peranakan Voices now comprises 28 dedicated Babas and Nyonyas who believe in promoting Peranakan Culture through Music, Song and Dance! Singing in four-part harmony, they bring back the glorious magic of the Peranakan musical lifestyle with their unique interpretation of nostalgic songs. From 'dondang sayang', 'keronchong' to modern popular songs and new, original compositions, the group's repertoire reflect the tradition and innovation of the evolving Peranakans!

The group has performed on numerous events (many of them raising funds for charity) from private functions to public shopping malls; with audiences ranging from school children to the elderly residents of old folks' homes; from foreign dignitaries and ambassadors to the theatre going public!

The Peranakan Voices are: Alicia Ang, Sabri Chew, Jessie Cheang, Anne Chia, Francis Chia, Peggy Chua, Marlene Foo, Joseph Goh, Patrick Huang, Albert Koh, Angeline Kong, Shirley Kua, Irene Lim, Teddy Lim, Mabel Long, Patrick Ng, Ruby Ng, Elizabeth Ng, Mary Ong, Veronica Ong, Irene Ooi, Irene Poh, Kelvyn Saw, Gina Sim, Shirley Tay & Gilbert Yap.

#### Accomplices:

Special Events Chairman

Cultural Advisor

Director

Production & Stage Manager Event Treasurer

Musical & Choral Director

Lyricists Music Composer

Music Arranger Choreographer

Stage Designer Wardrobe Manager

Technical Manager Lighting Designer

Sound Engineer

Recording Engineer Sound & Lights Operators

English Surtitles by Deputy Stage Manager Stage Crew & Dressers

Hair

Make Up & Make-up Artists Publicity/Press Coverage

Front Of House

Ticketing & Reservations

VIP Reception Design House

Souvenir Programme Editor Advertisements & Sponsorships

Photographer

Voice Over & Announcer

Bibiks Behind Bars - Website Designer Lee Wee Leong Antique Stage Costumes and Props

Guest Dancers

VIP Ushers/Helpers

Alan Koh, Hon Treasurer

The Peranakan Association

Peter Wee, First Vice President

The Peranakan Association

Richard Tan, Chairman, Cultural Development Group

The Peranakan Association

Andy Tan Yongyao Arthur D'Castro

Babes Conde

Babes Conde, John Lee, Richard Tan

Babes Conde Shah Tahir Richard Chia

Jeremy Koek of Dezign4mat

Mothar Kasim Tay Huey Meng

Jeffery Tan Chye Leng, courtesy of Theatreworks

Shah Tahir

Jason Tan of Eastward Audio Kallang Theatre Technical crew

Daisy Tan Grace Low

Engie Ho, Jac Tan, Melissa Kwek, Lee Wee Leong, Benji Lim, Samuel Choo

Ashley Lim of Ashley's Salon

MAC Cosmetics

Rita Bertrand Tan, Elsa Lim, Richard Tan, Andy Tan, Rita Bertrand Tan

Lim Geok Huay, perANAKan YOUTH Group, Bebe Seet, Heather Ong

Peter Wee

Jeanette Chan, Corrine Tan

Equinox Art & Design

Peter Lee

Rita Bertrand Tan

Janie Chua

Alvin Oon

Katong Antique House Richard Chia, Jacqueline Pereira, Heather Ong, Jeremy Bek,

Noorita Salleh, Anthony Lee

Nadine Kang, Patsy Goh, Noreen Chan, Judy Lim, Caroline Shun,

Maggie Loh, Rosalind Lim, Damien Jit, Timothy Lim

# JAIL HOUSE BLUES

BIBIKS BEHIND BARS! (The Theme Song Lah!)

Presenting our latest comedy
Bibiks Behind Bars!
Old tales! A brand new story
Bibiks Behind Bars!
Got new and familiar melodies
For you and for me!
So come, join the families
Main Cherki! Mahjong Kaki! Pong!

Bila you main judi
Don't play with money!
Bila Police dating nanti
Say, 'we play play only!'
Bibik, Nyonya suma kena
Masok 'Black Maria!'

A-la-mak! Kus Se-ma-ngat!

Bibiks Behind Bars!

Ai-Yee!!! Ma-lu Se-kali!!!

#### Acknowledgements:

We would like to convey our heartfelt thanks to:

All our Sponsors, Advertisers, Supporters, Members & Friends, who have in one way or another dedicated and contributed their invaluable time to making this event a meaningful milestone in promoting the Peranakan culture & heritage.

Marine Parade Community Club Management Committee: Dr Loh Soo Ann, BBM, (Chairman), Mr Brian Phuan (Treasurer), Mr Leonard Seow (Organising Chairman), Mdm Jennifer Yeo (Senior Constituency Manager), Mr Kanapaty RK (Deputy Constituency Manager) & Mrs Mabel Long (Secretary). The National Arts Council

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Prosecutor mentioned that a complaint had been made to him by a very well-known gentleman that his wife, who had had jewellery valued at \$50,000, had lost it all in chap-ji-ki and had had it replaced by paste and cheap imitation.

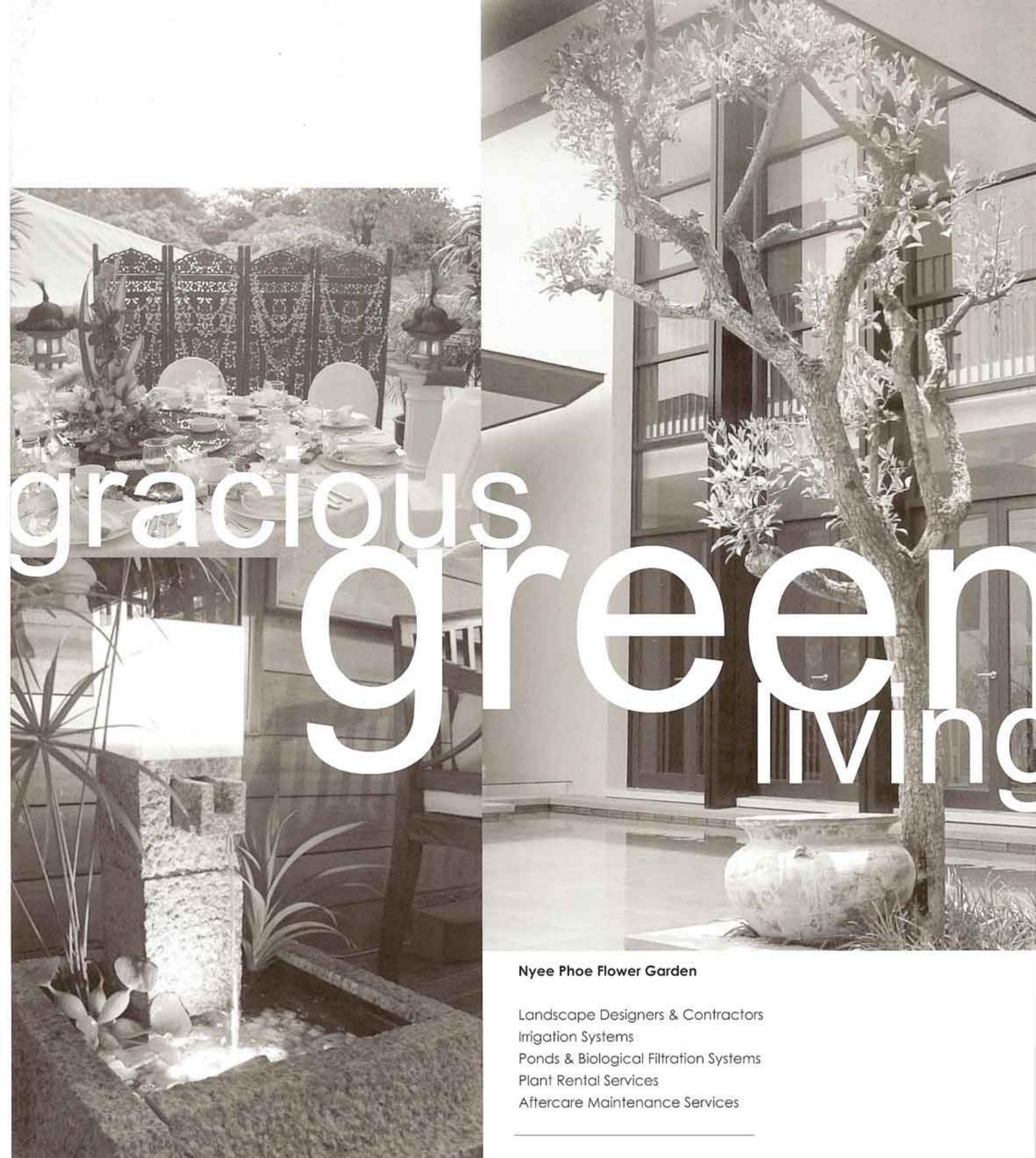
'The evils of chap-ji-ki gambling, so attractive to the Nyonyas (Straits-Chinese women), came before public notice in 1909, more particularly through proceedings taken in two police court cases. In the first case, eleven Nyonyas (including the banker) and the occupier were arrested on the top floor of a house which was then under seizure and in charge of the bailiff's watchmen. The Deputy Public Prosecutor mentioned that a complaint had been made to him by a very well-known gentleman that his wife, who had had jewellery valued at \$50,000, had lost it all in chap-ji-ki and had had it replaced by paste and cheap imitation. The stakers pleaded guilty and were fined \$25 each, or, in default, two weeks' imprisonment, which the magistrate said would be made "simple" on the application of their husbands. At the same time he advised the husbands and relatives not to pay the fines, but to let the women undergo imprisonment. The press reports were silent as to whether any of the husbands took the magistrate's advice. The occupier was sent to prison for eight months, while the banker was fined \$1,500.

The other event was known as the "Wong-tye-sin" case. Wong-tye-sin was a god of fortune which had come into prominence by prescribing medicine during an outbreak if the plague in Canton some fifteen years before. This god has been brought to Singapore and four shrines had been

opened, wither a large number of Nyonyas went for advice as to lottery tickets. Hong Wan Kai, who was in charge of the house in Cheng Cheok Street which had been fitted up for the purpose of giving oracles, was charged with pretending or professing to tell fortunes. For the defence, it was stated that there was a large temple to this god in Canton, and that the ignorant people among the Chinese here believed in the oracle and consulted it about medicines, births, marriages and deaths. And this was a part of their religious faith which should not be interfered with. The accused was convicted and fined \$50. He appealed with the result that in place of the fine he was sentenced to two months' rigorous imprisonment. Mr Justice Sercombe Smith, who heard the appeal, said that as the appellant had been convicted before for telling fortunes for his own profit, his lordship intended to do something which would put a stop to this kind of masquerading under the grab of religion and of imposing on the poor Chinese of Singapore.

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ONE HUNDRED YEARS' HISTORY OF THE CHINESE IN SINGAPORE, JOHN MURRAY, LONDON, 1923, P. 440



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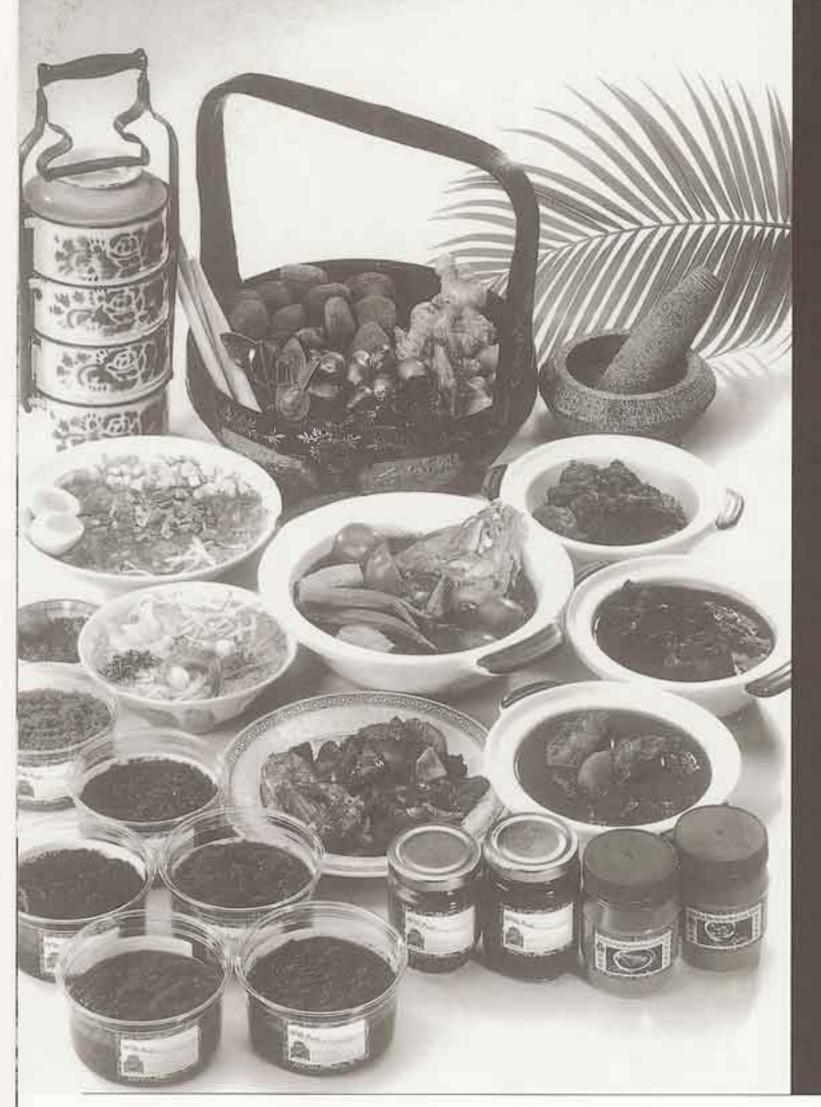
Please convey my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to your boys for a job well done. I am glad I chose Aardwolf Pestkare..... very professional and dedicated. - Ms Ang

We finally managed to catch the snake..... thanks to the excellent service provided by the Aardwolf Pestkare team. Please convey our sincere thanks to your team for relieving us of this major anxiety. - The Anthony Family

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# A TREATfor OUR SENSES

Heather Ong muses on jewellery therapy, watching TV and other happenings of perANAKan-the Youth Group

THE LAST FEW MONTHS WERE A TREAT FOR OUR SENSES, AS WE EXPERIENCED THE SIGHTS, THE FEEL, THE TASTES AND THE EXTRAVAGANCE OF OUR PERANAKAN CULTURE.



One Saturday in June, a group of young people met at Katong Antique House to learn more about an essential part of a Nyonya's life — her jewellery. Baba Peter Wee began by introducing pieces of jewellery in chronological order, from the simple styles of earlier pieces, to the over-the-top, extravagant pieces made during the Peranakan heyday of the 1900s.

We had a chance to see and touch these rare antique pieces, admiring their fine workmanship, and enjoying the stories behind them. Beautifully crafted belt buckles, earrings and kerosangs were passed around the table, as our knowledgeable speaker taught us the finer points of collecting Peranakan jewellery. Among us were some young members who were just

starting their collections, venturing gingerly into this exciting world of Peranakan collectibles. They brought interesting pieces of their own for a quick appraisal. Many had unearthed beautiful anklets, hairpins, and one large kerosang serong with dazzling multi-tiered blooms. There were also some heart-stopping moments, as we shared one another's pain upon learning that some recent purchases were not as old as initially thought, that is, they were good fakes!

Mrs Betty Mariette, an experienced collector, reassured us that making mistakes in the quest for Peranakan jewellery was part of a learning process. We were to be aware of new jewellery being passed off as antiques, but with perseverance and experience, we would eventually be able to judge the authenticity of the pieces.

# We ended the session with tasty treats like kueh pie-tee, tarts, cakes and fragrant kopi.

The Peranakan culture was also featured in the television series *On the Trail of the Phoenix*, shown over ArtsCentral in June and July. Each of the six episodes was a visual and aural feast, covering the history, the households, the clothes, the jewellery and the weddings of the Peranakans. An important link throughout the show was Noreen's 90 year-old grandmother, Mdm Elsie Chia. (Noreen is an active member of the youth group). Sprightly and articulate, she gave snippets about daily life in her father's household, her wedding, and the kebaya fashions of the 1930s. Some of us young



members have benefited from her answers; we have seen her personal cookbooks, tasted her cooking, and copied her kasut manek designs!

The series also featured some *sarongs*, *baju panjang* and handkerchiefs belonging to my great grandmother who lived in the 1900s. The clothes had lain undisturbed in a drawer for many years, but were still well preserved. I marvelled at the feel of the fine textiles, the tiny hand-stitched seams, and this physical connection with my ancestors.

I echo the sentiments of several young Peranakans. We are proud of, yet fearful of our enormous responsibility to preserve the culture and transmit it.

Join us, as we learn more about our culture, makan, and share our experiences. Keep updated about events by subscribing to our free yahoogroups service. Send an email from your account to peranakan-subscribe@yahoogroups.com>

# The Ways of the Matriarch

The Association lends a hand in supporting a new TV series. Chang Soh Kiak executive producer and writer of Sitting in Pictures, reports on location.



"IT STARTS OFF WITH A NOTION, AND THEN WITH PROPER FUNDING YOU HAVE AN IDEA AND THEN A CONCEPT". Not his exact words, but Woody Allen sort of summarised how this series came about. I had this notion of crossing genres; a programme that contains the elements of drama, comedy, reality TV and cooking demonstration. When ArtsCentral invited production houses to pitch on a programme about Peranakan food, I knew it was time to squeeze the santan. I sold the idea, ArtsCentral loved it and voila — funding money.

Then came the hard part. A notion is a great thing to flaunt, but nothing you can really use. So, lots of coffee, late nights, emails to friends and relatives, going through recipe books, and mostly remembering. How did my mother cook? What did my aunts talk about? How did my friends' mothers and aunties behave? The memory of the Nyonyas and Babas of my past helped me to shape the characters, and create the plots for their daily situations. I had to do a lot of cooking as well...to test out the recipes, but also to get an idea of what can happen in a cooking situation. And so in some cases, the story wrote itself while I was testing out the recipes. Within the batter for the *kueh belandah*, there was a story of love, secret messages and counter-revolutionaries. Within the *achar*, there was no story, except a lot of hard work and plenty of *rempah*.

I also believe that within everyone of us there is a bibik screaming to get out. While writing the first episode, three bibiks were making comments in the back of my head. So, I gave them life..., three bibiks of Macbethan proportions. They were meant only for the first episode, but, with bibiks, once they talk, they never stop.

The final shaping of the characters came from the cast. Corinne who plays Fern did not know that she had to do any real cooking. Since this series also crosses the genre of reality TV, I made her ad lib the cooking bits. Those were great moments: burning herself on the charcoal, putting her hands into raw meat, and crying from chopped onions. I think Corinne can cook now. I love my cast and while chatting with them, I saw their true characters. So one day, while lights were being set up, I decided to let them ham it up. My camera assistant, Dean, had a new bike. My actresses were all dressed up in their finery. What else could I do except to put them on the bike?! The result? Watch and judge.

In fact, watch and judge the whole 8-part series. It starts on Friday 8 November on ArtsCentral. It is a bit like Days of Our Lives meeting The Naked Chef in a Survivor situation.

# Hartey Birtheday!

The Association's Cultural Development Group is 2 years old



The Association's Cultural Development Group celebrated its 2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary on Saturday, 20 July 2002 at the Serangoon Gardens Country Club with a sumptuous buffet dinner for 70

of its guests, members and families. The dress theme was Naturally...Batik. Baba Richard Tan, Head of the Cultural Development Group, welcomed everyone and led the cutting of the Birthday cake and the Birthday song. He also introduced our newly formed BabaBand, comprising Babas from the Peranakan Voices and friends, which played hits from the golden 60s to the swinging 80s to everyone's delight. Guests were also entertained by members of the perANAKan WAYANG

and the Peranakan Voices and dancers, who performed a comedy skit, and organised a karaoke competition and line-dancing. Compere Baba Alvin Oon who conducted the hilarious 'Spoon Game' had everyone tickled. Lots

of games and lucky draw prizes were generously sponsored and all the guests went home with a prize. The organising committee led by Baba Patrick Huang was commended for its tireless effort in organising a memorable event.



Well Done!

# Restaurants

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# PERANAKAN

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Yes, it was Racial Harmony Day once again! And this year, our Association was invited by Cedar Girls Secondary School to present our Peranakan Roadshow! The school approached the Association through our website. Our resident emcee Baba Alvin Oon,

dressed in his baju lokchuan, introduced to the students and staff the various aspects of our Peranakan culture and heritage through a multi-media show. The MTV-style presentation gave a sweet, sharp and simple yet informative insight to all things Peranakan, starting from our historical roots, to customs, traditions, Nyonya cuisine, our attire and jewellery, and even Peranakan antiques, ceramics and architecture.

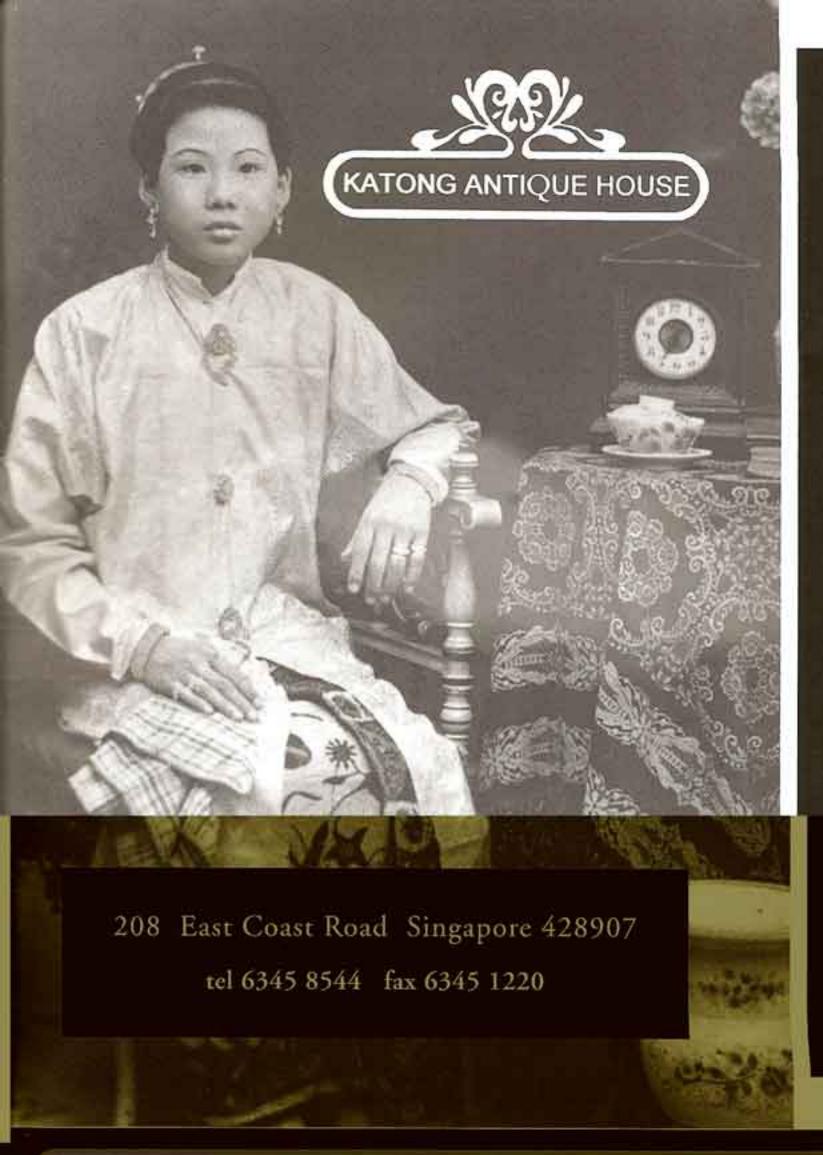
The segment that got the most thrills and squeals happened when four students and two teachers from the school took to the catwalk and modelled in our traditional baju panjang and kebayas. No details were spared! From

head to toe - the naik sanggul, bunga chot, right down to antique kasut manek, accessorised with the bakul siah and waxed paper umbrellas — all the elements turned the costume presentation into a grand fashion pageant!

And for the final segment, twelve members of our Peranakan Voices entertained with their repertoire of old and new Peranakan tunes together with some nostalgic English evergreens. Our signature song, Bunga Sayang, was an instant hit! We closed with Nyonya Manis, a singalong song, inviting the students to join us in a joget session!

It was truly a warm and resounding response from the cheers and thunderous applause we received at the end of the curtain call! By the time the show was over, we are certain that every person in the auditorium must have truly experienced our unique Peranakan magic!

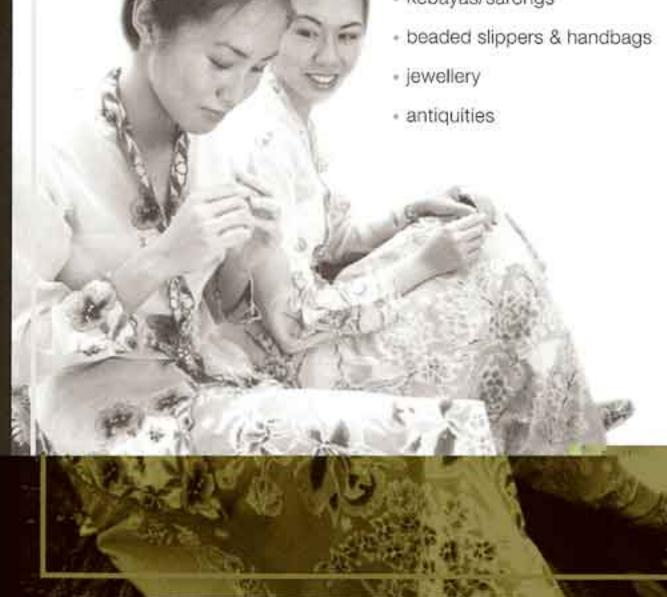
So, if there are any schools or organisations who may be interested to 'book' our Roadshow, please contact us at: enquiries@peranakan.org.sg, or visit our website at www.peranakan.org.sg.



# Bebe's Niche

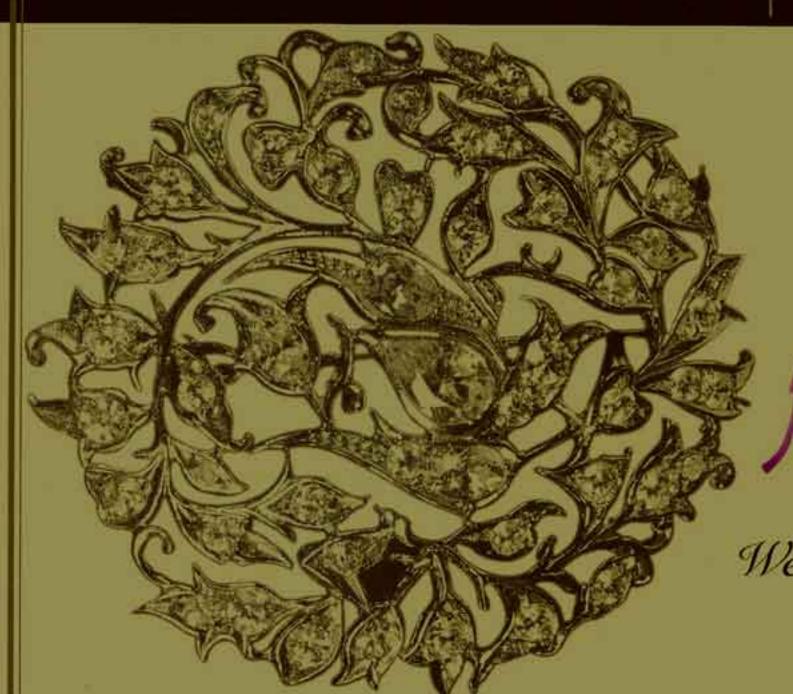
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# The Peranakan Association's 102<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary and Annual Dinner & Dance

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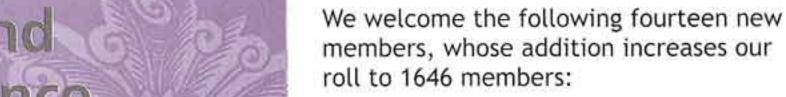
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OBITUARY



ALICE TAN KIM YOKE was the third daughter of Tun Sir Cheng Lock Tan, one of the chief architects of Malaysian independence and founder of the Malaysian Chinese Association, and sister of former Malaysian Finance Minister Tun Tan Siew Sin. She studied at the Methodist Girls' School in Malacca and then briefly at Raffles College in Singapore. During the Pacific War, she escaped to Bangalore with her family. After the war she enrolled at Eugene Univerity in Oregon, USA and upon graduation, moved to London where she eventually read law at Lincoln's Inn, qualifying as a barrister-at-law in 1958. She returned home and was called to the Singapore Bar in 1959 and the Malaysian Bar in 1960. She worked for two Singapore firms, Rodyk & Davidson, and Sison & Delay.

In 1967 she donated a large number of her father's papers to the National Archives of Malaysia, and a year later,

donated the remainder to the Institute of South East Asian Studies (ISEAS). She married Marcus Scott-Ross in 1970. In 1990 she completed a biography of her father and in 1995 together with her younger sister Agnes Tan Kim Lwi who survives her, she formed the Tun Dato Sir Cheng Lock Tan Trust Scholarship Fund with the ISEAS, donating \$16 million for that purpose. The sisters felt that as their father did not have the opportunity to further his studies owing to a lack of funds, this scholarship was set up in his honour to ensure that it would always be possible for Singaporean students to pursue the post-graduate course of their choice. Over the years she has also been an avid and discreet supporter of The Peranakan Association through many private donations for projects and events. She was a

first cousin of our President Lee Kip Lee and a third cousin once removed of our 1st Vice President Peter Wee. Other cousins include

stage veteran and doyen of dondang sayang William Tan, former Finance Minister Dr Goh Keng Swee, poet and playwright Robert Yeo and history professor Dr Ernest Chew. Her passing on 14 August is a great loss for the Association and for our community.



# Sinaran Collection



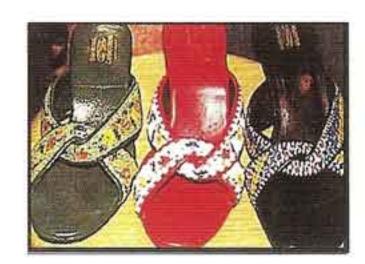




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