

# M1 PEER PLEASURE YOUTH THEATRE FESTIVAL LAUNCH

FESTIVAL  
YOUTH  
REPORTER:  
Ang Kia Yee

## THE YOUTH DREAMS OF THEATRE

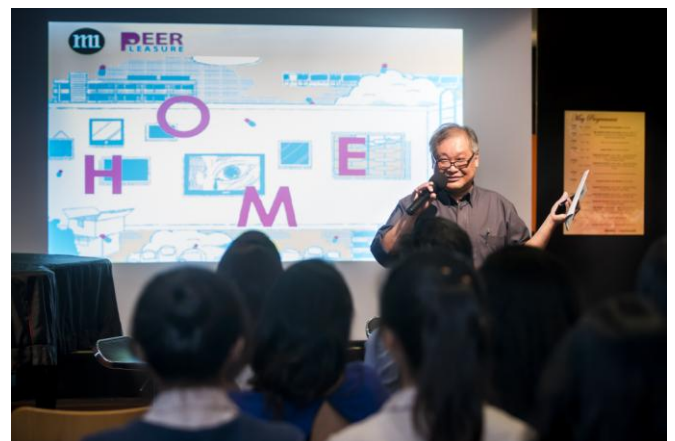
Sitting amongst the audience at the *M1 Peer Pleasure Youth Theatre Festival* launch, I couldn't help but feel a warming vastness in my chest. I will be 20 this year, coming to the imminent end of an eventful gap year. During this year which has felt both incredibly long and incredibly short, I decided to produce, write and direct an independent production with a group of like-minded peers. It stemmed from a desire to just *do*, without over-thinking (leading often to fearing) or a need for prior approval. I wanted to just see what I could do.

*Peer Pleasure* is allowing so many young people to do exactly that, and more. It is giving a group of youth theatre-makers a safe space to showcase their work without having to leap through the accompanying administrative, marketing and financial hoops on their own. Presented by ArtsWok Collaborative with Alvin Tan as Artistic Director, *Peer* signals, I hope, waves and waves of fresh faces to come. It is immensely exciting.

As part of the festival launch, a panel of five debated the question – “Youth Theatre in Singapore: Who Cares?” before an audience of students, educators, practitioners, funders and supporters. Facilitated by drama academic Edmund Chow, the panel discussed the ways in which youth theatre has evolved, the forces youths work against or with to produce their own work, and the responsibility and agency of

different stakeholders to make youth theatre happen.

We must care about youth theatre in Singapore. It is important and valuable not least because it empowers youths by allowing their voices to be heard. It seems that an increasing number of young theatre-makers are reaching for something that is uniquely theirs, be it through devising as a group or writing individual scripts. This brings youth theatre a step closer to realizing its potential as a platform for young people to speak out about issues that matter to them, such as *Home*, the theme of the *M1 Peer Pleasure Youth Theatre Festival* this year.



Furthermore, youth theatre offers a safe space in which youths can consider complex and sometimes sensitive issues, even offering support to one another. It is a mode of critical thinking, empathy and healing invaluable to the growth of youths in our diverse and often troubling world. As Sean Tobin, the head of the Faculty of Theatre at School of The Arts highlighted at the panel discussion, theatre is a mode of learning. In particular, I find that theatre teaches soft skills that make us better people – skills such as listening, communication and collaboration.

In order to proliferate and enrich youth theatre in Singapore, we must celebrate it through festivals and platforms such as *Peer Pleasure*, which offer not only a chance for youth theatre to engage with wider audiences, but also an opportunity for the public to see how much young people can do.

Perhaps more importantly, it is a chance for young theatre-makers themselves to see how much they can do. It is important that we all recognize the vast potential in Singapore's young artists, and together look forward to their growth.

Alongside the celebration of youth theatre must come mentorships that facilitate the development of young theatre-makers. There is a need and, may I say, a demand amongst young people for more theatre programmes that challenge and nurture them beyond their school curriculum and Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs). However, as Kenneth Kwok, Director of Arts & Youth and Strategic Planning at the National Arts Council, as well as Yvonne Tham, Assistant CEO of Esplanade rightly pointed out during the panel discussion, the responsibility lies not merely with external organizations and government agencies to provide these opportunities, but also with youths, who must seek out these programmes for themselves.

Additionally, it is vital that there are mentorships that expose and develop young people in elements of theatre beyond the creative, such as administration, marketing, production and criticism. Theatre is not only about the actor, playwright or director, and so the next generation of administrators, production managers and art critics must similarly be nurtured and groomed in order for the industry to further blossom and thrive.



*“Youth is a dream,  
a form of chemical  
madness.”*

F. Scott Fitzgerald

As young theatre-makers, we must be passionate and proactive. We need to take responsibility for our growth as artists, administrators, producers, technicians, stage managers, directors, writers and dramaturges. Instead of waiting, we simply must stand up and move, seek, discover for ourselves. More importantly, we must have grit. A member of the audience, theatre educator Oniatta Effendi summed it up powerfully when she said, “Beyond that passion, how much are you willing to fight and just push on because of the love for the arts? Because you want to see change? Because you know theatre is so darn powerful and you believe in it? Because there are people around you who think they know what it is, but actually don't? How do you go around fighting these little battles?” I do not yet know if we, the youths of today, have enough of this tenacious spirit, but I have faith that we will rise to the challenge.

Ultimately, youth theatre might seem like a niche area of the theatre scene, but it is in fact the very foundation upon which the next generation of theatre-makers could emerge. Through the process of creating my own show with fellow youth collaborators, I became more invested in the arts, and the experience also allowed me to see that I have a kind of power and potential. It made me believe in myself and the work that I can do for other people. I hope that the young people involved in Peer Pleasure this year see that they, too, are full of possibility and power. I look forward to all the great work they will do that will transform others as well as themselves.



The conversations cannot stop here. Parents, educators, the media and policy-makers must talk about youth theatre. Youths must talk about youth theatre. The public should know of and come to watch youth theatre. By asserting our individual agencies to propel forward the work, we'll enable our young people to dream of and create better worlds for all of us.



---

**Ang Kia Yee** is a young writer and theatre-maker. Earnest and passionate, she is the co-founder of Make Space, a theatre collective. Her writing can be found at <http://ofsunflowers.wordpress.com>