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[Theme Music]

INTRODUCTION TO EPISODE

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Serene: Welcome to Backlogues, an arts management podcast series, where we delve into the histories and evolving practice of arts management in Singapore. The world of arts management is a vast and wide ranging one, and this podcast series is a humble attempt at beginning to map this world and chart its growth. This pilot series focuses on the management of the theatre and literary art worlds, a process that brings texts to the stage or page. It also focuses on the time period of the 1980s to 1995, an exciting time for the local arts ecosystem because of the crucial work of the arts managers in the increasing professionalization of the arts and cultural industries. Head to our website at backlogues.sg, that's B A C K L O G U E S dot S G for more information and resources.

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Serene: The mid-1980s saw the proliferation of local theatre companies, such as Act 3 in 1984, HI! theatre in 1986, Asian Theatre Research Circus, or ATRC in 1987, and [00:01:17] Teater Ekamatra in 1988. Now, what was notable about the eighties was that it was a time of visionaries who shaped what arts management would look like in the years to come.

INTRODUCTION TO THEATREWORKS

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Serene: One of the most forward-thinking and prominent of Singapore's theatre companies was TheatreWorks, now known as T:>Works. It was founded in 1985 by an ensemble of artists, including actor and director Lim Kay Tong, designer Justin Hill, and with Lim Siau Chong taking on the company's artistic direction. They would come to be known for their bold and cutting-edge programming, their concept of a "total theatre" experience and their dedication to the development of local Singaporean works with programmes such as the Retrospective of Singaporean plays, the Writers' Lab, and the 24-Hour Playwriting Competition. please do note that in this podcast, we will refer to the company as TheatreWorks to situate it in the context of the 1980s and the 1990s that this podcast focuses on. So today on Backlogues, we are fortunate to have one of the early members of the company TheatreWorks, Lucilla Teoh, to share experiences working with the company from 1986 to 1997, where she wore multiple hats over the years from stage managing to front-of-house to production management, and to publicity.

INTRO TO LUCILLA TEOH

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Serene: Welcome Lucilla, so good to have you. I remember seeing you, Theatre on the hill, seeing you in the office of TheatreWorks in the early nineties. We're very glad that today you're able to come here and share some of your experiences of what the beginning looked like. But perhaps just before we go into the story of TheatreWorks, tell us how you began in theatre as an arts manager of sorts.

INTRODUCTION TO LUCILLA'S BEGINNINGS IN THEATRE

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Lucilla: When I was at university, I was in the arts faculty and we were all always doing a little production here and a little production there. And one of my linguistics lecturers got me very busy doing lunchtime things, et cetera.

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Lucilla: One day. I was approached by Mr. Lam Pin Foo from Shell, and he was interested in starting a theatre company - well, a small little one, for the staff of Shell, because he wanted to encourage their dramatic abilities and interests. And they were at that time also doing lunchtime performances. So I thought, wow, that's something very interesting because at that time, we were always looking for a platform to do our work, right? So, hey, here's someone who's giving me a platform, why not?

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Serene: Outside of the university.

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Lucilla: Outside of the university, right? And I was about to graduate and go into teaching. So anyway, I said, sure, why not? So I met this group and it was quite a diverse batch. As in you get the company secretary, you've got someone from finance, you've got someone from Bukom. So they were all very different backgrounds, but they all came together because they loved theatre.

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Lucilla: After about two years, we even actually travelled up to KL to do a performance for Shell in KL. And that's actually the first time where I met the theatre doyen, Krishen Jit. He came to watch and I was like, *gasps* he's here. But anyway Mr. Lam was also very good at encouraging young talents. So he, at that time, heard off this young director called Ong Keng Sen, who was then President of Varsity Playhouse in NUS. So, Keng Sen was in his last year of law school. So he was invited to direct some place for the Shell players and Keng Sen just asked, can I have someone to support me, who knows theatre, if I'm working with amateurs? So I was asked, would I like to help Kingson as a production stage manager? So I said, okay, why not? because in those days we kind of helped each other and we all wanted to just do good theatre. Then of course, Keng Sen gradually got involved with TheatreWorks because Siau Chong had invited him to be part of the early ensemble. Because in those days, Siau Chong's idea was that you do maybe two productions front-of-house, and you do a few productions backstage, et cetera. So everyone did a bit of everything.

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Serene: You kind of rotate.

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Lucilla: Yeah. You kind of rotate. So people like Nora Samosir, Christine Lim, Lim Kay Siu, et cetera.

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Serene: Neo Swee Lin.

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Lucilla: Neo Swee Lin. But I think Neo Swee Lin was not part of the early ensemble.

INTRODUCTION TO LUCILLA'S EARLY INVOLVEMENT WITH THEATREWORKS

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Lucilla: But anyway, there was this small group of people so they would do all this. So at that time, after we did the Shell production Keng Sen said why don't you come and help me for this other TheatreWorks production called *Dreamkeepers*, it's a double bill. So I said, okay, why not? You know, um, because at that time, although we say professional theatre or moving towards professional theatre most of us had a day job to pay the bills.

WOODLEIGH PARK

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Lucilla: And we came for rehearsals at night and in those days... Aiyoh! It was this little bungalow house in Woodleigh park and we would sweat buckets because

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Serene: No air conditioning.

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Lucilla: No air conditioning! And it's just this long. It was not a broad house, so it was it was longish. We normally played in Drama Centre, the old Drama Centre on Fort Canning hill. So we roughly could accommodate the stage dimensions within the living and the dining room, so it was very funny. And to get back on stage, we'd have to run around the building, through the kitchen and the toilet to come back from the left side of the stage, to the right side of the stage. Anyway. So that was how it was.

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Serene: That's the fun part right?

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Lucilla: Yes!

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Serene: And if it starts raining, then you just get wet.

INTRODUCTION TO TEO SWEE LENG AS THE FIRST FULL-TIME ARTS ADMINISTRATOR FOR THEATREWORKS

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Lucilla: Yes. And so immediately after that I got involved... So Teo Swee Leng at that time was managing, was the administrator. So she said oh, you know we've got this thing for arts festival called *Beauty World*, do you want to do it? So I said, what's the thing about, so she said, oh, it's a musical with Dick Lee and Michael Chiang and all that. So I said, oh really? How interesting! Yes, I would like to do that. So it was for the arts festival. And again, it sounds very grand now, but in those days we went crazy because the budget was small and we were trying, and we were like cast of a million people and we were trying to put them in costumes and we had singing rehearsals, acting rehearsals, dancing rehearsals, and at the same time, the play was still being written. So I remembered wanting to find out who is the father of Ivy Chan Poh Choo, and I was asked to go and pick up the script from Dick's office. No, sorry, Michael Chiang's office. And so I got the script, I got back to the TheatreWorks office and I had a tummy ache. So I dashed into the loo and I was reading the script in the loo, then I was like, huh her father is... Then I was like, then there was this scream in the toilet. I now know the father of Ivy Chan Poh Choo. So it was quite funny. Yeah,

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Serene: That's hilarious. So you were the first to know?

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Lucilla: I think Michael and Dick had talked about it, so they knew, but I think within the company, yeah, I was the first to know because yeah. And it was fun because we were in a way creating as we went along, because Keng Sen would give feedback to Michael and Dick. Like, I think we need a song here. I think we need something here. And so it was a very exciting creative period. And even for me working as a production stage manager, it was very exciting because for example,

Justin Hill will tell me his vision for the set, then I would have to think – okay, so we got the carpenters to build the round tables for the cabaret, then I got volunteers to come in and we painted zebra prints. And then I bought cheap animal print fabric and we covered chairs that people had thrown away to be the chairs for the cabaret. Because we sort of thought that it would be that thought of cabaret with leopard prints and things like that.

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Serene: So you're saying that in addition to being the stage manager, you had to dress the set. You had to exercise a bit of creativity to paint and to actually wrap over the furniture with fabric.

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Lucilla: Yeah. Anything to help bring the budget down and to also make it as real as possible. So like for example, because it was cabaret, we needed bottles of alcohol or something like alcohol. So I actually went and asked around and a certain eatery, which I shall not name, but they were very nice. They said, come after a weekend, we have so many bottles after the weekend – empty bottles, you can take all you want. And true enough, after the weekend, they had bottles of whiskey, bottles of all sorts of things. So, I just filled them with tea because tea looks like whiskey and then we just put it all on the shelves of the bar, you know? So it's things like that that was fun.

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Serene: You had a full-time job at that point in time already?

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Lucilla: Yes I did.

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Serene: You were teaching, am I correct?

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Lucilla: Yes.

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Serene: In a junior college?

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Lucilla: In a junior college.

MORE ON LUCILLA'S WORK DAY AS A FREELANCE ARTS MANAGER

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Serene: What was your average working day like?

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Lucilla: I would teach from 7.30am to about maybe 3 or 4 sometimes. And on my short days I would finish by 2 then I'll have a short period, maybe I'll be mocking and doing my prep for the next day. And then I'll go in for rehearsals and we would rehearse from 7 till sometimes midnight, sometimes 1 or 2 in the morning that I go home and sleep and then my whole day starts again.

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Serene: And then you wake up at six and then wow, again.

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Lucilla: Yeah. But somehow you love it and it doesn't matter. You don't feel the tiredness, but also to be fair, because I was a teacher, I worked with my teaching schedule. I tried to choose productions that

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Serene: would complement it, I suppose.

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Lucilla: Yes. So that if, say arts festival, it's always in June. So that's my school holidays. So I was free-er, or something that was end of the year, December, then I was free-er too. I never compromised my work to do the play.

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Serene: Yeah. I think it sounds like a lot of passion both ways.

QUOTE BY LUCILLA FROM " THEATREWORKS NEWS VOL 1. NO. 1 1989"

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Serene: I have a quote here that you gave in TheatreWorks News Volume 1 of 1989. You said "there is never time to rest. When a successful run has been completed, the next one is just round the corner. There are rehearsals to schedule, costumes to organise, photo shoots to conceptualise, advertisement space to sell, meetings to coordinate. Work is never boring and tasks vary with each production."

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Lucilla: Ah, yes.

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Serene: Do you still feel like that?

MORE ON THEATREWORKS' PLANNING FOR MAIN SEASONS

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Lucilla: Well, I'm no longer doing things like that, but it definitely is true because there is a season, right? So when you have a season, you know you've got five or six plays or some days three or four plays a year, or sometimes it's even a big thing like "Theatre Carnival on the Hill" where it's maybe 15 to 20 plays and dances and installations and things happening at the same time.

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Lucilla: But you also have to think ahead, so what's after that... I've got another play coming up so I'll also need to come from actors for that. I need to start thinking about conceptualising the photoshoot, what should the look be and things like that. And also discussing with the director, "what do you want, how do you want it to look?" But I think that quote came around that time when I was doing a lot more work with TheatreWorks and also in terms of doing forward planning. So like, okay, if I'm stage managing this one, maybe for the next one I'm doing front-of-house but front-of-house does not mean I just sell tickets, but it also means I help with the foyer exhibition.

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Lucilla: I may help with school programs because sometimes like say *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* we wanted kids from school to enjoy it, even though it looked and sounds like a very esoteric production. So it's all about how you prepare, perhaps because of the fact that I was a teacher, what worked for me, I think, was when I was able to bring this together. And I think that time Michele asked me – because she was then general manager and she said, do you think you could create something for the schools? So, I said for a play like this. Maybe the most is the pre-show talk and the post show talk or even interval talk. So she said, okay. So it was very interesting because we had a primary school come and so [during] the pre-show I explained the basic plot to the kids with the teachers present and they saw the show. And during the interval, the kids asked

me questions. And at the end the teacher said, can I ask a question? And I said, sure, of course. And the teacher said, there's this red cloth that comes down. What is the significance of that? And then this is one thing I've learned - so I looked at the kids, so what do y'all think? And one boy looked at his teacher and said, Madam it's blood *lah*, you know the blood coming down and I was like, yes! Thank you, Lord. This kid got it at least at some level.

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Lucilla: So for me, that was a beautiful moment because I do believe theatre is for everyone. I do believe that even the young can get it, whatever it is. Although I know there are certain age appropriate performances and things like that, but I think it is good for kids to be exposed to theatre as quickly as possible and for theatre to engage them and get them excited. So that for me was a moment where I went, oh yes! This is worth it because they are our future generation, they are our future audience, so we need to get them in.

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Lucilla: Being a teacher, I do believe that theatre has educational value of course. But I also do believe that even what is considered esoteric work we all find our own ins into that and it depends on what level you are at. So a young kid, maybe it's a bit more literal, but of course, for us who are adults, we may take it at a more metaphorical or surreal level, you know? So yeah, it just depends.

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Serene: Interesting. So how it really unleashes the creativity and that the kids can recognise it. We'll talk a little bit more in-depth about this whole idea of the total theatre and also who are these other people who are working with you so that you could do so many things and plan the season because of course TheatreWorks was one of the first companies to think of productions in terms of seasons, right? And obviously when it came to the development of grand schemes and things like that, this would be very important because you would have to deliver a season in order to qualify for grants.

DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL THEATRE ECOSYSTEM

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Serene: So that kind of will bring us into the whole professionalising of the ecosystem. We said early on that we wanted to talk about TheatreWorks' vision of a professional theatre ecosystem. So I want to start by just listing a couple of productions in the early perhaps leading up to *Beauty World*. So in 1985, '*Be My Sushi Tonight*' was the first recorded professional show, played 25th to 28th April at 1985 at the World Trade Centre auditorium. It travelled to Malaysia for the first Kuala Lumpur Arts Festival. directed by Lim Siau Chong, and so interesting, collaterals done by Goh Eck Kheng. Part of Backlogues, we're also looking at the literary scene. So, that's a really nice piece of history for us to see how they all come together.

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Lucilla: Well, Goh Eck Kheng, apart from eventually becoming the publisher of Landmark Books, he was a company member at the time.

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Serene: Mm. Mm, yep. And his wife Anita Fam.

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Lucilla: Yes, but that was much later.

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Serene: That was much later. Okay. Well, for the purposes of this particular pilot series, you're right, we're just looking at the eighties to the mid 1990s. there's another play, '*Fanshen*', which I've definitely done some research about it. This was 12 to 15, December, 1985, also directed by Lim

Siauw Chong and the venue was the Drama Centre, like what you said, right? This was a playground for TheatreWorks. You all did *Rashomon*, 1986. Well, this was before you joined.

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Lucilla: But I did see the production.

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Serene: Oh, you did see the production. Anything that you recall from there? Because I'm looking... interestingly, the directors are Siauw Chong and the late William Teo.

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Lucilla: Yes. And that's why... William, his visuals are fantastic. And so I remember the gorgeous costumes, the colors of that, because it was low reds and golds and all that. Yeah. And Christine Lim was playing the woman who was sexually assaulted in the play. And I remember, and she's on the ground and there are all these lovely brown leaves around her. And of course, it's an awful act that was happening to her, but it was done so beautifully. And that's William Teo, for you

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Lucilla: I was there at his funeral. And when he passed away, Swee Leng, his sister, told me he only wanted white flowers. And he got it. So the whole funeral parlour was filled with white flowers,

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Serene: Beautiful. Swee Leng is Teo Swee Leng, and she was the first administrator for TheatreWorks. Again, it's quite interesting to see how the network and the pool of early theatre artists, there's that interconnectedness you know? they are family members, they are friends from university and things like that.

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Lucilla: well, she later went on to work for the film festival as well.

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Serene: Mm hm, that's right.

MEETING AT THE 1984 SINGAPORE ARTS FESTIVAL

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Serene: There's also a very pivotal moment in 1984 for the Singapore Festival of the Arts, where Siauw Chong actually directed '*Bumboat!*' for that edition. It was commissioned as a festival contribution, as a deliberate international-local collaboration, right? It was an English language musical directed by the American Tzi Ma and Singaporean Siauw Chong of course. And that presented vignettes of contemporary Singaporean life in a series of stories written by a group of writers. Those included Michael Chiang of Beauty World fame, Catherine Lim, of course, novelist, Jacintha! Dick Lee was composer and musical director as well. And then as the history books would not show, Jacintha actually was the one who introduced Siauw Chong to Kay Tong, and they registered TheatreWorks together.

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Lucilla: Yes. Because Jacintha worked in Straits Times and Kay Tong was working in Straits Times.

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Serene: And Jacintha of course, went on to have a really long history with TheatreWorks. I think she acted with TheatreWorks for eight straight years from Beauty World in 1988.

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Lucilla: Yeah.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THEATREWORKS AND AND THE FOUNDING MEMBERS

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Serene: In 1985, that was the establishment of TheatreWorks. The artistic director was Siau Chong, acting and direct - Kay Tong oversaw that, set design, Justin. Founding members of TheatreWorks included Alex Abisheganaden, that's Jacintha's father, Goh Eck Kheng. as you mentioned earlier, Jacintha herself, Jenina Bas, Kalyani Kausikan, who was also a teacher.

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Lucilla: Retired now.

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Serene: Retired now. Kim Ramakrishnan, Lena Bandara, Michael Chiang and Sylvia Tan.

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Lucilla: Who married Kay Tong.

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Serene: Yeah. Correct. So we were starting to see the whole interconnectedness of the whole theatre world so to speak.

THEATREWORKS' VISION TO DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL THEATRE IN SINGAPORE

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Serene: Now it's enlightening to read that some of the very forward-thinking passages from TheatreWorks' early program booklets actually shed some light on what the situation was back then. For example, in the program booklet for '*Not Afraid to Remember*' – that was in 1986, back then TheatreWorks was one year old and it stated, "We're a group trying to create an environment for professional theatre in Singapore. We hope professional theatre would be a reality someday, and this is our own small step towards that day." So what to the people back then, these pioneers, was professional theatre? Was it quitting their day jobs? Was that the dream?

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Lucilla: I think it's a bit of... okay, there is one aspect of that. Being able to make your living from theatre, not making that sort of Hollywood tons of money type thing, but to be at least able to pay the bills. But in addition to that, it was to produce quality theatre, theatre that we could be proud of, which could go to the Edinburgh Festival, which could go travel overseas and take its place on the international stage. So it was about professionalism all round, whether it's in terms of acting, in terms of writing, in terms of backstage, that means the lighting, the sound, the stage design, all these things were important. So I think in all cases, although we were not fully professional, as in we made our money from theatre I think we all had this idea of a gold standard and we will try and achieve it to the best of our abilities. So like even when we look at the early iteration of say '*Beauty World*', there was a raw energy, but we all try to like, for example, create the stage, the lighting, even the costuming. Well, it's all done at a level with that we could be proud of and we felt could travel anywhere.

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Serene: Okay. Now that's interesting. So it looked like traveling was in a way, not just doing theatre, but also also showing everybody that there was this growth of the English language theatre scene in Singapore.

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Lucilla: Yeah. So like some of our early trips was like to Japan, of course to Malaysia and a few other countries too. Just sort of show that, hey, we've arrived at least at some level, you know?

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Serene: Mm-hmm. I have another quote here from the program booklet. It says this: "In February 1985, we put our money together to start this company. We still do not make much money from theatre. Those of us who have left our jobs still have to resort to other kinds of part-time work to subsidise our activity in the arts." Now, my question for you, Lucilla, is, well today, the roles in our theatre company are definitely more clear cut than they were back in the 80s, right? What was it like working part-time back then and how do you see the roles as evolving over the years?

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Lucilla: I think perhaps in the early days it was more collaborative in the sense that even though I may be the stage manager, I may share my ideas with Keng Sen, the director, or the set designer. And we would work on some of the things. And also in a sense that I didn't feel I was uncreative or not creative, that mine was just a technical role. And so, in a way, my involvement with production varied and some of the work was creative, some of it was technical, et cetera.

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Lucilla: I think now as it got more professionalised, we tend to have more fixed roles. So if I'm the set designer, I'm the set designer. In those days you may be the set designer, but you may give input on the costumes. How will your costumes look like on your set? Actually, I think they still do talk about it, but you're still the set designer, I'm the lighting person, all that, so I only focus on this.

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Serene: So a bit more specialisation,

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Lucilla: A lot more specialisation.

ROLE OF THE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER IN ARTS ORGANISATIONS

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Serene: In 1987, that was when there was a full-time artistic director and administrator and actually, the history behind that is that there was actually about two years of making do with part-time help and almost totally voluntary help, right? So when the company employed its first full-time artistic director, that was Lim Siau Chong, and the administrator was Teo Swee Leng. This is who you were talking about. There was also a part-time business manager.

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Lucilla: Dana Lam.

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Serene: Yes. Can you tell us a little bit about what was the role of the business manager back then?

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Lucilla: It was to look for sponsorship and it was also to help with the financing, because managing the budgets, although Swee Leng did the bulk of it. But yeah, the business manager was to see how we could get in a way, partly publicity, how can we sell tickets, how can we get bums on seats and how we can get people to sponsor us either in-kind or with actual cash donation?

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Serene: Was the company more successful with raising cash or kind?

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Lucilla: More kind. Because I think in many throughout the years we did get, of course cash donations. But if you know for production, sales of tickets will never cover cost. But what was also interesting was we had, for example, a paper company being our sponsors, so they helped with the posters, with our program booklets. And the couple that ran the company were actually very interesting because they were experts in paper and they did not see themselves as creative people, but sometimes I handle publicity and another person handled business when I went fulltime with TheatreWorks and we would describe like, oh, we want this, we want that. Then they'll say, okay, I will go back and look at my paper stock and I will tell you what, and then, okay, we will donate 20 reams of this paper to you. So those were expensive paper and it really helped, you know, because for us the total look counted. We had hotel chains that sponsored rooms. So like when we did with the British Council, a whole program on teaching, we could invite people like Simon McBurney, et cetera, to come to Singapore to do workshops. And they were housed at these hotels. We also had at one time, one of the local companies who would sponsor costumes, things like that.

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Serene: Was that Tangs Studio?

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Lucilla: Yes. That was Tangs Studio.

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Serene: Yeah I remember in some of the collaterals, we would see the logo. So Tangs Studio was one. For paper was?

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Lucilla: R J Papers.

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Serene: R J Papers. Wow. So these were the early, sort of local sponsors that came in to help TheatreWorks.

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Lucilla: And some of the other sponsors will include some catering companies who would do our opening parties and all that. So that was nice. Because we always got to take home the leftovers, or actually we, most of the time we scarfed them down before the end of the night anyway.

THEATREWORKS' SPONSORS

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Serene: The usual mode of sponsorship in the eighties was for theatre companies to receive funding for commission plays or for one-off productions. But astoundingly, TheatreWorks managed to obtain funding to carry out not just one production or a commission, but actually an entire season of programmes, as we said. For your 1989 to 1990 season, you received a total of \$175,000 from three local organisations. So Tangs Studio was one, Glaxochem, and Waterford Wedgwood, Singapore. And I also know that Tangs went on to offer continued support for the next three years. They said this, they stated this: "We see TheatreWorks breaking new ground towards the development of a Singapore theatre we can call our own."

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Lucilla: So many of them bought into that dream and vision of which we were very grateful. They understood what TheatreWorks was trying to do. They also knew actually what they were giving was just the tip of the iceberg. Because if you look at it, even in those days, a hundred over thousand for a whole season if you divide up with three plays, it's only about 30,000 a play. And we

did in those days give a stipend to everybody who worked: our stagehands, our actors. So, it took out a lot of... that already takes up a lot of the budget.

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Serene: Yeah. That's very interesting. So the, word stipend here is being used it, I suppose like an honorarium, not the full pay, but something to cover your transportation and your effort. And that obviously is a step towards the whole professionalising of theatre here in Singapore. Interestingly, also that these were local companies who seem to share the dream of having some kind of theatre that had carried the Singapore identity, a local flavour as well.

CONCEPT OF "TOTAL THEATRE"

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Serene: Let's talk a little bit about this idea of "total theatre", because obviously this would feed into the whole professional look of the shows that you were wanting to produce. I read here that it's a holistic mentality and total theatre was the conception of theatre experience as larger than just the performer and the audience and the space. And in TheatreWorks news volume I published in 1989 – yes, all the archival materials coming out – you have actor and director Jeremiah Choy explaining that what total theatre means is that the experience of good theatre is not limited to what happens on stage or even the house, but also in the peripheral areas that the audience inhabits.

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Lucilla: So like for example, right, we've always felt that... well, theatre and education calls it "enrolling". "Enrolling" means preparing the audience for what they are to expect. So it can be also like from the moment you are about to arrive at the theatre, how you are greeted by the usher, what you see in the foyer as you're walking towards your seat, the music you hear, so literally your five senses, six even, if you want to count, are totally stimulated if possible. So we wanted to always make sure that the audience went away like, wow, that was fantastic. And they lived through that experience. So like in some of our productions we break the fourth wall. We have actors coming from among the audience. We have certain things happening among the audience or the actors come offstage, etc. And I think many of our staging at one point when we moved from Woodleigh Park to the top of Fort Canning Hill, many of it was outdoors. So like for example Theatre on the Hill, etc., it was a total production, total theatre as you say it because when you come in and then you go to different parts of Fort Canning Hill, in a way the, each production was like a site-specific work, depending on where it's located. And even when you're walking from production to production you might encounter installation, or you might suddenly see a movement piece happening. So, there's always something to see, because we wanted theatre to come alive for the audience. Wow, sounds like I'm preaching to the converted, but that was the excitement of doing something like that.

[00:33:13]

Serene: Yeah, I had the chance to be involved in one of the smaller productions as well. And I suppose what you're saying really rings true because you don't want sort of, I'm walking from one space to another and nothing happens in between, but rather you feel that the experience is total; it's immersive even. That brings me to say one of the productions that perhaps fits this description and that was the 1990 production, it stretched into 1991 though. It's *Trojan Women*. The venue was the quarry at Bukit Timah. It was an outdoor performance.

[00:33:46]

Lucilla: No, because I was acting in it.

[00:33:48]

Serene: Yes, you were in the chorus and you are also the stage manager.

[00:33:51]

Lucilla: No, I wasn't.

[00:33:52]

Serene: No, you were not the stage manager?

[00:33:52]

Lucilla: No I wasn't a stage manager.

[00:33:53]

Serene: Okay, you were in the chorus.

[00:33:55]

Lucilla: Dawn Westerhout was the stage manager.

[00:33:57]

Serene: I see.

[00:33:59]

Serene: So Lucilla, you were doing the publicity sometimes. You were doing the stage management sometimes, and you also acted. How did you balance it all?

[00:34:08]

Lucilla: Well, acting was not my most favorite thing, but sometimes... I loved that play because when Keng Sen found the play - the version of the play – because Trojan Women is famous, but he found this version of the play and he was sharing it. So we were all like, okay, okay, let's do it. Let's do it. So what we found was at that time, when we were rehearsing, it was during the monsoon season. So Keng Sen will say, lie down, 'ka-plop'. And then, half of our bodies will be immersed in the mud and, we're lying there and he's giving directions to Nora or to one of the other main actors. And all of us in the chorus were going like 'faster, faster *lah*, it's so cold'. And yeah, so I did all this because it was interesting, but I didn't act that much, but I did do parts that I really liked. So like many years later I did a film called *12 Storeys*. And again, it was, again, a part that I liked and I said, okay, this is for the history books, I'll just do it. But I guess for me, it's just that my interests varied. So sometimes knowing the season, I would say, hey, this one looks interesting but because of time, I can't give that much commitment, so maybe I'll do lighting or sound, but like in this case, because it's school holidays, I can do Trojan Women. So I did that, but it was fun, running around the Bukit Timah quarry.

[00:35:29]

Serene: And did you rehearse on-site as well?

[00:35:30]

Lucilla: Yes. All the time.

[00:35:31]

Serene: All the time. So how many months did it take?

[00:34:54]

Lucilla: I can't remember now, but it felt like three months.

[00:35:38]

Serene: I'm going to ask a very sensitive question, but not sensitive because of time. What was the stipend back then for three months work?

[00:35:48]

Lucilla: Definitely less than a thousand dollars, I think.

[00:35:54]

Serene: Okay. definitely less than a thousand dollars, okay.

[00:35:56] **Lucilla:** Okay. Like my three months work on 'Beauty World'. for the first 'Beauty World', was only was about a thousand dollars.

[00:36:03] **Serene:** Okay. So that gives us some sense of where we are now in 2022 with theatre more or less having moved into professionalisation.

[00:36:13]

Lucilla: Yeah. Well there are of course people now who can but I think many of them still have to do other work. They may do voiceovers. They may do a production work still, but it's still within theatre in that sense. Some teach drama some go to schools and be drama teachers there as well. Yes. It's a bit more professional but getting there. But I think some of the same old same old problems are still there in terms of sponsorship, and getting enough work to be full-time, you know?

[00:36:51]

Serene: Yeah.

[00:37:02]

Serene: Let's talk about another quite famous, shall I say, piece of work, *M. Butterfly* in 1990, you were the stage manager together with Michele Lim. The directors were Christine Lim and Krishen Jit. This was 29th June to 6th July 1990 at the Victoria Theatre.

[00:37:21]

Lucilla: Yeah and that was when Ivan Heng just ate two *popiahs* for lunch and dinner to get himself so slim because one of the gowns was loaned by Jacintha and he wanted to get into that gown. So he went on a diet so that...

[00:37:38]

Serene: Why did she loan her gown?

[00:37:40]

Lucilla: Because it was a really gorgeous, sexy black chiffony thing, you know?

WALKING THROUGH THE PROCESS OF MANAGING A PRODUCTION AS A STAGE MANAGER

[00:37:45]

Serene: So how was it like being the stage manager for a production like this, where there was, tell us, was it partial nudity or was it full nudity?

[00:37:52]

Lucilla: There was full nudity.

[00:37:53]

Serene: Full nudity. So would you be able to walk us through the pre-production, the show itself and the post-production? It would be really helpful for our stage manager 'would-be's to listen to what they need to think about.

[00:38:10]

Lucilla: Okay, at all times we need to respect the process. We need to respect the performers as well, so during the rehearsals, there was actually no nudity, although in the script we knew at one point it's going to happen. And there were two characters who actually stripped, one was Kitty

Barkley, and the other one was Ivan. And I remember we had rehearsed up to a point where we were all comfortable with each other and because as you know, most plays are rehearsed in part so we were already doing full runs. At one point because we were doing full runs, Ivan said, "heck it, I'm going to do it". So one night he just stripped, so what we did as the crew was to make sure his coats were there for him so when he went off stage he could dress immediately. Now, when we were in theatre, that means we were bumping in, we were setting up the stage, setting up the wings, so one of the character, actresses, Kitty Barkley, she had a small part but a crucial part. So she does a strip and then the lights go off. She goes off stage into the wings. So I had stage hands standing by with a dressing gown for her, so she was protected because there were a lot of backstage people. Of course it was quite new in those days, everyone was peeping peeping, but we tried to make sure that her modesty was protected and she was grateful for that. But she also was prepared so that was good.

[00:39:40]

Lucilla: Something like *M. Butterfly* took us three months because in those days we were not again, fully professional. Nowadays it takes six weeks. And for *M. Butterfly*, we tried to get in the costumes, the props as early as possible so that the actors could work on them. So like for example, yes someone like Ivan had to moot change from one costume into that slinky black gown. And I think we had like 10 or 12 seconds to do that in. So I was the one who personally dressed him. So he came off and I just told him don't move. So we stripped him and then he stepped into the black gown and we pulled it up and we zipped him eight seconds and he stepped into his high heels and he walked on stage without losing a beat. He was very professional, but yeah, it's that sort of precision timing. We work at it to make sure the actors are not flustered. So like initially he was very nervous. In the end I had to tell him, Ivan, you got to stop panicking, you got to trust us then we can do our job. And then he said, okay. And then it was just easier because he was trying to help us, you know? And if you have someone struggling to undo his buttons and you're trying to do up his dress and you're both fighting at the same time. So yeah. So in the end we got it down to eight seconds. I still remember that because we just had enough time for him to even take a breather and walk on stage for his next scene.

[00:41:15]

Serene: Wonderful. Some sort of collaboration and just trying to put it all together.

[00:41:19]

Lucilla: Oh yeah. I think, I think the one thing you learn, if you are a stage actor and I think even in film, you realise your part is actually one small part in a whole bigger process. You need your stage manager, you need your costume designer, you need your lighting person and your sound person. All this comes together to put the production. So for me, what keeps me going, what gets me excited is that moment when the magic happens. And I think most often it's during the dress rehearsal, when you just run and you suddenly said, okay, it's everything that you imagined it to be happens. And yeah it does. And all of us played a part to make that happen.

[00:42:07]

Serene: So that would be going into the production, the sort of pre, And then during the show, what does the stage manager need to focus on?

[00:42:15]

Lucilla: A lot of it is maintenance. So like for example, we have to make sure of course that the costumes are kept pristine or in some cases like when we were doing one of the productions on Fort Canning Hill every night the stage manager that time, Tan Lay Hoon and myself, we had to wash the costumes overnight and dry them, because the performers were on the hill and they would get all the grass stains and everything. So it's maintaining costumes, and it's also making sure that the props are maintained. So sometimes they're consumables. The actors eat something. So every day you got to make sure you have supplies of that. And general maintenance. So like for example, in beauty world, there was a turning carousel so I have to check to make sure the

mechanism works. So it's basically that, but of course if it's like by middle of the run, you should have gotten all this down.

[00:43:14]

Serene: Sure. What happens post production?

[00:43:16]

Lucilla: Oh, it's crazy. Because before the last performance, you already start planning how to get out, how to tear down... so you have to work backwards, so you have to imagine who needs to be there. So you see, you have one group that will be packing the costumes, packing the props, getting them ready to be transported. Then you also have to label like which are borrowed and go back to whoever, which need to be cleaned and all that before you can return, then you also have to work with the carpenters and all that to tear down the set. Are we keeping the set? If we need to keep the set for future run, then we need to preserve it and where do we store it? But if we are not, and then we are tearing it down, then we have to think of disposing the set and all that sort of thing.

[00:44:06]

Serene: All that would come at a big cost as well right? Disposing, keeping, returning.

[00:44:12]

Lucilla: Yes. And of course, finally there is the balancing the books, right? So how much we spend, etc. So I have to settle the budget and give it to the finance person and say, okay, here are all my claims, et cetera. Of course, before the show, before we actually get the people in, we would have already told them what their stipend is, then it's a matter of confirming that, okay, we had five stagehands and they worked the full run, so this is what we're paying, but this one came in at the last moment so we're paying this person that much, et cetera.

[00:44:46]

Serene: was that difficult to find stagehands - crew, as we call them?

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Lucilla: I think it was a lot simpler in many ways, there were people who were interested and were willing to give their time. So we had a lot of students who are either like waiting to get to university or were on university break, or maybe junior college students who were interested in theatre, because I think in those days there was not a LaSalle school of the arts. Neither was there SOTA or whatever. So the only way you could learn is really hands on doing a production. And actually that's also how I saw my involvement in the different productions. It was for me to learn the different aspects.

[00:45:33]

Serene: Yep.

THE SPATIAL LOCATIONS OF THEATREWORKS

[00:45:43]

Serene: Now, Lucilla earlier on, you mentioned about the hill, the hill, the hill and of course, that's Fort Canning hill is that we associated many years with TheatreWorks, at least for myself. Now TheatreWorks' first home was in Woodleigh Park, 1985 to 1990, and this largest empty space in a two bedroom house was a small concrete strip at the side of the house, which you mentioned rehearsals would be held there usually till past midnight. And rehearsals typically only ended when the police summoned by the irate neighbours roused.

[00:46:13]

Lucilla: Not all the time! That one was legendary. The other one was, one of the neighbours had a dog who seemed to dislike us and would chase us down the hill.

[00:46:23] **Serene:** Oh the hill at Woodleigh park?

[00:46:25] **Lucilla:** Well it's a little hill, right? Yeah. It's just a slope, but someday it would chase us down, but that was just a little anecdote, but I think that place was actually rented so we had to pay rent for it.

[00:46:36]

Serene: Sure. But by 1990 TheatreWorks had built a strong enough repertoire. So it was actually invited by the National Parks Board to propose continuing their work at Fort Canning park right? The hill and this new space included more rooms. Was it 200 pax capacity theatre?

[00:46:51]

Lucilla: Yes. The black box.

[00:46:52]

Serene: I seem to remember it was smaller, but...

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Lucilla: No, it depends on, well, technically it's 200 pax, I think if you sit theatre style, but TheatreWorks never does that sort of production. So depending on the set...

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Serene: Theatre in the round or...

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Lucilla: Yeah. So you probably wouldn't get 200, maybe 150?

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Serene: So this expanded space actually opened up new possibilities in programming?

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Lucilla: Yes. Definitely. Because with your own space, you could rehearse straight away in it. You could plan for it. And also at the same time that I think was also how Theatre on the Hill came about because we had a good working relationship with NParks Board, so that's when we started to dream like, okay, if we can... And I think at one time we invited Five Arts from KL to come. So Marion D'Cruz and her dancers did something with big urns on top of the hill. And we had performances all over the hill as well.

COLLABORATION WITH FIVE ARTS AND KRISHEN JIT

[00:47:49]

Serene: There was already of course collaboration with Five Arts before, right? because I think in 1988 there was a collaboration with them in Malaysia under Krishen Jit as well as Keng Sen, and that was the production of three children and that was actually performed here in Drama Centre.

[00:48:06]

Lucilla: Yes. Leow Puay Tin. And actually when I did Theatre-Education I did a version of that for schools as well. In a way, for a period, there was a lot of collaborative work between Five Arts and TheatreWorks. I think also it was a very rich period because Krishen Jit's good friend was Kuo Pao Kun, and these two men, I think, had a strong influence on the current directors because Krishen also did quite a bit of work – I think some work with The Necessary Stage and of course, Pao Kun ran his very famous workshops for directing, acting and stage management at one time, in his little space in upper Serangoon.

[00:48:56]

Serene: Right, and those were the famous workshops that actually saw quite a lot of mentorship, right? Of the current crop.

[00:49:01]

Lucilla: People like Ivan Heng, people like Ekachai Uekrongtham, people like Haresh Sharma, Alvin Tan, Keng Sen.

HOW DID THE FUNCTIONS OF STAGE/PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT CHANGE DUE TO THE MOVE?

[00:49:10]

Serene: So, in terms of staging these shows right, moving from Woodleigh which is a house, to Fort Canning hill, how did the functions of stage and production management evolve from the time the company was working in sort of a terrace house situation to professional working venues and even outdoor locations?

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Lucilla: In a sense, the work is the same as in how you manage it, because you still have to look after costumes, props, et cetera. Then you sort of approach it from, okay, now my stage is this tree. So, I remember I had to walk with that time Tracy Howard who's now Tracy Pang

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Serene: Of Pangdemonium.

[00:49:56]

Lucilla: Yeah, and we walked round to say, okay if Kaylene Tan and her group were to perform here, then we need to put a mattress out for – not a mattress, I think we needed to out a platform for them so that they won't fall down, et cetera. So we needed to also dream in that space and we needed to work collaboratively with the artistic person. Working in that space to find out their needs, but in a sense that is in a way, another level of perhaps a more professional work, because it wasn't just a matter of, oh, you tell me what you want, I just get it for you. You also get a chance to say, well, in this space, would you like to consider doing this or doing that instead? So, that was how the work evolved, because I think the exciting part now was there were more possibilities, and we were also trying to find what could be done in that space that we had. So it's a bit more challenging because of course, you've got your normal theatre, like Drama Centre in the past, but now almost anything in Fort Canning park could be a space.

[00:51:09]

Serene: Yeah. To give a bit of context for our listeners as well. The Black Box at Fort Canning, this is TheatreWorks' own venue, it actually played host to *Mad Forest* in 1991 and you were the sound designer, Lucilla. There was also Madame Mao's Memories. That was in 1991, also at the black box. *Trip to the South*, 1991. Okay I see this 1991 season.

[00:51:31]

Lucilla: This Filipino...Yes, because we were collaborating with a lot of Southeast Asian artists. Tony Perez was the playwright for '*Trip to the South*'.

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Serene: I'd like to talk a little bit about 1990, there was a Retrospective of Singapore plays. TheatreWorks actually created the retrospective of Singapore plays. Seven plays written from the 1960s to the 1980s. And this established that there was like a collection, like a canon of Singapore theatre which has blossomed into the productive scene of today. (Lucilla: That was Keng Sen's idea.)

[00:52:12]

Lucilla: That was Keng Sen's idea.

[00:52:14]

Serene: It was, right. And this included David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. This is the one that, so there were so many, and then it culminated in this.

[00:52:22]

Lucilla: Yes, because that was actually how we opened the black box. We wanted something to say 'ta-da' and here it was about looking back to look forward. We wanted to look at the shoulders on which we are standing. So let's look at the plays that had been written, *Mimi Fan*, et cetera, and let's rework them for the newer generation. So I remembered I was stage managing '*The Moon is Less Bright*' and Keng Sen wanted to recreate the feeling of being on a farm. So I filled the whole of black box with dirt. So I designed the set with him. So we created like a sandbox. We actually had wood that we found discarded on a farm in Singapore. We created a rectangular box and we filled that with soil. And then we implanted things from the farm in Singapore, and then the actors acted on the soil, but we actually had wooden planks so that when they moved around that set, they were protected.

[00:53:32]

Serene: Sounds like a very sensory experience

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Lucilla: It was. And there was... it just slipped my mind, but we had a very old experienced, well he was I think, retired, but he was an experienced Chinese language actor. And he played the patriarch in that play.

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Serene: I see, I see.

DEVELOPING THE WRITERS' LABORATORY IN 1991

[00:53:51]

Serene: This festival, interestingly represented the beginning of TheatreWorks' overall focus on the playwright in the 1990s because actually The Writer's Laboratory was borne in 1991. So as an arts manager, were you very involved with this next phase that TheatreWorks went into?

[00:54:08]

Lucilla: Well apart from stage managing and all that, with The Writers' Lab, the initial phase of it... so people like Tony Perez would be invited to come to Singapore to run workshops and a few others. So, my role was to also facilitate those workshops and we had a lot of readings and a couple of other things that we did include, I think... was it at the beginning of the 24-Hour playwriting? Hmm cannot, that was much later. But it was that period of encouraging writing. Because obviously you can't have theatre. Well, we wanted to do local writing that we could be proud of. I remembered also one of my roles was reading those writings. So sometimes

[00:54:56]

Serene: Performed readings, right?

[00:54:58] **Lucilla:** yeah. Or, just to read through and say, okay, I think this one got chance we might consider putting this on or whatever. So, it was a lot of that, like, "Ooh, this person's written this, let's see how" and all that, you know, so it was quite exciting.

[00:55:12]

Serene: So the 24-Hour Playwriting Competition that you mentioned was actually started in 1998. But I see where you're going because the trajectory started a lot earlier, to try and develop that Singapore voice.

[00:55:26]

Lucilla: Yes. So as you can see, there's always a long runway because things don't just spring up overnight. At that time I think there was, I'm not sure whether it was... I think Shell was also sponsoring a playwriting competition, a short play writing competition because people like Theresa Tan and a few others had written plays and we also had produce some of those plays. But it came to a point when we were saying, okay, let's do something. And I think that Dr. Robin Loon – he may have given the idea but I cannot remember now, but the idea was to have a 24-hour playwriting competition, we will use an unusual setting. We will have –

[00:56:07]

Serene: Stimuli.

[00:56:08]

Lucilla: Stimuli. And so there'll be someone directing the playwriting at the 24-hour session. So I remember that they were in a bumboat, they were in an outdoor space, and I think at one point they went IKEA and all.

[00:56:23]

Serene: They went to the zoo. They went and bought a cruise ship,

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Lucilla: All sorts of different things. And you could use the stimuli in any way you wanted, so you didn't have to immediately – "Oh, okay, the scent of oranges filled the air". No, you didn't have to like immediately put in the stimuli. You could use it in any way you want. And after that what we did do was we would do a stage reading of the top few prizes. I think.

[00:56:52]

Serene: So you have had so many roles whether as sound designer or stage manager, you also directed early on in the Shell plays.

[00:56:59]

Lucilla: Well somewhere along the way also I did, I think one of the theatre carnivals, or no, not the theatre carnival, but the subsequent, something like that. I did, I directed a play and then I acted in another play.

MORE ON LUCILLA'S FAVOURITE ROLE AS AN ARTS MANAGER

[00:57:09]

Serene: What manager role do you enjoy the most out of all of these?

[00:57:15]

Lucilla: I think it's the overall production stage manager, because that's when you see how everything comes together. So you see how the sound, how the lighting, how the costumes, how the acting impacts on the script and make it real for the audience.

[00:57:32]

Serene: And I can see that really coming to pass in the 1992, Theatre Carnival on the Hill where you were the production manager. It was held at Fort Canning park. You said, I think, it was a logical continuation of the retrospective that began in 1990.

[00:57:48]

Lucilla: Yes. And the idea was... actually the idea for that was it was going to be a tour of Fort Canning Hill. So we had three routes, the blue route, the red route and the green route. So we actually had actors like Jeremiah Choy being a tour guide. So at the beginning of the night we divided our audience into three groups and they would follow the tour guide and they will be brought around. So we planned it... because you see the spaces was small, so you can't have a large audience at one point. So we had to plan the routes such that it did not matter which colour you went, you would have seen everything, but you would have seen them at different times. For some of the performances, obviously they had to repeat it, so we had blocks of performances. We also had, I remember food and because I remember having to be a barista, I had to learn how to make coffee among my numerous talents. And I remember we invited Eric Khoo to do a mural. So he hung his mural down the front of our building. And so at every time there was something to see, for the audience. Yeah. So that was how it was conceptualised.

[00:59:04]

Serene: Fort Canning is actually a very big and interesting space with a very interesting atmosphere as well. So as production manager, for example, how would you have handled say the security issues? Because I heard that there were spooky encounters on Fort Canning hill.

[00:59:21]

Lucilla: Well, at that time, our technical manager...

[00:59:24]

Serene: I feel like a story is coming. A ghost story.

[00:59:26]

Lucilla: was Mr. Lim Yu Beng. So he and the guys would go and patrol the area. So, we had sightings, yes. At that time, somebody apparently walked into our office - a being... So there were sightings on Fort Canning Hill. And we also realised there were groups of old men who liked to hang around Fort Canning Hill. So one day, I decided, okay, I had enough, it's 10.30pm, I want to go home. And I was walking off out of the building and suddenly an old voice said, "*wah*, you going home very early *ah*, tonight?" Then I was like, "oh, uncle, hello! Bye-bye!" He obviously had been keeping track of my movements. So... interesting. Yeah. We had a lot of interesting things happen on Fort Canning Hill.

[01:00:21]

Serene: Did you establish who this person was?

[01:00:22]

Lucilla: There were a group of old men. We knew that they hung around. Yu Beng, who was then our technical manager was quite protective, so he always made sure. So we were just sensible *lah*.

[01:00:35]

Serene: Okay.

LUCILLA'S TOP TIPS FOR AN ARTS MANAGER

[01:00:45]

Serene: So Lucilla, after taking on so many roles in different capacities of arts management, I'm just going to give you a while to think about this, okay? If you had a chance to write a handbook, what would be the top three tips? Take your time, okay? Take your time to think about this. So the handbook is a fictitious handbook. What would be the top three tips?

[01:01:10]

Lucilla: Okay. I think number one, is support the vision because the role for, I see, the production stage manager or the management team is to support the artistic vision and to help realise it. And so it is important to understand the vision. Second tip is, respect your team. So if you've got the right team and they're there to help you do the work, don't micromanage, don't second guess them, let them do the work, trust. That's very important. Teamwork. And the most beautiful moment during a production is when I can sit back and everything's happening. And I can see my stagehands are where they should be. My dressers are standing there ready. And actually I don't have to do anything, except call the cues or something like that. It's just magic happens. So that's one.

[01:02:07]

Lucilla: Number two, be prepared for anything. So I was a girl guide. So that motto is true. If anything wrong will go wrong, it will go wrong. So I remember during Trojan Women, when we were all lying on the ground, I think one of my fellow actors said, "I think there's a centipede". And I think that was Lydia Loke or somebody. Anyway. And true enough, there was this ginormous centipede and we were like, but we couldn't move. And the minute the rehearsal and we all like, *screams* so, okay. But of course, then our stage manager had to come and remove that centipede, but okay of course that is something outside our ability to handle in a way, but I'm just saying whatever can happen. So you just sort of sometimes have to be prepared for and try and cope. So I remembered during the first run of *Beauty World* at World Trade Centre, there was a power trip. And as a production manager, I can't do anything because the power trip is a power trip. And that is something that has to be dealt with by the technical people. And Jacintha goes off stage with bottles of Green Spot and started offering it to the audience to just entertain them and keep them going. And Keng Sen came forward to make a short announcement. So, you just learn to cope. And to this day, I can't find those bottles of Green Spot anymore because I think those people took it home for souvenirs because you see by then Green Spot did not come in those bottles. I actually found the original, the old bottles. I actually went to the company and said, can you fill it up for me? And they did it.

[01:04:02]

Serene: So, influential, you ask them to fill it up and they did it?

[01:04:04]

Lucilla: No no, no, no, not influential. I just sounded so sad. And please, please, uncle help me help me... Okay.

[01:04:11]

Lucilla: The fourth tip, free tip.

[01:04:13]

Serene: Okay, free tip, yes, freebies.

[01:04:16]

Lucilla: Must be thick-skinned to ask. Because ask and you shall be given. Because sometimes I was surprised in those days, you ask and people were quite kind, you explain to them, I'm trying to do this production, it's a school production – well not school production, but it's a low budget production, I need this, I need that, can? And then they'll say, *aiyah*, take *lah* take *lah* take *lah*, you know, whatever. So sometimes it's just about being thick-skinned in asking. So like for example, the opening of *Beauty World* then, it was a little girl coming on stage to listen to a radio and the voice on the radio we wanted an old DJ. And we said, it had to be Mike Ellery and I found him and he was doing private work at that time in his studio. So I told him the whole thing and he said, "*aiyah* just come to my studio, I'll do it for you". And he recorded it in one take and he gave me the tape and that was it. He did it as a favor, although I didn't know him, but I just called him. So you never know till you try, right? So that was it. And I think it is still about being creative, being daring to ask, and just knowing also who to ask.

[01:05:33]

Serene: That's really interesting. And I do think that that can be applied also to your relationships with sponsors. So, I'm going to dig out the piece of data where you actually managed to get some unexpected sponsors for '*Mixed Signals*'.

[01:05:49]

Serene: So the dates were '*Mixed Signals*', 1989, 14th to 17th, and then 20th to 24th of June 1989 at the World Trade Centre auditorium, this time the director is Ivan Heng, the writer Michael Chiang, right? FOH was Michele Lim. I'm paying tribute to all these early stalwarts of theatre...

[01:06:08]

Lucilla: Oh she just aged us all.

[01:06:12]

Serene: Including myself, okay? Fourth play collaboration between TheatreWorks and Michael Chiang. Now this is interesting. It was commissioned by the American Express. For the first time in Singapore's short theatrical history, an international corporation commissioned a local professional theatre company to produce an all local work. And in the past corporations in support of the arts actually looked outside of Singapore and brought in reputable companies from abroad, right?

[01:06:38]

Lucilla: Yes. Like, you would get the, don't-know-what playhouse and then they'll do it at the Hilton or something like that, or, well, you still have a bit of that, like SRT would bring in a company from England or America to perform, but yes, this was the first time you get an international company commissioning a local group to do something.

[01:07:00]

Serene: So Lucilla, on a parting shot. This is just a parting shot. Are you happy with everything that you've achieved as an arts manager?

[01:07:08]

Lucilla: Yes. I think I stopped at a time when, in a way, health wise, it was hard for me to continue. And I had actually by then done full-time because I was in TheatreWorks as their full-time publicity manager, and I was also helping to run their education program. Keng Sen was of course interested in more international type work. And that was a bit difficult for me. So anyway, but looking back at all the opportunities I got and all the things I got to do I am very grateful for all those experiences and in a way, it's like all these skills are still there. You need to run an event. And they call it now events management, but you know what to do, you know what to look out for. Because about three years ago, I was asked by an organization to run their 150th anniversary. So it was, I don't want to do this anymore, I don't want to do this anymore, but in the end I directed their concert, but I also had to be the stage manager for it because they didn't have the money. But it was nice because it was about passing on the knowledge and teaching younger people to do the work and all that. So that was nice.

[01:08:26]

Serene: Thank you very much for being here with us today. and sharing all your stories.

[01:08:31]

Lucilla: You're welcome. And also it's like interesting because you sometimes think is there a point to all the things I've gone through? Is there any way of sharing this? So I thought when I was approached to do this, I thought, oh, okay, that's nice. At least all my stories got a point to it. I can share and talk about it. And it wasn't just a distant memory. So, thanks for having me.

[01:08:56]

Serene: Thank you.

SERENE'S OUTRO

[01:08:59]

Serene: You've just come to the end of another episode of backlogues and arts management podcast series. If you'd like to learn more about any of the key events, people and institutions mentioned in this particular episode, head over to our website at backlogues.sg. That's B A C K L O G U E S dot S G to find further information pertaining to each episodes content. You may find them under shownotes on the respective pages for each episode.

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