Centre 42's fun-raiser *Desert Blooms* tells the colourful history of the first decade of queer Singaporean theatre

Desert Blooms - The Dawn of Queer Singaporean Theatre by Ng Yi-Sheng makes its return after a well-received first staging in 2019. This staging will be held as part of Centre 42's 10th anniversary fun-raising celebration, with Wild Rice as a venue partner. This showcase of the queer Singaporean theatre scene will be presented to a wider audience for one show only on **30 June 2024, 3pm** at the 358 seater **Wild Rice Theatre**.

Desert Blooms 2024 features the talents of **Yap Yi Kai, Medli Dorothea Loo, Izzul Irfan and Coco Wang Ling** as cast, with **Tan Shou Chen** returning to direct. Audiences will be treated to a kaleidoscopic lecture-performance that recounts the history of queer and queer-allied voices in Singapore theatre during the tumultuous decade of 1985-1995, showcasing the works of playwrights such as Eleanor Wong, Russell Heng and many more. From the first portrayals of a transgender woman's struggles in *"Lest the Demons Get to Me"* to the first lesbian protagonist in *"Mergers and Accusations"*,

Desert Blooms deftly paints the story of how these plays opened conversations for queer characters to enter society's consciousness.

As Ng Yi-Sheng emphasises, "What I want to show is that the artistic revolution during this period is part of the shift in the national queer consciousness. It's not just what queer people think of themselves, but it's the way people in Singapore regard the queer community, waking up to the fact that they exist, developing feelings about them, whether it's paranoia, disgust, or otherwise." This restaging uses historical research and narrative to make its own contribution in shifting that same consciousness today for the better. Audiences from the previous staging gave it glowing reviews, highlighting the dialogue created between generations within the queer community, with one audience member commenting: "*Very informative, very instructive, loved the intergenerational queer discourse & dialogue*".

This restaging ties into Centre 42's mission of resisting cultural amnesia through documentation of the local theatre scene. As a "fun-raiser" performance, invites to the show are by donations of $50 and up. The Centre is looking to fund its programmes heading into its next decade, including maintaining its comprehensive, publicly-accessible C42 Archive of Singapore Theatre, and running New Writing Development programmes. Donors will also receive tax deductions and become part of their *Champions of C42* donors community, with exclusive perks such as invites to special showcases like *Desert Blooms* and regular updates on its programmes. *Desert Blooms* is proud to be an event partner of Pink Fest 2024, in line with the festivities of Pride Month. To donate and receive an invite, register at bit.ly/desert-blooms.

For interview opportunities and other media enquiries, please contact:

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For information about Centre 42's donors programme *Champions of C42*, please visit:
https://www.centre42.sg/donation/
For information about the past staging of *Desert Blooms* in 2019, please visit:
https://www.centre42.sg/residencies/the-vault-residency/9946/the-vault-desert-blooms/

ARTIST BIOS

Ng Yi-Sheng (he/him) is a multi-genre writer, researcher and activist. His books include the short story collection *Lion City* and the poetry collection *last boy* (both winners of the Singapore Literature Prize), *SQ21: Singapore Queers in the 21st Century*, *Loud Poems for a Very Obliging Audience* and *Black Waters, Pink Sands*. He recently served as editor of *EXHALE: an Anthology of Queer Singapore Voices*. He has written plays such as *The Last Temptation of Stamford Raffles* (Wild Rice), *251* (Toy Factory) and *Reservoir* (TheatreWorks). Additionally, he has crafted lecture performances such as *Painted Shadows: a Queer Haunting of the National Gallery* (Substation) and *Ayer Hitam: a Black History of Singapore*. He still documents the arts in Singapore on Instagram at @yishkabob.
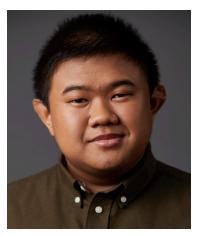

Tan Shou Chen is a recognised theatre-maker from Singapore. His performances and directorial works reflect interest in the encounters between different cultures across time and space and the traverse between tradition and contemporary. In addition to Dramaturgy, Shou Chen brings with him over 15 years of experience in media, technology and communications. Shou Chen has a BA in Psychology from Boston University and a Masters in Communications Management from University of Southern California, Annenberg School of Communication. He continues to apply his background in psychology, media and communications in the rehearsal room, and in the works he creates.

Yap Yi Kai has acted on stage and screen. Her stage credits include Wild Rice's *HOTEL*, *Press Gang* (Singapore Theatre Festival) and *Public Enemy* (Best Supporting Actress nomination). She played Sheila in J.B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* (Wild Rice) and Ricky Roma in David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* (Episode 7 Theatre Film). Her screen credits include *Baby Bumps* (Channel 5 Telemovies, Mediacorp) directed by Li Lin Wee, *Glimpse* (明月盒) and *To Mum* (Love, Me), a short film screened at IndigNation, Singapore's queer festival, and at festivals around the world. Yi Kai is a Wolf Trap Teaching Artist with the Singapore Theatre Company (formerly SRT) and a special needs drama educator with ACT 3 Theatrics. She sings, plays the guitar, loves cycling, climbing and trail runs.

Izzul Irfan is an actor and theatre-maker. A graduate of WILD RICE's Young & W!LD program, his recent performance credits include *Four Horse Road* (The Theatre Practice), *Re:Assembly* (Drama Box), and *_T0701_* (Zeugma). In the future, he hopes to stretch himself with even more complex roles both on stage and screen.

In between shows, Izzul dreams about cities and architecture, reads manga, and dances. Above all, he finds simple contentment in the all-too-human act of telling stories.

Coco Wang Ling (she/her) is a multidisciplinary theatre maker, actor and collaborator. She recently graduated from the Victoria College of the Arts (VCA) with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Theatre) degree. Her creative practice is led by her passion for play and world-building, and places audience connection at the forefront of her practice. She works to challenge theatrical conventions by creating performances in non-traditional theatre spaces. Coco is passionate about theatre education for young children and, through this, she wishes to create a more empathetic world through empowerment. She believes in making the arts more accessible by practicing brave spaces in the rehearsal room.

Medli Dorothea Loo is an actress, singer and theatre-maker born and raised in Singapore. She first started performing professionally when she was seven years old in Ken Kwek's *Cartoons*. She then continued to act and star in numerous television shows, movies and theatre productions, most notably, International Kids Emmy nominated *Spelling Armadillo*, Singapore Repertory Theatre's *Forbidden City: Portrait of an Empress* (2017), *Lion Moms* (2017), Wild Rice's *Peter Pan in Serangoon Gardens* (2019), The Necessary Stage's *Old Gaze* (2023) and the feature film *Repossession* (2019), where she was nominated for Best Actor at the Horrible Imaginings Film Festival in San Diego.

Centre 42 is a non-profit arts organisation with IPC status committed to the creation, documentation and promotion of text-based works for the Singapore stage. As a theatre development space and intermediary, we incubate original writings for the stage, support the development of artists and new works, and develop and maintain a functional archive documenting the histories and processes of Singapore theatre.

Centre 42 is developed in collaboration with the National Arts Council (NAC), and officially opened in 2014. Visit our website and C42's Archive of SG Theatre here.