

Flying high

Online theatre review
The Flying Inkpot reaches terminal velocity; after all, it has been in the business for 14 years



MAYO MARTIN
 mayo@mediacorp.com.sg

EARLY this year, a certain theatre company's publicity material for a play featured a quote from a theatre critic belonging to a group called The Sinking Teapot.

"Washing dirty linen in public couldn't get dirtier than this", it said. The "critic" had given the play 4 out of 5 stars.

There is, of course, no group called The Sinking Teapot. It was a parody of local online theatre review site The Flying Inkpot.

"We were very amused by that. You know what they say — you've made it when people actually mock you," quipped Kenneth Kwok, 35, one of the website's editors and reviewers.

He was joking, yes, but there may be a grain of truth there somewhere.

The Flying Inkpot is probably the theatre community's longest open secret: A website crammed with hundreds of reviews of practically everything that's been staged in Singapore for nearly a decade and a half.

Recently, the folks behind it have temporarily emerged from their comfy cyberspace zones and teamed up with The Substation for Open Roads, intimate fortnightly "book club" sessions where they discuss some of Singapore's iconic plays.

It kicked off this month with Stella Kon's *Emily Of Emerald Hill*.

This Saturday will see them taking on The Necessary Stage resident playwright

Haresh Sharma's *Off-Centre*.

Lined up until November are works including Jean Tay's *Everything But The Brain*, Kuo Pao Kun's *The Coffin Is Too Big For The Hole* and *No Parking On Odd Days*, Ovidia Yu's *Three Fat Virgins Unassembled* and Alfian Sa'at's *Homesick*.

"We wanted to see what we can do to help people be more confident in expressing views about theatre. And generally to nurture the audience in Singapore," said Kwok.

Credibility issues

The Flying Inkpot has been doing just that since 1996, when a group of people decided to use the then-relatively new media of the Internet to talk about the local arts scene.



Sim Yi Jin

Members of The Flying Inkpot:
 (Top row, from left) Matthew Lyon, Ho Rui An, Kenneth Kwok;
 (bottom row from left) Kalin Tay, Adele Tan and Deanne Tan.

While other sections of the site, such as poetry and classical music, have gone kaput, the theatre and dance section has soldiered on, making it Singapore's longest-running theatre website — and the most comprehensive one that's available in a click, too.

To date, surfers can access around 800 reviews of everything from, say, Singapore Repertory Theatre's *Ah Kong's Birthday Party* to the recent production of *The Full Monty* by Pangdemonium!.

They will also find reviews of productions by companies that have slipped under the radar of mainstream media, as well as those that have simply vanished. Remember The Small Theatre? Theatre Ox? Ingot Arts?

Right now, there's a veritable platoon

of 10 people — ranging from educators and academics to lawyers and theatre practitioners — keeping the ball rolling under the editorial supervision of Kwok and Brit educator Matthew Lyon, 32.

Everyone does it for free and they've once declined an offer to monetise the website for fear of compromising its integrity.

These days, The Flying Inkpot is a recognisable — if not respected — entity in the theatre ecosystem. They get invited to critique plays, hold workshops, judge theatre contests, get quoted by theatre companies and find themselves at the receiving end of potshots.

That wasn't the case years ago when their presence raised some eyebrows.

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