

## Flying high

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"It was very bad," said Kwok, a former theatre practitioner and secondary school vice principal who is now furthering his studies at the National Institute of Education. "The Internet was just starting out. A lot of theatre companies were, like, 'Is there really value in this creature, this online review?' There were those who would go: 'I'm sorry, we're not giving you tickets.' It's not so antagonistic anymore."

Except for the occasional heated reaction to their star-rated reviews, of course.

Co-editor Lyon comes across as the wry bad cop to Kwok's good cop. He once gave zero stars to a twin-bill production.

"It was absolutely abysmal and physically painful," said Lyon. "We stuck it out until five or six minutes before the end and just left."

After the review came out, the artist put up a strongly worded response online "to express his unhappiness in no uncertain terms," said Lyon, with a laugh.

Kwok also remembered having written a "very negative" review of a play — and ended up bumping into the person at a party. "That person was not very pleased. He said he felt betrayed."

"But we've never been Keng Sen-ed," said Lyon, referring to the incident where

TheatreWorks artistic director Ong Keng Sen had mentioned that a certain newspaper theatre reviewer was not welcome to his production of *Diaspora*.

### Hits and misses

Despite its longevity and dedication, The Flying Inkpot is still a niche site.

"I would say we're a trade magazine," said Lyon, who self-deprecatingly added that they stopped tracking how many people go to the site four to five years ago.

"It got depressing. At that time, we had 95 unique users per day. We're not challenging *The New York Times* or anything."

But there may be certain benefits beyond the amount of eyeballs it gets.

"We've had feedback from people who say it's a very good resource. If you're doing an essay and would like to get some information about, say, Haresh Sharma's last 10 plays, it's there," said Kwok.

And because they've kept an eye on local plays for a decade, they have a broad perspective of the quality and quantity of the theatre scene through the years. Rare in an industry with a rather short-term memory.

"I think there are more companies doing high quality work now. There was a period in the early 2000s when there were a lot of new companies and people just threw things on the wall and saw what



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**It got depressing. At that time, we had 95 unique users per day.**

**Matthew Lyon, on deciding to give up tracking the number of people who visited The Flying Inkpot**

stuck," said Lyon.

Added Kwok: "There's certainly more professionalism in the theatre scene now. And it's been so many years that you can see theatre companies' bodies of work. Wild Rice, for example, has been very consistent. They started with a clear identity of what they were going to be — big productions which were very solid but had a bit of edge to it. And they've kept going."

"TheatreWorks, in the past, used to do very big shows but now it's very fragmented; a lot of inter-cultural stuff."

While the folks at The Flying Inkpot have been very generous with their words and time, there's one thing they're rather stingy about: That 5-star review.

For Lyon and Kwok, at least, the only local productions that have earned those are The Finger Players' *Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea* and The Necessary Stage's *Gemuk Girls*.

Of course, there are the odd 5-star decisions to make. "There's *Cirque du Soleil*, too. It was the first time I'd seen anything like that," said Lyon.

Added Kwok hastily: "I don't think you should put that in. We'll lose all credibility. We're gonna get hate mail now!"

You can drop by The Flying Inkpot at [www.inkpotreviews.com](http://www.inkpotreviews.com). For details on Open Roads, visit [readingsingaporetheatre.blogspot.com](http://readingsingaporetheatre.blogspot.com).

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