

YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2018

FAITH NG



Post-show dialogue session of 'Whale Fall' by The Orange Production, The Necessary Stage, 2017.

Photo courtesy of Dan Koh

Faith Ng (b.1987) is a playwright. She is also an Associate Artist and Executive (Engagement) with Checkpoint Theatre. Faith holds a Master of Arts with Distinction in Creative Writing (Scriptwriting) from the University of East Anglia. She was awarded the National Arts Council's Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate) to pursue her Masters in 2012.

Faith's plays capture slices of Singapore life. They include the critically acclaimed 'Normal' (2015; 2017), 'For Better or for Worse' (2013) and 'wo(men)' (2010). 'Normal' played to sold-out audiences and continues to receive interest from schools. 'For Better or for Worse' received three nominations at the 14th Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards including Best Original Script and Production of the Year. 'wo(men)' received four nominations at the 11th Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards including Best Original Script. Her collection of plays, 'Faith Ng Plays: Volume 1' was published in 2016.

In 2014, Faith was a recipient of the Singapore Creative Writing Residency, where she led creative writing workshops for the University Scholars Programme (USP), National University of Singapore and a playwriting programme for younger writers between 9 and 12 years old at The Arts House. In 2015, her work was featured in the Esplanade's 'The Studios: fifty', which celebrated 50 years of Singapore English language theatre and the practitioners who have contributed to its development.

Faith has also worked with The Necessary Stage, Drama Box and Esplanade, where she has branched into writing specifically for senior audiences as well as for children. Her works have been well-received internationally. 'For Better or for Worse' was read at the National Play Festival organised by Playwriting Australia in Sydney in 2014 while 'Speak Good English' was read at the London Book Fair in 2013 and 'Make Believe' was read by Theatre Centre, Norwich, in 2012.

Faith is also a lecturer at the National University of Singapore where she teaches playwriting. She has been actively involved in mentoring young playwrights whose works have been read and produced by various theatre companies. She continues to organise, facilitate and present talks, workshops and panels aimed at supporting and nurturing young theatre makers and bringing more audiences to the theatre. ■



A CONVERSATION WITH FAITH NG

Tell us about your earliest memories encountering the arts. Who or what were your key influences?

I owe a lot to Checkpoint Theatre's Joint Artistic Directors Claire Wong and Huzir Sulaiman. I stumbled upon playwriting during my first year in National University of Singapore (NUS), when I took Huzir's module 'Introduction to Playwriting'. He was the first person to take my writing seriously; he encouraged and nurtured my voice as a playwright.

Claire directed and brought my first play, 'wo(men)', to life as the curtain-raiser for the NUS Arts Festival in 2010. She directed my next two plays, 'For Better or for Worse' (2012) and 'Normal' (2015), each time with so much sensitivity and care. Those pockets of time with her in and out of the rehearsal rooms over the years have really shaped how I write for the stage and who I am as an artist.

“Value life over art, because how you lead your life is the most important work of art.”



'For Better or for Worse' by Checkpoint Theatre, Drama Centre Black Box, 2013.

Photo by Wesley Loh, Memphis West Pictures, courtesy of Checkpoint Theatre



'Normal' by Checkpoint Theatre, Drama Centre Black Box, 2017.

Photo by Crispian Chan, courtesy of Checkpoint Theatre

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced when creating new works?

Mustering the courage to begin writing and having the self-discipline to see it through. Being unafraid to make mistakes in the process of crafting the work, to take a risk, a detour, or to let go and start over if need be. Most of all, being relentless in ensuring that the work is honest, not contrived, truthful.

What motivated you to continue in spite of these challenges?

My husband, who is always the first person to listen to the smallest spark of an idea that I might have, who would heat dinner up for me during the many long nights where I sat in front of my laptop staring at a frighteningly blank Word document, and who would read and comment on draft after draft of each script that I wrote.

My friends who share the same passion and commitment for theatre as I do – Claire, Huzir, Jerusha Tan, Chen Yingxuan, Lucas Ho, Adib Kosnan, Oon Shu An, Joel Tan, Luke Somasundram, and Shiv Tandan. Knowing that I have a community to belong to has made me feel less alone and has inspired me to keep honing my craft.

What is your personal philosophy in life, and how does it translate into your writing?

Value life over art, because how you lead your life is the most important work of art. So if I hit a wall with my writing, I'll try to not beat myself up over it. It's just not healthy or productive. I try to extend that same kindness, love and patience not just to myself, but to the characters I am getting to know as I write them out.

What do you want the audience to experience through your plays?

I hope that my plays are starters to conversations between audience members; that in the darkness and sacredness of the theatre space, where they have to put their gadgets away and really pay attention to each other as living breathing bodies, they may reach out, listen and connect a little more with each other.



What advice would you give to students who want to pursue a career in your field?

Theatre is about people; a playwright never works in isolation but with a creative and production team. Surround yourself with a community of people who share the same beliefs and goals as you do as an artist. Make work together; support and spur each other on.

Be yourself. I think a lot of writers pretend to be someone else because they don't feel confident in their own voices, so they try to sound smarter or more poetic. I think it's really important to accept who you are and just let your work reflect your voice, as it is.

You also need to know why writing a play is so important to you. If you don't have the impulse and urgency to tell a story, then you're just wasting everyone's time. It could even be a comedy or something frivolous, but it will only mean something to everyone else if it means something to you.

What are your hopes and vision for Singapore's theatre scene?

I would like to see more voices being heard. I find theatre grouped into language groups limiting so hopefully we can begin to transcend those boundaries and reflect our multi-cultural linguistic environment. There are still stories to be told and performance forms to experiment with. We can grow as a scene when there are more conversations between artists, both within the scene as well as across disciplines.

How does receiving the Young Artist Award change things for you? Tell us more about how you intend to further grow and contribute to the arts scene.

I'm very humbled and thankful to receive this. I'm grateful for the National Arts Council's continued support – from receiving the NAC Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate), which granted me the invaluable opportunity to pursue my Masters in Creative Writing, to the Young Artist Award, which will go a long way in furthering my craft as a playwright.



The cast of 'Normal' with Minster Grace Fu, 2017.

Photo courtesy of Izz Sumono



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

My sincere and heartfelt thanks to the tireless and often thankless staff at the National Arts Council for supporting my growth as an artist and for this award. I am truly honoured.

To Claire and Huzir, for teaching me not just how to be a better playwright, but to be a better mentor and friend. I am forever grateful for the love and guidance you have given and continue to give me;

To the wonderful team at Checkpoint Theatre – Izz Sumono, Jerusha Tan and Lum E-Sean, for your patience, kindness, encouragement and for guiding my practice;

To Alvin Tan, Jean Ng, John Richardson and Sean Tobin for your vote of confidence. I hope to do my best to make you proud;

To my students who continue to inspire me with their passion, creativity and resourcefulness;

To my family, for believing in me;

To my husband, for your faith, trust and enduring love. ■