



YOUNG ARTIST
AWARD
2014
SITI KHALIJAH
ZAINAL

Born in 1985 in Singapore, Siti Khalijah Zainal began her acting career in 2003 when she was a part of the Theatre for Youth Ensemble programme by The Necessary Stage (TNS). She has since built an impressive acting portfolio, working with a range of theatre companies in Singapore like TNS, Teater Ekamatra, Cake Theatrical Productions, Wlld Rice, Dream Academy, The Theatre Practice, I Theatre and Panggung ARTS. By working with a multitude of professional groups, Siti has displayed a ceaseless zest to hone her craft as an actress and a collaborator of theatre works.

Siti has a prolific presence in both theatre and television circuits, having established her public celebrity status as one of the hosts for National Day Parade (2013 and 2014) and joining the motley team of strong actors in local parody television series, *The Noose*. Despite her acting credits, Siti is not averse to taking risks by working on exploratory projects on top of commercial works. She has been consistently cast in Dream Academy productions such as *Broadway Beng* (2013) and *Happy Ever Laughter* (2012 and 2014), as well as been avidly involved in experimental works of Cake Theatrical Productions such as *Desire At the Melancholic String* (2011), *Nothing* (2007) and *Divine Soap* (2006).

Siti won Best Actress for her role in *Model Citizens* (2010) at *The Straits Times Life!* Theatre Awards in 2011, and was nominated at the same award for her roles in *Gemuk Girls* (2008) by TNS, *How did the Cat Get so Fat?* (2007) and *Nadirah* (2009) by Teater Ekamatra. As a performer, she has toured internationally to Malaysia, Australia, Russia and the UK. In particular, the production *Best Of* (2013) toured to great success at CausewayXchange, as part of the Georgetown Festival in Penang, Malaysia.

Aside from performing in English and Malay language productions, Siti also performed in multi-lingual projects such as *The Bride Always Knocks Twice* (2013) by The Theatre Practice directed by Kuo Jian Hong. Her ability to cross barriers in language and culture are evidenced in these collaborative projects. She continues to be an inspiring actress who develops her craft from deeply intuitive instincts, channeling these instincts toward portraying characters that speak to global audiences through unparalleled sincerity and verisimilitude.



A CONVERSATION WITH SITI KHALIJAH ZAINAL

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

I struggled a lot starting out, I didn't even know where to begin and how to go about looking for auditions. It is really all thanks to my drama trainers who I look up to in Institute of Technical Education, Mr Tony Quek and Roger Jenkins; and also Serena Ho and Chong Tze Chien, who trained me when I joined the TNS Theatre For Youth Ensemble, for constantly pushing me and believing in me to continue doing theatre as a profession.

What are some of the biggest challenges you face as an artist?

Having to create impactful characters for every show that I do. Finding the time to do my own homework, research or interviews and making sure all of the characters are different and well-represented.

What motivates you to continue creating and inspiring, in spite of facing these challenges?

I see challenges as a form of self-betterment. And it gets quite manic when you are doing a few shows at the same time, but sacrifices have to be made and there should be no excuses.

Where do you look for inspiration, whenever you set about creating a new piece of work?

Everyday people and things. Sometimes we take the simplest things around us for granted when actually they are the ones that usually have the most to offer. Every individual has a deep secret or interesting stories to tell. It is my job to try and pick these things out and create something new.

If approached by an up-and-coming artist who wished to learn from your experience, what advice would you give to him/her?

Endurance and hard work. It is not easy starting out, even if you have the talent. In addition to having the passion and drive, you have to be patient and just keep going. Keep going for auditions, work with different companies and just do as much as you can whether you like it or not, just to gain experience and understand how the scene works.

What is your vision and what are your hopes for the arts scene in Singapore?

I would like for there to be more international/cross-cultural collaborations amongst theatre companies. I am very thankful



to have experienced this myself and it benefitted me as I learn so much each time. There is so much to absorb and understand and I wish for more theatre practitioners of my generation to experience this for themselves.

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

I hope to be an inspiration for those academically-challenged, but are very much into the arts and would like to do it for a living. I have talked to some of them and they remind me of myself, when I was just starting out. I would like to tell them that it is possible. I would like to guide them into finding different avenues of how they can be in the arts for a living. I would also like to better myself as an actor and learn from the best in the scene, both locally and internationally.



Best Of (2012)
Photo credit: Alan Lim



Desire at the Melancholic String (2013)
Photo credits: Cake Theatrical Productions

WORDS OF APPRECIATION

“First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the National Arts Council for choosing me for this award. I'm very grateful to be selected and be amongst the best in the industry to receive this prestigious award.

Secondly, this would not have happened if Melissa Lim from The Necessary Stage had not nominated me. Thank you so much for doing this and for believing in me!

I have been very lucky to be trained by some of the best in the industry when I first started out. Mr Tony Quek, Mr Roger Jenkins, Ms Serena Ho and Mr Chong Tze Chien. Thank you my teachers!

People who inspire me and helped me: Alin Mosbit, Elnie Mashari, Noor Effendy Ibrahim, Natalie Henedige, Darius Tan, Karen Tan. And of course, Alvin Tan and Haresh Sharma for all the challenging roles they have given me, earning me my nominations and eventually clinching The Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards for Best Actress. I can never thank all of you enough.

And last but not least, my family: Thank you Mak and Ayah for not asking me to quit theatre even though you initially gave me only a year to try out. And my sisters too. Thank you for taking care of me and understanding my crazy work schedules and explaining to our relatives about my line of work. Thanks for being my number 1 supporters. I love you all.

Siti Khalijah Zainal