

Singapore slaps ban on play about AIDS

Singapore: A dedicated group of amateur actors and actresses has been rehearsing for a year, convinced the time was ripe for an original drama about AIDS. But the Government thinks otherwise.

Officials, shocked by the sympathetic treatment of homosexuality in the play, *Safe Sex*, won't let the curtain rise on April 14 without drastic revisions.

As opening night approaches, ministers and the authors are at a deadlock. The artists refuse to tamper with the plot or characters and charge that Singapore's crackdown on homosexuals has gone too far.

"It's appalling," said Lim Shiauw Chong, director of the Theatre Works drama company. "Banning the play sends out a clear message that nothing will be tolerated except what the Government views as normal."

Police have barred homosexuals from nightclubs, bars, lounges and discos. Owners stand to lose their licences if they don't comply. Disco managers have been ordered to discontinue such promotions as Macho Nights and male fashion shows.

The clampdown on the play soon before its debut inflamed homosexuals already incensed by ostracism from their favourite haunts.

"This is a slap in the face to some of the most creative people," said a homosexual professional, "people the Government should be trying to encourage."

Officials insist they have no objection to a play focusing on AIDS. There have been four AIDS deaths and 16 carriers detected on the island so far. The Ministry of Community Development gave Theatre Works the go-ahead with-

out reading the script and even helped with costs by paying the theatre rent.

Now it has decided the problem with the play is that "homosexuality is portrayed as a natural and acceptable form of sexuality", said Ng Yew Kang, the ministry's cultural affairs director. If the slant was changed, he said, the production might proceed.

"This is in line with the Government's campaign against AIDS," Mr Ng said. "Homosexuality is one of its main causes. Homosexuality in Singapore is objectionable."

Playwrights Eleanor Wong and Chay Yew said the proposed changes would dilute the play's message and compromise their artistic integrity.

"The ministry doesn't want the homosexual portrayed as a sympathetic gay," said Ms Wong, a deputy

public prosecutor who wrote the first sketch about an egocentric yuppie convinced he has AIDS.

Mr Chay, a serviceman, is adamant the play - centred on a homosexual worker in an AIDS organisation and a straight husband stricken with the disease - should be staged as it is or not at all.

Mr Lim holds little hope a compromise will be reached in time for opening night.

"We thought Singapore was ready to deal with the very real problems of AIDS," he said. "Obviously the Government isn't if we can't even portray homosexuality realistically."

Equally incensed are proprietors of nightspots who have seen business drop as much as 40 per cent on weekends since the ban on homosexuals went into effect on March 1.

"Customers call us up and say they're afraid to come down in case the police raid the place," said Ronnie Tan, manager of Legends, a new disco that became an instant hit with homosexual patrons.

The police order leaves Mr Tan and other proprietors in a dilemma.

"How can I ask, 'Are you a gay?' and keep some out?" he asked. Mr Tan said one customer threatened to sue after the doorkeeper inquired if he were a homosexual.

Chua Cher Yak, director of the police Criminal Investigation Department, said the ban was only partly related to AIDS.

"We do not want to encourage such behaviour," he said. "To sit back and do nothing about something that happens openly in public would in effect be a form of tacit endorsement."

United Press International

On play on Aids

Ministry

open to

suggestions

1 REFER to the report 'Ministry says no' to play on Aids' (ST March 6).

The report quoted Ms Eleanor Wong and Mr Chay Yew as saying that my ministry wanted them to alter the characters in the scripts.

This fits to clarify that my ministry has not spoken to the writers on how to amend the scripts.

Suggestions on possible amendments mentioned by the writers came from TheatreWorks.

My ministry is open to suggestions but will not dictate how amendments are to be made.

We will co-present plays with any cultural groups provided the plays do not portray unacceptable values.

NG YEW KANG
Director (Cultural Affairs)
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Community
Development

Ministry says 'no' to play on Aids

It objects to the way homosexuality is treated

By YAW YAN CHONG

A PLAY about Aids, due to be staged next month, looks unlikely to make its debut because of official objection to certain parts of the script which its writers have refused to alter.

The Ministry of Community Development, the co-presenter of the play, Safe Sex, said it objected to the way homosexuality is treated in it.

It was to have jointly presented the play with drama company TheatreWorks at the Drama Centre from April 13 to 24.

The play, which comes in two parts, is by Miss Eleanor Wong, a Deputy Public Prosecutor, and Mr Chay Yew, a national serviceman.

The ministry's Cultural Affairs Director, Mr Ng Yew Kang, told The Straits Times yesterday: "Homosexuality is portrayed as a natural and acceptable form of sexuality in the play. My ministry will not want to be a joint presenter of the play in its present form."

"This is in line with the Government's campaign against Aids and homosex-

uality is one of its main causes. Homosexuality in Singapore is objectionable."

Mr Ng said the Ministry of Communications and Information also supported his ministry's stand on the matter.

His ministry would meet TheatreWorks officials and the two writers to decide what can be done.

Would not alter scripts

But Miss Wong and Mr Chay said they would not alter their scripts to get the ministry's approval. According to them, the ministry wants them to alter the characters in their scripts.

Miss Wong said the ministry was dissatisfied with the way the homosexual was portrayed in her play, Jackson On A Jaunt.

"The ministry doesn't want him portrayed as a sympathetic gay. It wants the gay character straightened," said Miss Wong, whose play, Two's Company or Peter's Passionate Pursuit, tied for first prize in the 1986 Short-Play Writing Competition organised by Shell and the National University of Singapore.



MISS WONG ... "the play won't have the same impact."

On why she would not compromise, she said: "The play won't have the same impact."

Her story is a comedy about an egocentric yuppie named Jackson who thinks he has Aids due to a mix-up in hospital test results.

Mr Chay also said he would not give in as this would be compromising on his "artistic integrity".

He is adamant that the play "should be staged as it is now or not at all."

His piece, Ten Little Indians, is about the friend-

ship between a homosexual voluntary worker in an Aids organisation and a "straight" husband stricken by Aids.

Mr Chay said the ministry wants him to change the character of the gay to that of a woman.

He explained that the message behind his play is that not only homosexuals can get Aids but straight people as well.

A bit of a surprise

Confirming that Safe Sex has been indefinitely postponed, Mrs Dana Lam-Teo, business manager of TheatreWorks, said on Monday: "The script is still under review and will not be able to meet its April staging date."

The ministry's move came as a surprise to TheatreWorks, which had not expected any adverse reaction from the ministry.

Its director, Mr Lim Siau Chong, said yesterday: "This comes as a bit of a surprise. We thought that Aids is so close to home and that the present climate is just right for the play to be staged."

THE ARTS

THEATRE

The loneliness of an Aids victim

By A SURENDREN

SAFE SEX is difficult. So is the double-bill feature by the same name at the Drama Centre.

On one hand, there is the direct message of the horrors of Aids, thrust very strongly in *As If He Hears*. On the other, there is the highly stylistic treatment of Jackson on *a Jaunt*, which also deals with the fatal disease.

Both are meant to increase awareness of Aids, to show the abject loneliness and social rejection faced by Aids sufferers.

As If He Hears does this, showing the pain and suffering of a victim of the disease. Strong acting by the cast — Lim Kay Siu as Aids sufferer Hans, and Lim Yu Beng as volunteer helper Peter — helped drive the message effectively home.

Hans, a bright Harvard graduate, suffers on stage. So does

Peter, a somewhat naive person who sings Doris Day songs, himself a social outcast as he is a homosexual. They experience the gamut of feelings as social misfits — today's society will have nothing to do with the infirm, weak and certainly not the infectious.

No clearer indication of this came than in two instances. In the first, Hans' advertising executive wife Ruth, played by Nora Samoisir, walks out on him with their young daughter when she learns of his affliction.

Even when Hans goes to her for solace, there is an initial reluctance to hug her own husband. The second instance, and certainly the more stark, was when Peter tells the audience that he was the only mourner at Hans' funeral.

But the play, written by Chay

Yew, does not remain interminably gloomy. There are instances of wry, cynical humour in the lines delivered by Hans, who faces an accelerated end.

Peter, who gradually infects Hans with renderings of *Que Sera Sera*, uses just a hint of Singlish. This is not merely to evoke a laugh from the audience, but is truly in keeping with his character.

What Hans initially, and derisively, describes as the "start of a beautiful relationship", ironically turns out to be true, as the two people who would otherwise not have met at all begin to support each other.

Hans, facing the unknown, admits to Peter during their very first encounter that he is afraid to die. Peter spontaneously holds his hand — the first physical contact offered to Hans in

months. Before Peter helps him die in dignity, Hans helps Peter straighten himself out.

As Hans says: "It's my turn now..."

But secondary issues are left unresolved. For example, what's to become of Hans' wife, who has been infected with an Aids-related disease.

And how badly scarred has the experience left Peter? He's the last person in Hans' life and he is left with the debris of that life — Hans' personal belongings. It's not made decisively clear that Peter is left the stronger for the experience.

Hans leaves behind a reminder for Peter — a beautiful Swiss watch. Perhaps it serves to remind everyone of the limited time they have here, especially if they are infected with the Aids virus.

□ □ □ □ □

"WE'RE awfully sorry about this."

These were the words that ended Jackson on *a Jaunt*, written by Eleanor Wong. It refers not just to the mix-up of Aids, but results in the play, but in this reviewer's opinion, also to the play itself.

Jackson makes use of a lot of symbolism. There was the circle of truth, within a circular stage which provided a circuit for the characters, stylised furniture made of stacks of newspapers, and the almost exclusive use of black-and-white clothes and props.

At the heart of Jackson is the attempt at self-discovery by a person who has Aids. Even when Jackson, played by William

Grosse, examines himself to try and admit his mistakes, what emerges are more lies. Jackson cannot help but delude himself.

Eventually, the climax almost brings you to the edge of the anguish faced by Jackson, but we never quite get there.

The play was originally meant to be a comedy, but tempering it to suit the sombreness of the disease — the script had been re-written at least twice — has left it neither a wry comedy nor a hard-edged pronouncement of the horrors of Aids.

■ The double-bill is showing at the Drama Centre until Dec 3. Most of the tickets, priced at \$8, \$10, \$12 and \$15, are sold, but there is the possibility of obtaining some at the door.

to find... sometimes you don't think He is, you must live every moment of the day as if He hears."

ELEANOR WONG'S hero, Jackson Wong, goes on one junt too many, and ends up with Aids.

It turns out to be a mistaken diagnosis — sort of — for he went to the clinic at the same time as Mimi, the prostitute, and they were both given call No. 633.

So who has got it? Does it matter less if it is the prostitute and not Jackson? Who cares anyway? Everybody close to him seems to be wearing masks.

Jackson seems to be wearing the most number of

that he is often away from home because he works hard selling insurance.

He does not tell his hot new date, Celene, about his forthcoming marriage to his fiancée, Susan — and neither woman knows about Mimi.

He thinks Celene is a public relations officer, but she is, in fact, something very different. And she has a boyfriend with whom she has a "mature, open and honest relationship". Hab!

Daddy is wrapped up in his songbirds and mother in ferreting out the latest scandals. Susan may or may not love him, and Mimi? Well, she may or may not have Aids.

They all spin their webs of

curricular platform painted with Aids news reports. The platform slants forward, symbolic of the off-centre characters in the play.

Ong denies that the strong stylistic treatment is meant to disguise a weak script:

"The script was very sparse, so we've had to work in a message, a focus, and tighten and restructure scenes in quite a big way."

Ong has borrowed the magic circle concept from Chinese opera: people step into the circle and into character, or freeze until the other characters finish their parts and speak the cues.

Rani Moorthy, as Jackson's mother, walks in circles drib-

Kee, the father, barely pays attention.

Their ethnic costumes, and the different races of the actors, are a reminder that Aids can affect any family.

William Anthony Grosse plays Jackson; Janet Ng, Mimi; Jacintha Abisheganaden, Celene; Karen Lim, the doctor and Christine Chan, Susan.

• *Safe Sex opens at the Drama Centre with a students' preview tomorrow at 8 pm (\$6). Tickets are at \$30 for the gala night on Friday and \$8, \$10, \$12 and \$15 for other shows, which end on Dec 3. Students' tickets are at \$8 for the 2.30 pm matinees on Sunday, Dec 2 and 3.*

Change in attitude and sensitivities

ONCE upon a time in 1987, a TheatreWorks director decided to stage two plays on Aids. All he had to do was get them written, one by Deputy Public Prosecutor Eleanor Wong and the other by Chay Yew, then a national serviceman.

Simple. Right? Wrong.

The censors banned both plays last year. The Community Development Ministry was supposed to present it jointly with TheatreWorks in April 1988, but objected.

On Wong's play, Jackson On A Jaunt, MCD's Cultural Affairs Director Ng Yew Kang commented: "Homosexuality is portrayed as a natural and acceptable form of sexuality in the play. My ministry will not want to be a joint presenter of the play in its present form."

Chay said that the MCD wanted him to change Peter, the homosexual volunteer worker in his play, Ten Little Indians, to that of a woman.

Both playwrights said they would not compromise their artistic integrity by making any changes.

But the plays have been changed, and director Ong Ken Sen says the changes have been to enhance the plays dramatically, but he has kept the plays "true to the writer's intentions because it is important to the writers, writing in Singapore."

"Chay's play was written almost like a piece of literature, but we felt some parts were very strong and could stand on their own, and they were much more poignant with chunks taken out from other parts."

Chay himself is a perfectionist, and he created about 10 different drafts as the cast and director workshopped the characters' relationships, he said.

The crucial character, Peter, is still a homosexual, but a scene where he reflects on how Aids has changed the gay consciousness — while sitting in a gay bar and speaking as a member of the community — has been excised.

The focus is on the relationships, and the friendship between Peter and Hans, the patient is a potent thread in the plot.

"Peter does come to love Hans, but he's able to accept that Hans is a heterosexual and he'll never feel the same love, and that is the strength in Peter's character. But they are friends, because in a sense they are both derelicts of society —



Nora Samosir as the shattered wife told of her husband's illness and Lim Kay Siu as Hans, the Person With Aids (PWA).

Peter's a loner and Hans is socially ostracised," says Ong.

The plays were submitted again this year, and approved. Ong says he is not sure why, as the changes have not been major. That may be a matter of perception. The ministry has not given him any reasons, but he speculates that it might have been due to change in attitude and sensitivities about public discussion of Aids.

Chay had worked as a volunteer helper while studying in the United States, and his play documents the phases in the development of the disease and in the change in the patient's attitudes and rela-

tionships with people. It has been renamed *As If He Hears*, from a line in the play.

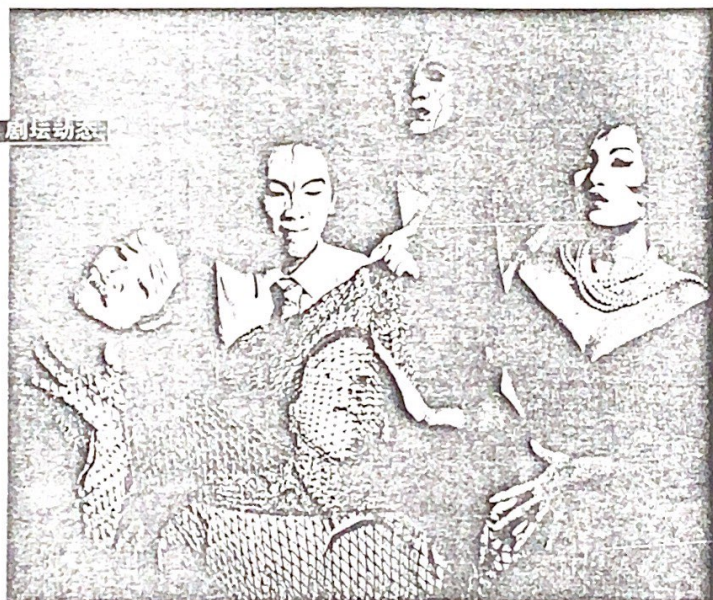
Wong did not have such first-hand encounters with Aids patients, so her intention was to "use Aids as a catalyst to examine the society around the victim", says Ong.

Ong spoke for both the playwrights, who are now studying in the US. Wong is in New York reading for her Masters' in law and Chay is at Boston University, reading for a Master of Science degree in broadcasting.

Both plays will open in the doublebill, *Safe Sex*, tomorrow at the Drama Centre.

曾经遭禁 《性安全》 终于安全过关

文：霍月伟



剧运动态



▲《恰似地听见》调子低沉。

现在，凭着这些经验，我想说个故事。”谢耀说。

《恰似地听见》调子上比《杰》沉得多。剧中男主角汉斯患上爱之病后，失去成功世界的一切，无力地在家等待死亡，而辅导人员彼得（一名同性恋者）在这期间成为他唯一的朋友，两人产生一段温馨的友谊。但汉斯终究还是死了——剧作者甚至让我们看到他病情的步步发展。

“爱之病里头不会有快乐的结局。”谢耀表示：“唯一的快乐结局是治愈的方法，但至今没人知道那是什么。”

《杰克逊之旅》里，观众可能会为男主角杰克逊与周围人士的虚伪、小聪明等常见习性发笑，但剧作者王少妍指出：“我不认为爱之病是什么笑话。”

这群年轻人，将通过戏剧来表达他们的关怀。（PO）

剧艺工作坊呈献 英语剧《性安全》

日期：11月23日—12月3日
时间：晚上8时
(11月26日、12月2日及3日兼演2时30分下午场)
票价：8元、10元、12元、15元(23日学生场一律6元，下午场学生优待券8元，24日场一律30元)

我国英语专业剧团“剧艺工作坊”，原订在去年4月搬演探讨爱之病问题的本地剧《性安全》，后来却因为“把同性恋看作合乎自然、可以被接受的事情”（社会发展部发言人语），剧作者又不愿修改剧本，而遭禁演。

守得云开见月明，从下星期四开始，国人终于有机会看到这出戏了。到底，《性安全》在这一年半的时间里，经历过什么蜕变？

《性安全》(Safe Sex)由两个小戏《恰似地听见》与《杰克逊之旅》组成。

当初遭禁演时，剧作者谢耀(写《恰》)与王少妍(写《杰》)的反应都很强硬：宁可不上演也绝不修改剧本！

两个剧本经过修改后更为紧凑

但剧艺工作坊艺术总监、《性安全》导演王景生劝得他俩回心转意。“我告诉他们，重写剧本并非为了检查官，而是因为剧本的第一稿本来就弱。”

王景生指出，带有黑色幽默意味的《杰克逊之旅》开始时，并未在“爱之病”与“人际关系”两个主题之间作出明确的选择。王少妍后来决定，以爱之病作为催化剂，让男主角杰克逊患病后突然重新认识自己与世界，扩大了整个戏的视角。

总的来说，两个剧本都变得更紧凑和更集中了，基本上却没什么大改动。再登上时竟然通过了，王景生表示颇感意外。

为病人与社会人士间搭起桥梁

他希望《性安全》能真实地呈现爱之病人经历痛苦与创伤。

▲《杰克逊之旅》具有黑色幽默意味。

“在一般人眼里，爱之病已不仅仅是一种疾病，它成了一个道德问题，谁患上爱之病，他就是同性恋或拈花惹草……这种联想，使病人陷入死亡的恐惧与社会的孤立中无法自拔。”王景生说：“这书是一场严肃的演出，我们期待病人与社会人士之间能搭起一座沟通的桥。”

为了了解爱之病人的感受，主要演员还到医院去访问了医生、辅导人员……还有现实生活中的爱之病人。

“演员们深受触动。”王景生不无沉重地道：“这些病人在我们的社会里是得完全隐蔽起来的……”

●凭着担任义工的经验说个故事

《恰》剧作者谢耀年前尚在美国洛杉矶攻读广播电视课程时，曾在爱之病组织里担任义工。

“我看过这些病人的样子，我知道他们的感受……”

TheatreWorks' doublebill uses Aids as main theme

Safe Sex — A Double Bill
By TheatreWorks
Drama Centre
Nov 23 — Dec 3

PREVIEW/
By TING MEI SEE

AIDS reared its ugly head in our lives about five years ago. Since then, many plays, movies and TV dramas have been made on the subject.

Now finally, TheatreWorks' double-bill on the topic — Jackson on a Jaunt by Eleanor Wong and As If He Hears by Chay Yew — will be seen by audiences here.

Originally planned for April last year, the two plays did not make it clear official censorship and was dropped from TheatreWorks' lineup for the year.

The plays have since seen a certain degree of rewrite, but director Ong Keng Sen said that the storylines are basically the same.

"I think the reason we got the approval this time was because of change in the attitude of the censors. When we first submitted the scripts, the Aids issue was still very sensitive. Basically it was the wrong time for it."

Both plays focus on Aids, but Wong and Chay have chosen different approaches to the subject.

Chay, who is studying film in California, has worked as a volunteer in an Aids organisation in Los Angeles. As such, he has powerful first-hand experiences to draw on.

His play deals with the friendship between an Aids volunteer worker Peter (played by Lim Yu-Beng) and

His play deals with the friendship between an Aids volunteer worker Peter (played by Lim Yu-Beng) and Hans (played by Lim Kay Siu), a man stricken with Aids.

As If He Hears is a sombre study of the lives of Aids patients. "I don't want to romanticise Aids, nor shove it down the audience's throats.

"But just like a drama about cancer or death, you cannot expect not to be serious," said Chay.

For their roles in the play Kay Siu and Yu-Beng met two Aids patients from the Communicable Disease Centre here to find out what the disease is like.

"In meeting with the patients, we get to know what they go through in the different stages — not just the physical changes but the emotional aspects as well," said Kay Siu.

In contrast to Chay's play, Eleanor Wong's Jackson on a Jaunt takes a more humorous approach to the subject in the form of a black comedy of errors. However, Aids is not the subject of comedy in her play.

"It would be ludicrous to make Aids a comedy. In this play, we laugh at the stereotypical characters and scenarios that I have created," she said.

Jackson (played by William Grosse), an egocentric insurance executive, thinks he has Aids due to a mix-up of test results at the hospital.

From there, the play looks at the general public's ignorance and indifference towards Aids and their callousness towards Aids patients.

"We hope the plays will form a bridge to people's understanding of



Facing death: Lim Kay Siu plays Hans, a man who is stricken by Aids, while Nora Samosir plays his wife in As If He Hears by Chay Yew.

the disease. It is plays like these that help us come to an understanding of the disease and to see that after the moral issue, there is the human issue," said Ong.

Tickets at \$15, \$12, \$10 and \$8 are available at the Central Booking Office, Tangs, Tangs Studio, Centrepoint and Wisma Atria. Tickets for

the student's preview on Nov 23 cost \$6. Concessions for students are available at \$8 for the matinees on Nov 26 and Dec 2 and 3. For the opening night on Nov 24, \$30 tickets (inclusive of refreshments and supper) are also available.

Night performances are at 8 pm. The matinees begin at 2.30 pm.

CENTRESTAGE

Mary Rose Gasmier

Safe seats

PEOPLE trying to get tickets for TheatreWorks' Safe Sex have been stymied because tickets at the more popular centres are all sold out.

Not to worry. TheatreWorks' publicity manager, Ng Soy Cheng, says the company has retained a limited number of tickets for the Aids doublebill, coming up on Nov 23 — probably so desperate fans can chivvy her to reserve tickets. Call 280-0188.

Meanwhile, those who wondered why TheatreWorks moved away from the usual sophisticated poster-designs to one featuring a child's crayon drawing and kiddies' alphabet

blocks for this play's poster design, director Ong Keng Sen has an answer.

One of the plays, As If He Hears, "is about the loss of innocence, and about the devastating effects that Aids has on the family," said Ong.

To drive home the message of lost innocence, Ong has two girls as members of the cast. Daphne Ng, 10 and Jamie Lo, 11, will enter during scene breaks to recite nursery rhymes. The four rhymes relate to the predicament of the Aids victim in the story, especially the first one: Humpty Dumpty.

Aids is the main issue in TheatreWorks' doublebill, *Safe Sex*. Mary Rose Gasmier previews.

Aids and circle game

LIM SENG TIONG

DURING rehearsals last week, Nora Samosir was thrashing out with TheatreWorks director Ong Ken Sen the probable reactions of a woman whose husband has just told her he has Aids: controlled, pitying his predicament? Or raging at the sexual betrayal? How would Lim Kay Siu react as the guilty husband?

As Ong admits, the whole question of Aids is inextricably bound up with social and moral issues: sexual mores, promiscuity, betrayal of the spouse, the sanctity of marriage and family. Clouding the issue of family support is the paranoia based on fear of infection.

Amid such murky issues, Chay Yew's play, *As If He Hears*, tries to capture the sense of a friendship between two men which brings some hope to a dying victim.

Lim plays Hans, the bright young Harvard graduate yuppie whose life falls apart at 35, when the doctor tells him he has Aids.

Before he can cope with the emotional devastation, the seizures begin, and he is fired from his job: "Everybody's just thrown me away," he says bitterly.

Then comes daft, wimpy Peter, who went to the same school as Hans but has achieved nothing with his life. Only he does not have Aids.

From bitterness and rejection, Hans learns to cope with the outside world to some extent.

And Peter's strength and acceptance give him courage to face death.

Both Lim and Lim Yu Beng (Peter) researched their roles by going to the Communicable Diseases Centre and talking with two Aids patients.

Instead of it being a grim experience, Lim found "there was strength, a sense of hope, a kind of composure, and they were getting on with their lives".

Perhaps that explains Peter's answer when Hans

to man: "Sometimes when you don't think He is, you must live every moment of the day as if He hears."

asks. He lies to his parents that he is often away from home because he works hard selling insurance.

He does not tell his hot new date, Celene, about his forth-

deceit within a magic circle, a circular platform painted with Aids news reports. The platform slants forward, symbolic of the off-centre characters in the play.

bling gossip while Lee Weng Kee, the father, barely pays attention.

Their ethnic costumes, and the different races of the actors, are a reminder that Aids



Jackson pleads for solace, mother Saras has time for a token hug, then it's back to the social whirl.

Arts & Leisure

Aids plays premiere in April

K.F. SEETHO

Two Singaporeans have written plays on Aids (Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome), which TheatreWorks will present this April as a double bill entitled Safe Sex. **JUDITH HOLMBERG** reports.

AIDS will rear its ugly head on the Singapore stage in April probably for the first time, when TheatreWorks premieres Safe Sex.

A double bill, Safe Sex consists of original short plays on the terminal disease, Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome.

Both plays were commissioned before the recent deaths of a handful of Singaporeans, and the ensuing publicity.

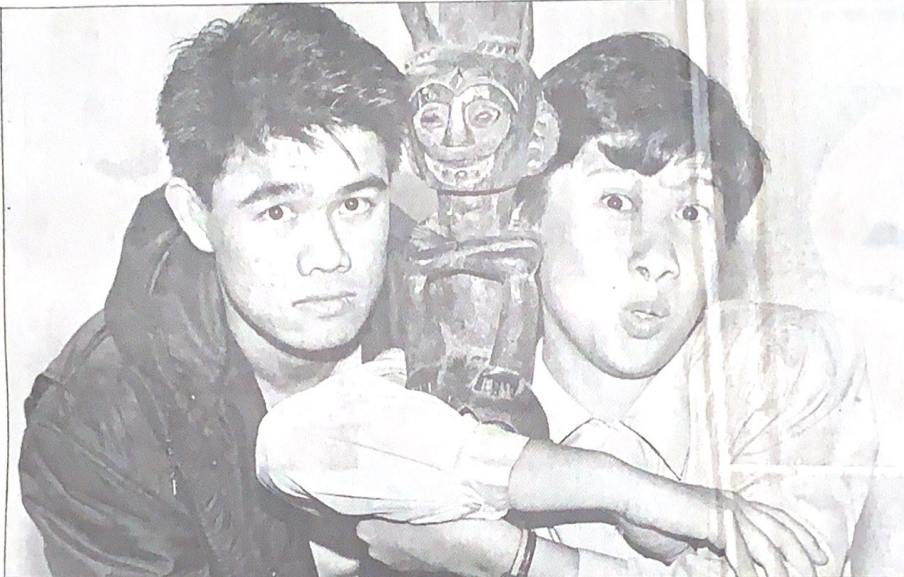
"I scheduled a production on Aids about a year ago, as I had anticipated that the disease would make a large impact on Singapore in five to 10 years' time.

"I felt it should be brought up now as many are not aware of how serious it is," explained Lim Siau Chong, the group's artistic and resident director.

"Then, I certainly didn't anticipate how topical it would be here now, as well as overseas. "We're pretty lucky that it has been getting so much publicity recently. If we went into the subject cold, we could well have been accused of being sensational.

"Dealing with current issues like this one is also the direction in which the group is moving. Such themes make the theatre more than just entertainment."

He added: "I'm not worried about the authorities' reac-



Two plays on Aids: Jackson On A Jaunt by Deputy Public Prosecutor Eleanor Wong (right) and Ten Little Indians by Chay Yew, a national serviceman.

tions to the two plays, as they deal with an issue which the government would like to address, and because the scripts don't endorse or promote lifestyles or promiscuity together with an awareness of safe sex.

"The plays take a humane view of Aids. They attempt to alert people to Aids and its consequences, and to correct misconceptions about it. One appalling idea that we hope to set right is that it is a foreigners' disease."

The first piece, a comedy called Jackson On A Jaunt, basically advises people not to judge a book by its cover. It is

written by Deputy Public Prosecutor Eleanor Wong.

Jackson is an egocentric yuppie who, because of a mix-up in hospital test results, thinks he has Aids. As his world crumbles, he is forced to face startling and often funny revelations about both his family and friends.

The other, penned by national serviceman Chay Yew, is a darker drama entitled Ten Little Indians, which deals with what happens when someone close to you falls victim to Aids.

This focuses on the friendship between a gay Aids vo-

luntary worker and a straight husband stricken with the disease, and looks at prevailing attitudes towards Aids along the way.

Jackson On A Jaunt is Miss Wong's fourth effort for the stage. Her first, Peter's Passionate Pursuit, won the first prize in the 1986 Short-Play Writing Competition organised by Shell and the National University of Singapore.

The play will be staged for the second time in June, as part of the Festival of Arts core programme, and will be directed by National University of Singapore lecturer and

Cultural Medallion winner (Drama) Max Le Blond. It was first performed by St*ars in 1986.

Last year, Miss Wong's Six O'Clock formed part of the clutch of short plays featured in St*ars' Drama Festival, From One To Midnight. She has also co-written and co-produced the musical, Memories, Gems and Sentiments for the centennial celebrations of her alma mater, Methodist Girls' School.

"The idea suggested was for a dark comedy, but that's not my thing," said Miss Wong. "I prefer to think of my play as

one about how people interact, unintentionally employing a shorthand so that no one really knows about anyone else.

"Aids is used as a catalyst that makes the characters realise that they all put up a facade. Hopefully, people will also note the way the disease can destroy relationships."

Ten Little Indians contrasts with Miss Wong's comedy and is the first of Mr Chay's scripts to be performed here. Others were written while he was reading for his degree in broadcast communication and his diploma in film in Californian universities. They were performed for friends and students there.

Mr Chay, who returned to Singapore in 1986, has instead been seen in several plays here. He played Beelzebub in St*ars' version of Peter's Passionate Pursuit, Practice Performing Arts School's The Gypsies and TheatreWorks' The Elephant Man.

He penned Ten Little Indians after seeing a TheatreWorks' advertisement on the group's plans to put on a comedy about Aids.

"I was rather upset, as I've been around Aids victims and didn't find it very funny," he recalled.

Mr Chay's play, which gives no indication of its setting, draws on his experience as a voluntary helper in an Aids organisation in Los Angeles, and his conversations with the man in charge of Singapore's Aids programme.

"Eleanor and I checked back with each other while we were writing the scripts as we didn't want them to overlap and sound too preachy," he added.

Both plays, to be staged at the Drama Centre from April 13 to 24, will be directed by Lim Siau Chong.