

t h e a t e r

Mapa on the spot

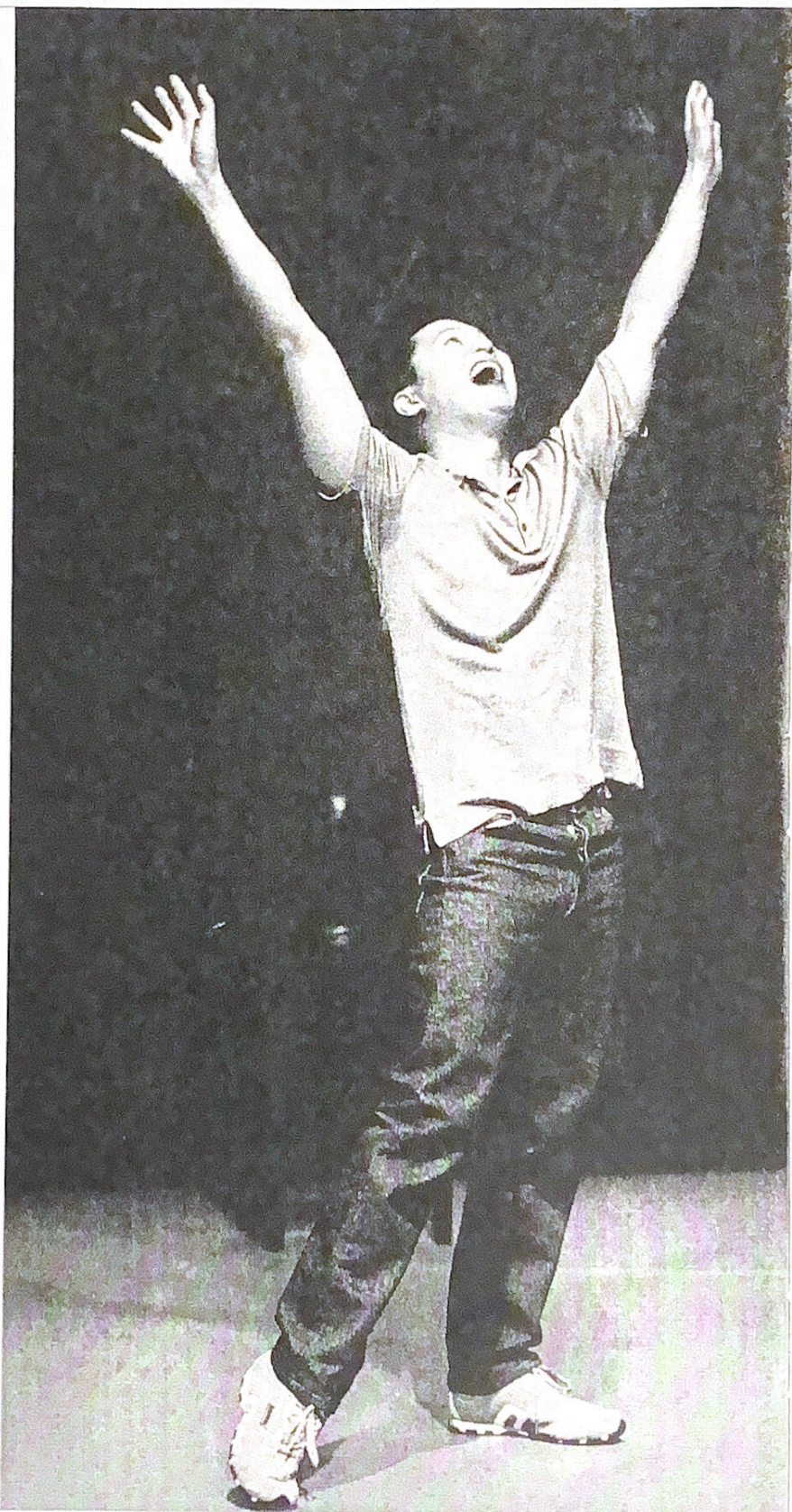
As they rehearse their latest stage collaboration, director **Chay Yew** gives comedian Alec Mapa a gay grilling

Alec Mapa has lent his talents to art (Broadway's *M. Butterfly*) and commerce (CBS's short-lived sitcom *Some of My Best Friends*), but he shines most brightly in his hilarious one-man shows, such as *I Remember Mapa* and *Drama!* He is performing both shows through February 9 at the Mark Taper Forum's Ivy Substation, located in Culver City, on Los Angeles's west side. For those who haven't seen the Filipino-American actor's fabulous work firsthand, *The Advocate* invited Mapa's collaborator, openly gay playwright and director Chay Yew, to interview his leading man.

Yew: I think names are revealing of one's character. I've always been thankful I wasn't named Dick or Charo. Are you named after Alec Guinness, Alec Baldwin, or Alexander McQueen?

Mapa: I was originally named Alejandro after Alexander the Great, an ancient Macedonian homosexual with a penchant for world domination. Leo DiCaprio's slated to play him in a movie, and if he needs tips, I can be reached in care of this magazine.

Let's get that requisite ethnic gay question out of the way. I'm sure all our white readers are dying to know what is it like to be gay, Filipino, and talented. Is it like stepping into one of Imelda Marcos's many shoes? I wish! I met Imelda Marcos in the Philippines once, and she scared the crap out of me. Being gay, Filipino, and talented is like being a champion figure skater—in hell.



What was the moment you decided to be an actor and not an Asian dentist with an accent?

I decided to be an actor when I saw my older sister Monica dance in *The Nutcracker*. My father wouldn't let me take ballet, so I decided I was going to get on that stage, with or without a tutu. I decided not to be a dentist when I learned that you didn't have to go to school to know how to put your fingers in some one's mouth.

What is the most humiliating moment in your career? Spare no details.

Gosh, there have been so many. My New York stage debut was in an off-off-Broadway play where during the final scene I had to stand in a jock-strap while the entire cast looked at me as the lights faded to black. Opening night one of my balls slipped out, and I had to stand there as the lights *slowly* faded, with every actor and the entire audience looking at lefty. There was no pay.

If you were a Disney character, which one would it be, and why?

The evil queen from *Snow White*—because I just want to be the most beautiful, and there's always someone out there trying to upstage me, who's younger, prettier, and can talk to birds.

I identified with that mean old queen too. I actually wept when she died. While we're on the subject of mean, which actor was the meanest to you? Did you stalk him or her? Again, tell all.

I once dated a Tony-nominated actor who was so paranoid about being outed, he made me hide in the bathroom from room service at the Four Seasons. This was stupid because he'd ordered dinner for two, so I'm sure room service was thinking, *Here's your dinner, sir—and a cheeseburger for your imaginary playmate*. I didn't stalk him, but I talked about him in a solo show, got big laughs at his expense, and sent him a tape of the performance.

If you had to sleep with someone so you could star in your very

own sitcom, what would it be about, and which actors would you love to have on?

I've never had to sleep with someone to get a job, and it's starting to hurt my feelings. I'd love to star in a sitcom as a temperamental but wildly gifted costume designer working on a 1970s variety program. Each week I'd design costumes for a different guest like Cher, Diana Ross, Ann-Margret, or Loretta Swit. They'd all have issues: "This makes my butt look big"; "I'm short-waisted"; "I'm concerned about my wattle," etc. And each show would end with me saving the day and a big dance number. It'd be called *Hilarity En-sews* or *Bitches and Stitches*. Is anyone writing this down?

Promise you'll invite me to the taping when Florence Henderson guest-stars. What was the moment in the career when you said, "See, Mom, it was all worth it"?

This is a true story. My mom was visiting me while I was working in Winnipeg on the Canadian premiere of *M. Butterfly*. After the show we were standing outside the stage door. It was snowing, and I said, "Wouldn't it be cool if a limo pulled up and took us back to the hotel?" Seconds later a limo pulled up. The driver offered to do just that, and my mom and I sat in the back of this stretch limo just agog.

Enough about you. Let's talk about me. Why do we keep working together? Tell me. I can take it.

Because you keep telling me to, and I'm too afraid to say no. That and the fact that without your direction my shows would just be cheap and funny instead of cheap, funny, and deeply moving.

I've enjoyed interviewing you. This could be a totally new career for me. I could be the gay Asian James Lipton. Speaking of him, I've always wanted to do this: If God exists, what would you like him to say to you at the gates of heaven?

"Wipe your feet." ■

Chay Yew has directed solo performers including Margaret Cho, Sandra Tsing Loh, and Denise Uyuhara.