

The air was cool, well below ten degrees Celsius when I stepped out from the plane beneath the grey sky. I realized that my wildest dream had finally become a reality. 'Welcome to Christchurch, New Zealand' declares the banner at the airport.

Coming from the tropics, the air might be freezing, but it was the friendliness of the locals which warmed our hearts. Two well-known figures of the New Zealand theatre circle, Pam Logan and Bryan Aitken welcomed us at the airport. The former is the National President of New Zealand Theatre Federation, while the latter, is the Director of the International Youth Theatre Festival.



A. Tan Poh Lee, choreographer of *Ramayana*, is seen assisting Yeh Chien Ee with his make up.

## International Youth Theatre New Zealand 1990

*Zhuo Shao Jie*

We were transported in a chartered coach to our place of stay for the whole of the week – St. Andrew's College. Located in the suburbs, the college is situated by the river. As the school was out for spring vacation, the organizer settled us there till the end of the week, when school reopens again. Nice timing, and of course, wise thinking too.

Our room in the hostel was cosy. Facilities were adequate : a common bathroom, a recreational room, hall, television set, telephone, heaters, vacuum flask boiler,

do-it-yourself laundry, etc.. All was well, except for one thing. Being the only Asian group in the whole festival, we were perhaps "too Asian" to accept the fact that there were no doors to any of the rooms !

Meals were always appetizing, at least, before our dinner in the Salvation Army Headquarters. I could still remember our first dinner – whipped potatoes, peas and fish cream. I was not quite accustomed to the switch from our staple rice diet. But thank goodness, they served the meals

hot in such cold weather.

An early night's sleep and a hearty breakfast at the hostel's canteen refreshed us from our tiring journey. One observation was that "Good morning" were the favourite words of the day and smiles were never kept to oneself, whether or not one knows the other. Never have I had such greetings in my school days. I simply like life this way, so friendly and warm.

The whole festival started off with a simple, yet impressive ceremony at the James Hay Theatre.



**F. The Coco Youth Theater from Western Australia brought "Under the Mask", an inventive production.**

The national flag of each group was hung by representatives. Tan Poh Lee, our choreographer, represented Singapore on stage and her glittering costume was undoubtedly the most eye-catching of all the participants.

The four-day play action began with 'Whale Rider' by Lakes District Players, New Zealand. A play not unfamiliar to me, this was the show performed by the very same group in Toyama International Youth Theatre Festival in 1989 in which I participated. Held on the first of August, the play won a Silver Award for its excellent production. Highly-rated as it was, the show was superb. The folktale of the Maori People was retold vividly by the

skilful new cast. I found the new cast equally skilful. It gave all visitors an understanding of the unique culture of the Maori in New Zealand.

The second show gave me a deep impression. Twilight Zone, brought by Pimpernel from Netherlands, broke the language barrier by giving an action-packed show. The play, devised and directed by F. M. Luitz, was very imaginative. It showed how a group of teenagers encountered a stranger who came to exchange their golden apples for electronic goods. The teenagers soon lost all of their fruits and indulged in the electronic music.

Monday, the fifth of September, was 'workshop' day. Out of the 11 drama internationals, our group chose to be with Rosalind Easton, from Verbatim, Auckland. The topic of our workshop was



**B. "Twilight Zone", Presented by Almelo, Netherlands, deals with an environmental issue.**



**C. The killing of the golden deer, a memorable scene in "Ramayana"**

Dramatic Shaping – Movement, Mood, and Motivation. Sounds difficult, doesn't it? As a matter of fact, it was an imaginative workshop regarding the flow of movement of the body of an actor with the lines. The workshop also included storytelling drama action. Rosalind read a story, while we acted it out and practiced using our five senses on stage. Everybody thoroughly enjoyed it!

A two-hour technical rehearsal at the theatre warmed us up for our performance the next day. Everything was fine, and we were all looking forward to our performance, scheduled for the evening at 9:00 p. m.

There were party times in the college before lights went out.

We would always gather at the hall, have fun, make more friends, and be chased to bed by Helen, our Accomodation Hostess. Everyone would have a terrific time, especially as we, youngsters from different nations meeting for the first, time, never failed to produce a little sketch or two during the session, which would be the highlight of the evening. These not only provided space for us to perform, but also gave us a chance to express and share our feelings.

A few more rehearsals in the afternoon made us feel more confident. The show was put on stage on the fourth of September. It was quite an experience though. Just imagine, performing in the

half-naked Javanese costumes in a non-airconditioned theatre with the temperature of subten degrees Celsius! Hard to believe wasn't it? But it was true. All of us couldn't wait to rush back to the dressing room for the heater after the show.

On Wednesday, we had some real live theatre action. The Lord Byng Theatre Company, Vancouver, Canada presented Canadian Gothic. This was the show I liked best of all in the festival. This beautiful story, set in the early twentieth century, in a small town in the far north of Canada, reflected the racist conflicts between the whites and the native Indians during that time. A strong cast and delicate directing made it the most successful



G. Bryan Aitken (left), artistic director of the International Youth Theater Festival, greets the cast backstage.

E. Madam Liu Chun Wai in her workshop for Arts & Acts.

play in the festival.

A cheerful play, or rather, a humorous performance by the two-man Cooperativa 'Le Nuvole' group from Napoli, Italy, livened the theatre tremendously. More professional than amateur, they presented us with a variety show: acrobatics, magic, music, songs, and of course, some delightful little happenings in their country. Good communication with the audience was one of the very important targets that it had achieved.

The play marathon on the last day, which lasted for 12 solid hours, allowed me to peep into the nation's long-running drama history. Consisting of 12 performances, it drew out the high drama level within the schools and lesser known drama groups in the country.



It was tiring to watch all the shows, though, but what kind of comments can one expect after a string of eye 'entertainment', without stopping, for 12 hours?

The festival had finally come to an end after the last applause from the audience subsided. I am glad and lucky to have represented Singapore at both the Toyama International Amateur Theatre Festival and the Christchurch's International Youth Theatre Festival.

From the eyes of a Singaporean student the festival seemed pretty quiet. The mass number of audience in New Zealand, especially in Christchurch, is considerably less in comparison to the audience one

may find in a Singapore theatre. Coming from a city of 2.5 millions, I am not used to the quiet streets either. Nevertheless, it has been a wonderful learning experience. We made contacts with the New Zealanders throughout the festival. After all, it has been a culturally stimulating gathering.

Viewing the performances, I learned the great variety of theatrical styles: different playwrighting skills, different directorial styles, and different acting styles.

As a whole, the festival was a great success. It achieved what it set out to do: promoting greater understanding among young peoples through theatre.



D. "Shule Mit Clowns", a highly acclaimed production, was presented by the Sandkorn Theater from Karlsruhe, Germany.



H. Representatives are shown rehearsing for the closing ceremony at the James Hay Theater of the Christchurch Town Hall.