



MENEWS

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2019

INTERVIEW

An Interview with the lead actor and dramaturg of Teater Ekamatra's 'Clockwork Orange'

FREEDIVING AND TESTING YOUR LIMITS: SHUYI CHUA RECOUNTS

Shuyi Chua documents her personal journey in the niche sport of freediving

EVENTS: MENTAL HEALTH AT THE WORKPLACE

Mensan Troy Engle speaks on a panel organised by WeWork and Global Shapers on Mental Health at the workplace

EVENTS: MENSA AT STRAITS CLAN

3 Mensa female members speak on gender inequality and the subject of intelligence at private members' club Straits Clan.



MENSA EVENTS



EDITOR'S NOTE



SPORT



CONTENTS

Pursuing A Freediving Dream In Roatán, Honduras.....	Page 4
Interview with Rizman Putra & Nazry Bahrawi	Page 6
Mental Health at the Workplace.....	Page 9

Mensa at Straits Clan.....	Page 9
Members' Activities.....	Page 10

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EDITOR'S NOTE



I'm taking over for the month of October whilst Siang Ern sits for his 'A' levels.

The theme for this month is 'Outliers', people who dispense with societal expectations to pursue their passions.

In this issue, you'll find an interview with Teater Ekamatra, which had just staged the Malay version of 'The Clockwork Orange'.

Burgess, famous for 'A Clockwork Orange', is a linguist. The title itself is borrowed from a Cockney expression and does a double entendre with the Malay word 'orang'. Burgess lived in Malaysia and knew Malay.

Teater Ekamatra's interpretation of 'A Clockwork Orange' this September has been a long time coming.

Shuyi Chua left her PhD to travel in Latin America and this year, she represented Singapore in the World Freediving Championship in Roatan, Honduras. In this issue you'll find her account of her personal journey with the sport of freediving, a niche sport sometimes classified as extreme that is gaining momentum.

Also featured are a range of members' events- from a whisky appreciation ceremony to an event in conjunction with WeWork and Mendaki with Senior Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam in

attendance, the members' welcome event to a panel on IQ and gender equality at private members' club, Straits Clan.

And that's it for the month of October!

Hajar Ali

Mensa aims to identify and foster human intelligence for the benefit of humanity, encourage research in the nature, characteristics and uses of intelligence, and to promote stimulating intellectual and social opportunities for its members. Mensa has no affiliation with any ideological, political or religious creed and is constitutionally designed to hold no collective opinion whatsoever. It is a society for individuals who possess the same single qualification for membership, which is a score at or above the 98th percentile on any one of a number of standard IQ tests. Mensa is a genuinely international organization with contacts in every part of the world. There are currently over 110,000 Mensans in more than 100 countries.

Menews is the official newsletter of Mensa Singapore that is circulated to all paid-up members. It serves as a medium of communication and as a forum for the views, opinions and thoughts of Mensa Singapore members.

PURSUIING A FREEDIVING DREAM IN ROATÁN, HONDURAS



© Photo by Alex St-Jean

Freediving is a sport that involves holding your breath as you challenge your personal limits of depth, distance, and duration. I discovered freediving accidentally at a dive fair in 2017 and became hooked to this sports that is a curious combination of control and freedom, relaxation and focus, and grace and adrenaline.

Freediving was a form of therapy to me that helped me unwind after a hard day's of work. I did it recreationally and though I have had experiences with competitions from my past, competitive freediving was not something I was particularly drawn towards.

When Anqi, a fellow freediver, first broach the idea of us forming Team Singapore to participate in the CMAS Freediving World Championships in Roatán,

Honduras; I was apprehensive. I am a relatively new freediver and compared to the top freedivers in Singapore and other world-class athletes who attain depths of 60 – 130 m, I am an unimpressive 'shallow' diver of 30 m.

However, I became open to this idea as Anqi told me about her dream of seeing Team Singapore represented at these world-class events and the challenges she has faced forming a team. Over the years, she had reached out to other Singaporean athletes to join her in her endeavor but was always met with rejections.

Soon, I started to understand her dilemma, as I realized her decision to give up her job and invest time and money to train in a sports that few Singaporeans have even heard of was an unconventional move that was often met

with snide remarks from those who do not understand her and her wanderings around the world in pursuit of her dream.

Even Singaporeans who are financially stable and have few obligations in their lives would rarely dare make such a move.

We tend to give excuses –

The air tickets and registration costs are too high!

How am I going to fund myself?

My boss wouldn't give me this much time off work!

I would be losing too much in potential earnings if I took no-pay leave or leave my job!



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There's no chance of me winning, why should I even participate?

For Anqi, she was going to do it any way. She started a GoFundMe campaign to fund herself, despite her hesitations of doing so, in hopes of making up for what she lacked.

And as for me, meeting someone so passionate about the sports and willing to go all out for the glory of Singapore, moved me to join her in her endeavor.

Early July 2019, we met up in Roatán, one of the three Bay Islands of Honduras, where the competition would be held. This island is popular with scuba divers and tourists who come on big cruise ships. It is a tropical paradise with its coasts lined with sea grapes and coconut trees and with its gentle lapping waves and sea grass carpeted shallow waters where crabs and fishes skirted around your legs as you move through its cool waters.

Though we had done our own depth training over the month of June, we did most of our training over the month in Roatán. Being two, rather than one, also helped us save on the cost of accommodation and food. Being a popular tourist destination in the Carribean, the cost of living in Roatán was not cheap. We cooked most of our meals to keep our expenses down.

We hung out in the evenings to watch the sunset with other competitors and gave each other physical and moral support. This was important as training can take a

toil on the mind and body. When I fell ill from an allergic reaction that caused my body to itch and skin to swell, Anqi helped me obtain medication and looked out for me. We also discussed strategies for training and competition.

And we fared well as Team Singapore! For Anqi, she managed to set new national records in all of the disciplines, with her deepest dive to 65 m. She was also featured in the media and was on the front pages of the Straits Times, twice! This gave our sports the much-needed publicity that we sorely lacked.

And as for myself, I deepened my personal record in one of the disciplines by 20 meters over the course of a month of training. I was now a 50 m diver! This shocked many of my family and friends back home, and even myself! A few of my friends congratulated me and told me

that I had inspired them and my example has shown them that investing in dreams can pay off tangibly.

Besides these personal achievements, we both gained much from the international experience and exposure. We interacted with the world's best and gained much knowledge and tips for ourselves. In addition, we forged friendships with athletes from all over the world.

In our lives, sometimes opportunities arise for us to make a decision in the direction of our dreams. The steps that we must take often go against the grain of what society considers logical and acceptable. Even so, remember, only you get to decide for yourself whether something is worthwhile or not. And if it is important to you, go for it!



© Photo by Shuyi Chua

RIZMAN PUTRA & NAZRY BAHRAWI



© Photo by Jean Ng

Interview with Teater Ekamatra's Rizman Putra and Nazry Bahrawi

Burgess, famous for 'A Clockwork Orange', is a linguist. The title itself is borrowed from a Cockney expression and does a double entendre with the Malay word 'orang'. Burgess lived in Malaysia in the '50s and knew Malay. He described his experience with the Malay

language as akin to 'diving into a bath of pure logic' and having changed 'not just my attitude to communication in general but the whole shape of my mind'.

It can be said, then, that Teater Ekamatra's interpretation of 'A Clockwork Orange' this September has been a long time coming. Instead of Beethoven, we see Al and his droogs go on a rampage

against the sounds of keroncong, instead of nights of 'ultraviolence', they gear up to 'soksek' and instead of ordering Moloko plus cocktails, they hook up to tubes to suck on 'tuak bahagia'.

In this interview, I speak to Rizman Putra who plays the main character Al and Nazry Bahrawi, the dramaturg



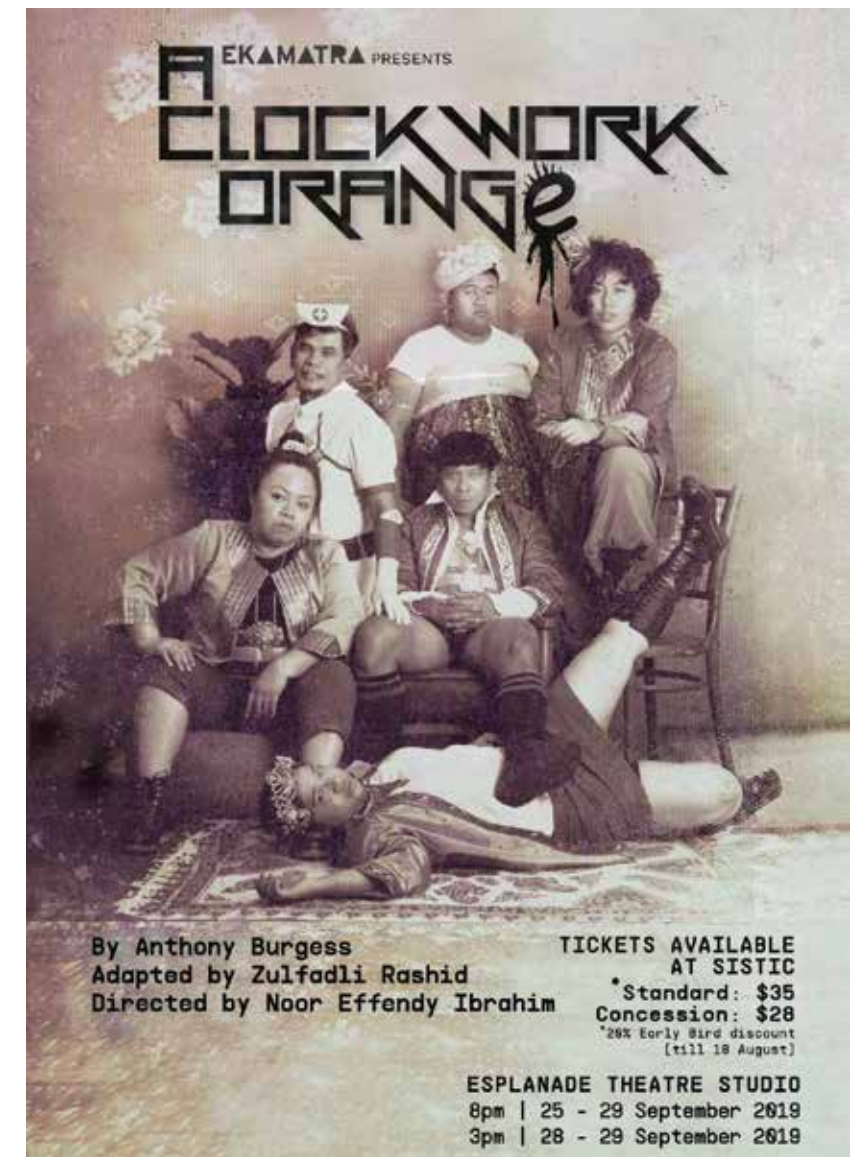
Hajar: What is the role of a dramaturg? How prevalent is the involvement of dramaturgs in theatre productions in Singapore? What was the role of the dramaturg in Clockwork Orange?

Nazry: Within the larger history of Singapore's theatre scene, dramaturgy is a fairly new development. Dance and theatre companies began officially employing dramaturgs sometime in the 2000s. This mirrors the development in the region considering that the Asian Dramaturg Network was only established in 2016. As I understand it, the primary task of a dramaturg is to "sharpen the elements of a performance in a way the performer can never do" to cite T. Sasitharan of Intercultural Theatre Institute. So, a dramaturg performs a bevy of roles that differ according to the needs of a specific production, playing to the strengths and expertise of the engaged individual. This could be performance-oriented, research-oriented or both. In other words, the dramaturg acts as an internal critic of sorts to the production. While literary criticism is something I do for a living, dramaturgy is a new role for me. Yet, it sounded to me that moving from the former to the latter will be a productive venture, even a natural progression, when Ekamatra and I first explored the possibility of my contribution as a dramaturg to this production about a year back. Playing to my strengths as a literary critic and a translator, my contribution to A Clockwork Orange can be surmised as plugging gaps to make the adaptation work better by way of conceptual, linguistic and inter-cultural crossings. Taking on the role of a dramaturg in this production gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in a literary venture that is polyphonic in ways that prose fiction can never be. A Clockwork Orange is what it is not because of any single person's work. It is a well-oiled machine that is the product of many talented voices working in tandem, from the playwright and director to the actors and the set designers. The actors are impressive (as the many reviews have pointed out) but because of my experience as a critic and translator with more experience on page than stage, I found myself working mostly with the creative team behind the scenes such as playwright Zulfadli, director Noor Effendy, set designers Fared and Syadiq, producers Khairina and Erny as well as the surtitlist Ifrah. A lovely bunch.

Hajar: You're a senior lecturer at SUTD and also an associate editor at Critical Muslim, a translator and co-founder of the Bras Basah Open, a collective for discussing critical theory and philosophy in Singapore. How have these various roles influenced your contribution as dramaturg for 'A Clockwork Orange'? Did you have a role to play, for example, in advising on the creation of the gospel keroncong scene when Al was first interred?

Nazry: Trained in comparative literature, the thrust of my work as an academic has been about sussing out cultural, aesthetic and conceptual parallels between objects that one would not

normally compare. The adage goes that you can't compare an apple to an orange. But my work suggests that you can – for the fact that they're both fruits. So, comparative cultural work means going beyond the literal, and digging deeper to look for common denominators where most only see insurmountable differences. With this in mind, the one question that I keep returning to as a dramaturg for A Clockwork Orange is this – what parallels can be drawn between a post-war British novel to the experience of minority Malays in contemporary Singapore? It's made me think about how much the countercultural aspect of the Droogs mirrors Singaporean Malay youths' affinity for countercultural movements – punk, hardcore, hip-hop, skaters, and such.



INTERVIEW WITH RIZMAN PUTRA & NAZRY BAHRAWI

Growing up in Singapore, I was part of one such countercultural movement, and recall noticing many of my Malay peers, rather than my Chinese peers, in other movements. Indeed, countercultures appeal to societal members who feel like they exist on the margins. These movements accorded them a sense of belonging and empowerment. The challenge then is to articulate this affinity. So language is one platform in which we've tried to do that. Zul had already written a powerful script that introduces certain unique words like soksek, tuak bahagia and the protagonist's trademark line 'abih amacam'. Early on during the rehearsals though, we noticed that the Nadsat lingo of the Droogs hadn't quite been incorporated satisfactorily, and that we could do more. So Zul and I discussed possibilities of pushing the envelope further. With language, we wanted to mirror the sense of defamiliarisation captured through Fared and Syadiq's set design, the costumes and photo shoot. We wanted to channel the sense that what you're seeing is real but not quite. What you're seeing is a relatable representation of us but just off. So we first toyed with the idea of mixing vernacular Malay with another regional language like Thai since Nadsat was English peppered with Russian. After a few rounds of creating nonsensical words, we figured it'd be better to speculate a future form of street Malay. To me, street languages and creoles emerge by way of simplifying existing languages, and they do so by way of contractions, omissions, stylisations and suffixes. You see this with Singlish. This was when we've decided to transform certain words – 'minta ampun' to 'ampunan', 'sial' to 'yal' and my favourite, 'assalamualaikum' or 'salam' to 'selams'. Now, 'selams' is especially interesting because to the non-Malay speaker, it sounds like 'slums' which deepens the dystopian feel of the production. I was also involved in creating the play's surtitles, working closely with Iffah. Here, I've tried to bring to the attention of non-Malay speakers some of what we've tried to do with language and so you see strange words appearing on screen like 'sorryful' for 'ampunan' and 'fuckster' for 'yal'. Some words like 'soksek' and 'kemurnian' were kept as they are because epiphany and pleasures can be derived from literary works when one has to work for meaning.

What fascinated me most about this production is that it was one of those rare decolonial moment this bicentennial year where the relationship between Britain and Singapore as coloniser and colonised can be called into question. It encourages us to rethink the centre-margin dichotomy in that we are made to consider Britain as a singular entity with its own centre and margins in the same way that Singapore is a nation that has an identifiable centre and margins. What this means as a bicentennial project is that the production prods us to consider the ways in which contemporary Singapore continues the colonial legacy. In essence, it makes us think of colonisation as a behavioural condition more than a historical fact. One way in which I had identified this early on was to draw connections between the idea of the panopticon as this was expressed by Michel Foucault in his book on crime and punishment. Conversing with the set designers Syadiq and Fared, we explored the possibilities of how the panopticon can be expressed on stage, the end-result of which is the part-panopticon, part-runway structure design that Alfian Sa'at had written about in his review of the play. We wanted the audience to feel like they were watching the play and yet feel like they were also being watched. Al's stool at one of the stage becomes the perch from which he observes us. The audience watches the play unfold before their very eyes but characters also enter the stage as if they came from the audience themselves. The set design also means audience members notice not just the actors but also other members in the audience whom they may know. It's uncanny too that we were in the thick of rehearsals when the brouhaha over the Singapore Prison Service's magazine called Panopticon broke. It appears that there is little sense there about the dystopic connotations of the term. It's surreal but also so real.

Hajar: You had an accident before the performance that led to the opening night to be cancelled. I'd assumed the leg cast to be another prop until my friend told me about the accident. Tell us how you adapted the leg cast into the play.

Rizman: The accident happened during the full dress of the play, and I had to be sent to the A and E that night, thankfully it was just a deep sprain, but doctor found bone fragments in my foot to the extent that I had difficulties in moving my left foot, eventually they had to cast it. The leg cast was a functional prop to be exact, and it protected my foot during the duration of the shows. The reason why they had to cancel the show was that we had to reconfigure all the blockings due to my injury. I had to re-learn how to walk with that cast for there were moments where I could still feel a stinging pain in violent situations. It is a sad state for any performers if they would have to cancel shows after months of intensive rehearsals. The show meant a lot to me as an actor, and I had to push myself psychologically to portray Al as how it was planned to be. I had to modify Al's physical state but yet retain the truth to how I designed the character. Painkillers helped to soothe the pain, but I will not deny the fact that I was in pain after every performance.

Hajar: Writer Zulfadli Rashid's interpretation of Burgess' Nadsat (a fictive Russian-influenced cockney) drew on both literary and vernacular Malay. How difficult was it for you to use this invented argot to portray Al?

Rizman: The changes in some of the words were, in the beginning, was difficult, as no one speaks like that in reality. The moment you find the rhythm and reason to why you, as a character speaks in that manner, naturally it creates meaning and motivation for the role. Adding to that, Big's interpretation of the Nadsat comes from a history of "Mat" speak or slang. It's a hybrid of many different levels of style which I'm used to listening to and observed since my childhood, and you can hear it from middle age uncles at the coffee shops, it has been around since the 70s.

MENSA EVENTS

MENTAL HEALTH AT THE WORKPLACE

Mensan Troy Engle represents Mensa on a panel organised by WeWork and Global Changemakers.



MENSA AT STRAITS CLAN

Three members of Mensa Singapore: Hajar, Magdalene and Sia Yeun, spoke on IQ & Gender on a forum at private members' club, Straits Clan



MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES

The recent International Board of Directors' meeting at Kuala Lumpur from the 10th to 13th October 2019



A whiskey appreciation workshop held at The Single Cask



MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES



Mensa had a booth at this year's re:work, a collaboration between WeWork and Mendaki Graduates' Club. The guest of Honour was Tharman Shanmugaratnam.



New Members' meet-up: Oct 19, 2019

