

ARTS & CULTURE

In this first of a five-part series on the Singapore Youth Award (SYA), the highest national youth accolade, **Eveline Gan** speaks to director and playwright, **Goh Boon Teck**, recipient of last year's SYA in the individual category

>> For the love of arts

WHILE most of his peers head straight to junior college or polytechnic after their "O" Levels, **Goh Boon Teck** took the road less travelled.

He passed his "O" Levels with flying colours and chose to study at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.

Explaining his move to study the arts, the 34-year-old director and playwright said: "I have always been very keen in drawing, singing and acting since I was young. The arts has always been a part of me."

It was a move that paid off.

In 1996, he was the first recipient of the VISA international arts scholarship to study theatre directing in Rose Bruford College and Middlesex University in London.

To Boon Teck, it seems nothing is impossible in the world of arts.

At just 19, he co-founded the Toy Factory Theatre Ensemble, a bilingual theatre company, with another young artist.

As chief artistic director, he has spearheaded more than 60 productions since 1990, including *Posteterne, K, Shopping & F***ing, Fireface* and *Dangerous Liaisons*.

He has also directed several Mandarin productions such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Thunderstorm*.

He credits much of his theatrical styles to his mother, a veteran Hokkien opera singer, who introduced him to the "stories, sights and sounds" of Chinese opera.

"Chinese opera has taught me how to take care of theatrical designs, music, lights, acting and audience reaction. Whenever I run out of creative ideas, I always re-visit the Chinese Arts history for inspiration.

"There are a lot of moral teachings in Chinese opera — that is why I am always keen on working on morality plays," said Boon Teck, who lives by the creed of "work very hard and stay very humble".

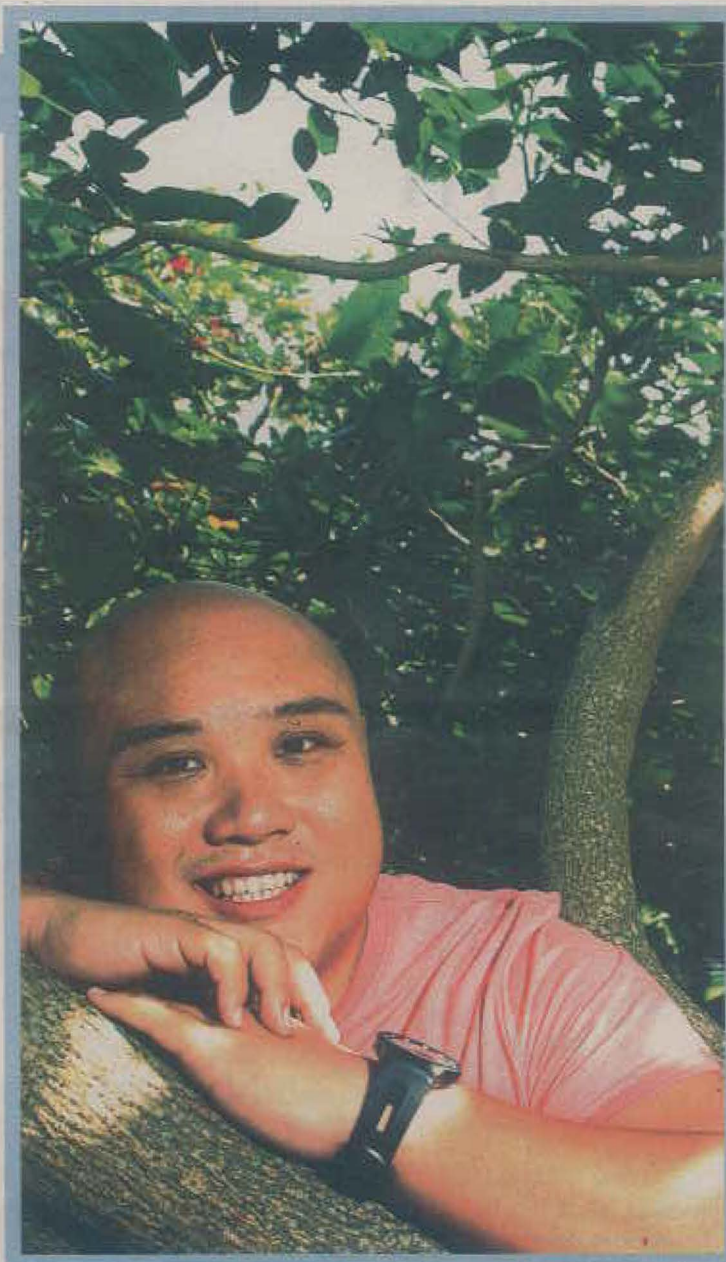
His highly acclaimed 1994 multilingual play, *Titoudao*, is based on the life of his mother.

That masterpiece won him the Best Play of the Year and represented Singapore in the Cairo International Festival for experiment theatre in 1994.

"*Titoudao* mirrors the development and changes of Singapore through the life of a petite Chinese *wayang* actress. It questions how much changes we need and how far we can fight to keep our cultures," said Boon Teck, who is currently adapting it into a movie.

His new project, *Long House* — a play about family love — will be staged in the Esplanade's Hua Yi Festival next year.

Despite his success, life wasn't always a bed of roses.



WONG KHING CHONG

The worst setbacks, he revealed, are always issues revolving around a lack of funding, sponsorships and low audience figures.

"When artists aim to produce challenging artworks, we are always rewarded with deficits at the end of the day. It is still very tough to balance the books," he said.

When asked if he has any regrets, he said in jest: "I still wish to be a tenor singing opera and also a TV food and travel host.

"One more — I have yet to publish all my scripts!"



To dream is to live one's life bravely.

— Kit Chan, performing artiste

When we realise what we want to achieve, that becomes our vision of perfection. Striving towards that becomes an obsession. Only coming close is the satisfaction.

— The Tang Quartet, string chamber music ensemble

Never lose track of the vision.

— Eric Khoo, director and producer