



'Okay, I got an Emmy nomination but my car is not working. What should I do? Call a mechanic or jump for joy?'  
**Actor Jimmy Smits (right) on learning of his Emmy nomination for Dexter**



'In the music business in the 1970s, girls were beautiful. You could be a girlfriend or groupie but you still had to look good. If I'd been pretty, my life would probably have been very different. Not being beautiful was an education'  
**Reality TV star Sharon Osbourne (right)**



'When one does not think at all, greed appears'  
**Actor Daniel Wu (right)**



# Theatre on parade

This year's National Day Parade creative director Ivan Heng promises the event's biggest spectacle

adeline chia  
 arts reporter

**Y**ou could say that the National Day Parade is director-actor Ivan Heng's biggest production to date.

Six thousand performers, 5,000 backstage crew, a multi-million-dollar budget, 27,000 people in the audience. Not to mention more than one million people watching it live on the tube.

"Can you imagine what rehearsals are like?" says the thespian who has more than 20 years of experience in the theatre scene.

The 44-year-old, who is also artistic director of local theatre company Wild Rice, is one in a line of artists who have helmed the nation's biggest spectacle as its creative director.

The list of names include musician and Cultural Medallion recipient Dick Lee, theatre and film director Glen Goei and theatre director Goh Boon Teck.

On what differentiates this year's parade from last year's, Heng says: "I've treated the parade like a piece of theatre. It is told as a story with a beginning, a middle and an end."

Indeed, like a structured theatre script, the show is organised in a way that investigates each line of the national pledge without being prescriptive or preachy.

It will also be a highly theatrical experience with thrills and spills.

For example, the show is interrupted halfway by a simulated enemy attack,

which will eventually be "vanquished" by the Singapore Armed Forces.

Heng says: "A bomb threat seems so far away to Singaporeans, so there will be a genuine discomfort."

"I feel that the audience needs to feel a bit unsettled, just for that moment, so that they can go on a journey. The enemy is defeated and there is a sense of relief."

There are also cheekier elements, or a bit of the "Ivan" touch.

"It's theatrical, it has a gentle irony, it has charm. It always has an eyebrow arched," he says with a laugh.

He could well be talking about Emily Of Emerald Hill, the Stella Kon play in which he made his name cross-dressing as a Peranakan matriarch.

Indeed, there is a Peranakan connection in the parade. To celebrate Singapore's Peranakan fever - aided by popular TV serial The Little Nyonya - 80 Peranakan dancers will make their first appearance in this year's parade.

Main Wayang is a group that promotes Singapore's Peranakan culture.

Then, there is the pole-dancing segment, performed by five women called The Spice Girls, who have been attracting flak online.

Some have said the dance, which originated in strip clubs and features scantily clad women, sends out the wrong message to youth.

When asked for his response to these comments, Heng says: "I was impressed with the grace, agility and strength of these women. Pole-dancing has moved on from being an exotic dance to a sport and a performance."

"And this does not take place in a darkened bar but a national celebration. Have we failed to understand the importance of context here?"

He says the pole-dancing debate resonates with the ban on bar-top dancing in Singapore in the late 1990s.

He adds: "The question is, 'Have we progressed?'"



ST PHOTOS: TERENCE TAN, FILE

He stresses that "nothing is taken lightly" in the parade and shies away from saying the show fulfils his vision.

The creative decisions are made in collaboration with the parade's executive committee.

"It's not my vision but our vision," he says.

He adds that he is unlikely to do another National Day Parade.

"I'll be repeating myself. I'll do it once and give it my all."

He had, in fact, been approached several times by the organisers but he turned down the offers "because the timing wasn't right".



'I realised that my work has always been about telling Singapore stories. Who gets a chance to direct a show on such a scale? I feel deeply humbled by it. It's a real privilege.'

**Ivan Heng (left) on directing this year's National Day Parade, which includes performances by Peranakan group Main Wayang (above).**

The offers came when he was busy with Wild Rice, which was just starting out.

"I was also nervous about being perceived as an artist who sold out and was compromising my integrity," he says.

Indeed, he once said that Wild Rice's biennial OCBC Singapore Theatre Festival, which showcases local plays, provides an alternative voice to the parade.

The festival is also known for showcasing politically themed and sometimes risqué theatre.

But he realised that directing the parade did not contradict his work.

He says: "After soul-searching, I realised that my work has always been about telling Singapore stories and expressing different stories of the nation."

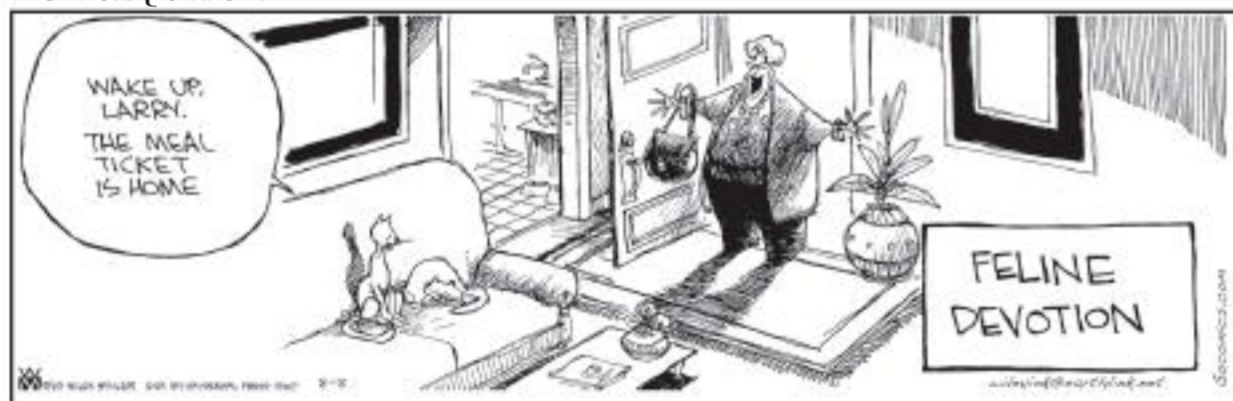
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chiahta@sph.com.sg

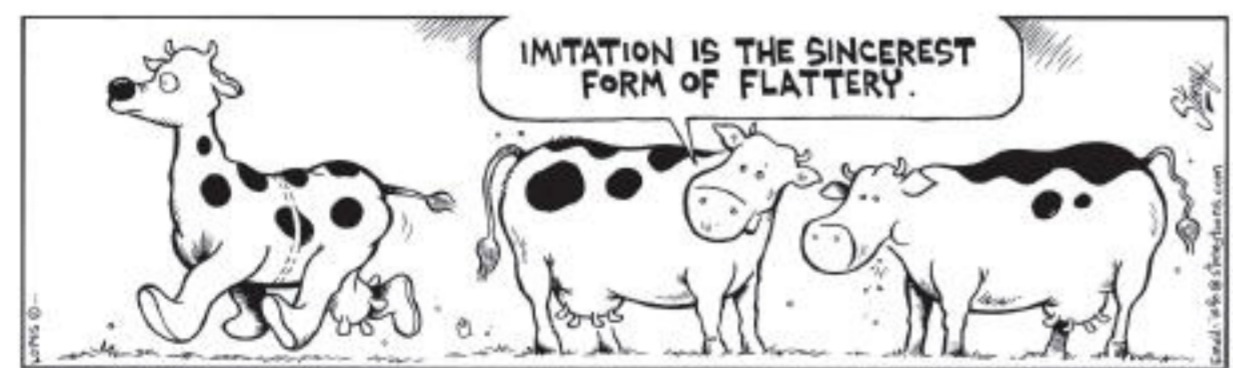
The National Day Parade will be broadcast live on Channels 5 and 8 tomorrow at 6.15pm.

Did you enjoy the parade? E-mail stlife@sph.com.sg with your views.

## NON SEQUITUR



## INSANITY STREAK



## BABY BLUES



## PEANUTS



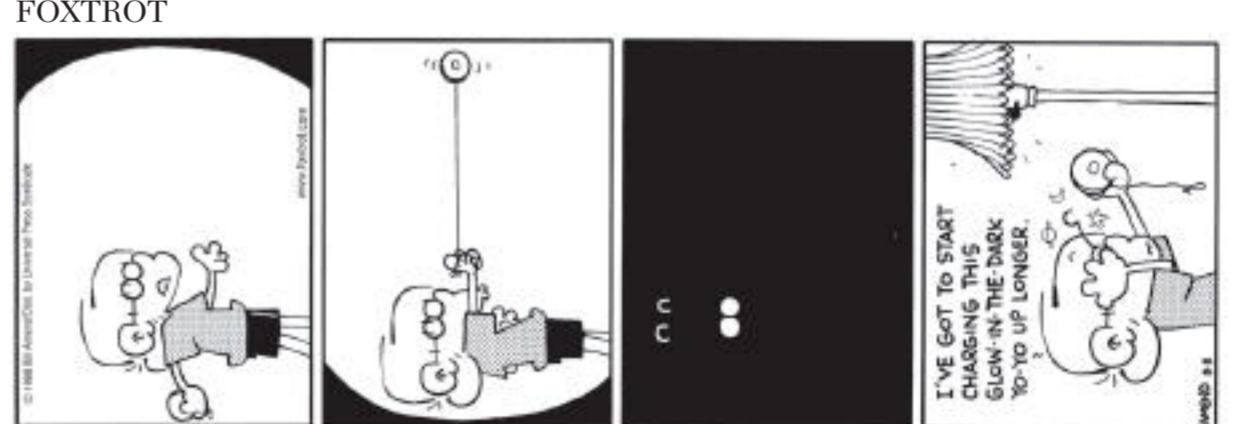
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