

Law and Order

ELOQUENT EXPRESSION SUMS UP **CLAIRE WONG**, ACTRESS, DIRECTOR, THEATRE CO-FOUNDER AND CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS LAWYER. ALEXANDRA KOHUT-COLE WAXES LYRICAL ABOUT HER TALENTS

FROM HER FIRST dramatic role as a gardener at the age of nine to the establishment of Checkpoint Theatre in 2002, acting has been Claire Wong's lifeblood. As part of a dynamic team (together with digital artist Casey Lim and husband Huzir Sulaiman), she is partly responsible for critically acclaimed productions such as *Cogito*, staged in June, a compelling psychological thriller prompted by philosopher Descartes famous proclamation, "I think, therefore I am."

Testing the human spirit when faced with momentous events and dire emergencies is a recurring theme in the theatre's work and, indeed, was the catalyst for Checkpoint's formation. After collaborating on *Occupation*, a commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Japanese occupation of Singapore, the three knew the time was right to formalise the relationship.

Originally from Malaysia, Wong arrived in Singapore to take her A levels at National Junior College. Subsequently, she studied law at the National University of Singapore. Now, Wong's "day" job is as corporate communications partner at law firm Rodyk & Davidson.

Of theatre, Wong says, "I found it such a stimulating experience – not just the acting, but working with people, bringing words on a page to life by using the imagination to create something others believe in. It's one of the hardest things to do well but I've met film producers who believed in me and people who have given me the opportunity to explore some great stories."

One stage play which Wong says stands out is

political satire *Atomic Jaya* in which she played all 16 characters. At the time, she had arrived back in Singapore fresh from studying for a master's in fine arts specialising in theatre at New York's Columbia University. "The play is very local yet the humour is sharp and 16 characters are very demanding as a solo performer," she explains. The play stands out for another reason: it is when Wong met her husband, renowned dramatist and playwright of *Atomic Jaya*. For her role, she was nominated for Best Actress and Best Ensemble Performance in both the Singapore Life! Theatre Awards and the Malaysian Cameronian Arts Awards. But her accolades are not just confined to acting; she was also a nominee for Best Director at the Life! Theatre Awards 2003.

AT A GLANCE

STATUS Married

CHILDHOOD AMBITION

To meet Donny Osmond – and I did!

TREASURED POSSESSION

My husband and both our families. And my wedding and engagement rings

NEXT AMBITION

To write and direct my first feature

FAVOURITE BOOK

The Tin Tin and *Asterix* series

EARLY MENTOR

My parents; Sister Enda, my headmistress, an Irish nun; and Miss Lopez from my school in Malaysia

All the elements of Wong's different lives – lawyer, director, thespian and playwright – feed her acting career. But it doesn't stop there: she's also selectively taking on new projects. Stretching herself out of her comfort zone, she says, "Every year I end up doing something I have never done before: one of my aims is to be adventurous."

Previously having played badminton at national level in Singapore and Malaysia, Wong now practises pilates.

Her next adventure is a move to the United States for five months when her husband attends Yale's World Fellowship Program. But she won't be taking a break: "I will stay in touch with my office and work for them online whilst also developing a couple of film projects." ■

HAIR: PHILIP KINGSLEY; MAKE-UP: T. LECLERC



PHOTOGRAPHY: YANG, PENORAMIC