



Monkey Goes West actor Chua Enlai taking a "wefie" with fellow actors and directors of the Wild Rice musical and Nine Years Theatre's Art, which won Production of the Year at the Life! Theatre Awards yesterday. It was the first time in the award's 15-year history that there was a tie for that honour. ST PHOTO: SEAH KWANG PENG

Monkey Goes West and Art make theatre history

They jointly clinch Production of the Year prize at Life! Theatre Awards

By LISABEL TING

FOR the first time in the 15-year history of the Life! Theatre Awards, there was a tie for the top honour of Production of the Year.

It jointly went to: Wild Rice's Monkey Goes West, a humorous musical spin on the Chinese classic Journey To The West; and Nine Years Theatre's Art, a Mandarin translation of French playwright Yasmina Reza's play about three friends debating over what makes art.

The ceremony for what is now known as the M1-The Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards took place yesterday at the Esplanade Recital Studio.

The theatre community gathered to honour the best of the local stage. The event, held in collaboration with the Esplanade, was graced by National Arts Council chairman Chan Heng Chee, Esplanade CEO Benson Pua and Mrs Rosa Daniel, Deputy Secretary (Culture) at the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth.

In a speech at the ceremony, The Straits Times' Life! editor Helen Chia said: "Today, we celebrate 15 years of Life! Theatre Awards, but actually the history of Singapore theatre goes back much further than that."

She paid tribute to pioneers of local theatre such as playwright Robert Yeo, theatre practitioner and educator T. Sasitharan and director Max Le Blond. Some of the stalwarts, such as The Necessary Stage artistic director Alvin Tan, were there to present awards, while Yeo was an invited guest.

Tan presented the Best Director award to Nelson Chia for Art, which also picked up a Best Actor

nod for Peter Sau.

Monkey Goes West also won Best Costume Design and Production of the Year (Readers' Choice) - decided by online public voting.

Said its director Sebastian Tan later of the joint win: "It's great because there are so many productions in a year, and it's so difficult to say who the winner is because, frankly, they're all quite different. Some are plays, some are musicals, so how do you judge?"

"I think to be able to share this award with another play, which I like as well, is wonderful."

Nine Years Theatre founding company director Mia Chee was similarly effusive about Monkey Goes West. "It was the first time that I've seen (actor) Sebastian Tan direct, and I was delighted to see his work. I thought it had very good pacing and rhythm, and the pantomime was quite sharp."

Jo Kukathas took the Best Supporting Actress gong for her work in Wild Rice's The House Of Bernarda Alba, while Remesh Panicker won Best Supporting Actor for his turn as Shylock in the Singapore Repertory Theatre's The Merchant Of Venice. The Best Actress accolade went to Mina Kaye, for her role as vocal powerhouse Little Voice in Pangdemonium's The Rise And Fall Of Little Voice.

This year's awards were judged by a six-member panel comprising Lasalle College of the Arts provost Venka Purushothaman; online arts journal The Flying Inkpot co-editors Kenneth Kwok and Matthew Lyon; as well as arts reviewers Helmi Yusof, Tang Hwa Kwee and Corrie Tan from The Business Times, Lianhe Zaobao and The Straits Times.

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Winners

- **Production of the Year:** Art by Nine Years Theatre and Monkey Goes West by Wild Rice
- **Production of the Year (Readers' Choice):** Monkey Goes West by Wild Rice
- **Best Director:** Nelson Chia for Art by Nine Years Theatre
- **Best Actor:** Peter Sau in Art by Nine Years Theatre
- **Best Actress:** Mina Kaye in The Rise & Fall Of Little Voice by Pangdemonium
- **Best Supporting Actor:** Remesh Panicker in The Merchant Of Venice by Singapore Repertory Theatre
- **Best Supporting Actress:** Jo Kukathas in The House Of Bernarda Alba by Wild Rice
- **Best Original Script:** Liu Xiaoyi for Fluid by The Theatre Practice
- **Best Ensemble:** Dark Room x8 created by Edith Podesta
- **Best Set Design:** Ho Tzu Nyen, Andy Lim and Jed Lim for Ten Thousand Tigers
- **Best Lighting Design:** Andy Lim for Ten Thousand Tigers
- **Best Sound Design or Original Score:** Bani Haykal for Gitanjali by The Necessary Stage
- **Best Costume Design:** Tube Gallery by Phisit & Saxit for Monkey Goes West by Wild Rice



Guest of honour and National Arts Council chairman Chan Heng Chee receiving a token of appreciation from ST Life! editor Helen Chia. ST PHOTO: STEPHANIE YEOW