

'The more mistakes, the merrier'

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The Straits Times, 12 January 2007

GO ON, don't be afraid, make mistakes.

In fact, actress-director Beatrice Chia-Richmond believes that for artists here, the more mistakes made, the merrier.

A young nation such as Singapore needs such trials and errors to provoke itself as a society, she said yesterday at a seminar.

Addressing the topic of 'The New Politics of Identity', the artistic director of Toy Factory Productions argued that mistakes also make Singaporeans think harder about the society they want.

Using the example of Josef Ng, who was fined and banned in 1994 for snipping off his pubic hair in a public performance, she said that incident raised questions about the viability of Singapore as a renaissance city.

'Censorship debates always talk about protecting the people. But in 2007, how much of this protection is still necessary? Can we be a global city for the arts with our censorship policies on political and sexual expression?' she asked.

Mrs Chia-Richmond, a recipient last year of the annual Young Artist Award given by the Government for her contributions to the arts, raised her point at the Singapore Perspectives 2007 seminar organised by the Institute of Policy Studies.

The chance to make mistakes - defined by her as 'producing work so bad that it just stinks like a rotting carcass' - in the arts scene also distinguishes Singapore from the thriving cities of London, Paris and New York.

In these cities, the ferocious media can easily destroy the careers of budding artists, she said. In contrast, there is more latitude for productions here.

'Maybe because really, we can't actually tell the good stuff from the bad,' she joked to much laughter from the 750-strong audience, which included academics and business leaders.

Singapore, with a young culture, also offers its people a chance to be part of the artistic history in their own city.

This opportunity, she said, is what keeps her here instead of venturing back to London, where she spent eight years studying and acting.

'It feels like there is nothing new to try there,' said the 32-year-old. 'Josef Ng can try trimming his pubic hair in public and the public will probably grunt and just toss him a couple of shillings.'

In Singapore, by nature of the country's youth, there is still much to explore.

Referring to the Singapore audience, she said: 'They might be hard to please at times, but essentially they still have a fresh appetite and perspective. They are not totally cynical and jaded yet, and that to me as an artist is priceless.'