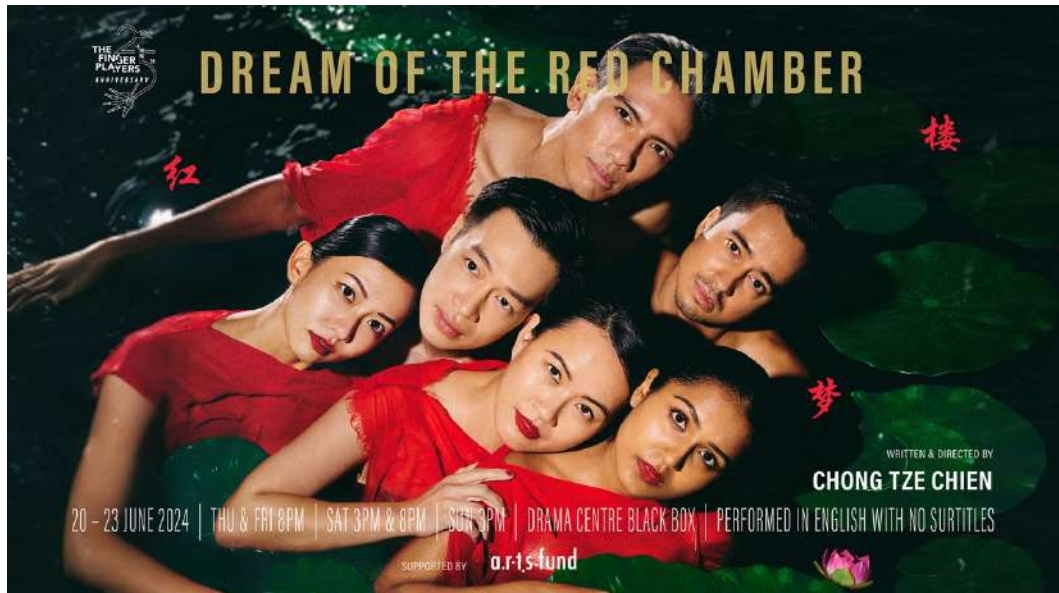


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# Dream of the Red Chamber

红楼梦



## Synopsis

A celestial stone reincarnates as the scion of a wealthy aristocratic family. Baoyu, born with a jade in his mouth, is raised as the heir and Precious Jade of the clan. The heir takes centre stage in a love rivalry between his two cousins – Daiyu and Baochai, amidst the backdrop of the family's slow financial collapse.

Presented by The Finger Players, *Dream of the Red Chamber* is award-winning playwright and director Chong Tze Chien's reinterpretation of one of the four greatest Chinese classical literature novels. With delicate mask work and a riveting moving set, this stage adaption delivers visual poetry that pays homage to the beauty and grandeur of the novel. Weaving an intricate tapestry of dreams, desires, duty, and destiny, the play dances between reality and illusions, creating a microcosm of secrets, political intrigue, and social complexities within the mansion.

There will be a 20 minute post-show discussion for all evening performances.

## Multiculturalism

Written by Cao Xueqin in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, *Dream of the Red Chamber*<sup>1</sup> remains as one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature to this day. The novel explores a panorama of the psychological and political states of the characters, amidst a flurry of mythical and surrealist dreamscapes.



The story follows Jia Baoyu, a charismatic and obstinate youth who is born with a special jade in his mouth. Baoyu is a reincarnation of a sentient stone, which was left behind by Goddess Nüwa after she repaired the Pillar of Heaven. The stone, yearning for human experience, persuaded a Taoist monk and a Buddhist priest to bring it to the mortal realm. Jia Baoyu is born to the Jia Clan—the Rongguo and the Ningguo House—who is associated with the imperial family, making them members of the aristocratic high society. Baoyu is also entangled in a love triangle between his cousins, Xue Baochai and Lin Daiyu. The novel is an episodic record of the characters living in the Red Mansion, including family members and servants, as they navigate interpersonal and political tensions, as well as the family's declining wealth.

The western translation of *Dream of the Red Chamber* began as early as 1812, but the most popularised version was translated by sinologists David Hawkes and John Minford, and published by Penguin Classics. In 1973-1980, David Hawkes translated the first 80 chapters in three volumes, while John Minford, Hawkes' son-in-law, covered the last 40 chapters in two volumes.

In June 2024, The Finger Players' production of *Dream of the Red Chamber* will be performed in Singapore in English. This artistic choice is part of award-winning theatre director and playwright Chong Tze Chien's reimagination of the story. Chong's vision is to make a multicultural play, drawing inspiration from cultural signifiers from Southeast Asia as well as from the Eastern and Western. Despite *Dream of the Red Chamber's* origins from China, the play will be performed with a heavy undertone of international flavours. The costumes, headed by renowned Fashion Designer Max Tan, will see a playful blend of textures juxtaposed against the Eastern fashion silhouettes. The sound design by Sound Artist Ng Jing will explore music and sounds influenced by a fusion of the Western, Eastern and Southeast Asia aural conventions. This ambitious reframing of the theatrical vocabulary is Chong's way of examining the cultural and social values explored in the play and their impact on modern audience in this contemporary era. It is also his signature blend of working with the cultural imprints and creating a new hybrid.

*"[Dream of the Red Chamber] invites viewers to embark on a visual journey that transcends time and space, inviting them to contemplate the universal themes of love, loss, and the fleeting nature of life."*  
– Chong Tze Chien

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<sup>1</sup> Alternate names are *The Story of the Stone* or *A Dream of Red Mansions*.

## Visualising beauty

The lynchpin of this reimagined Chinese classical literature is arguably The Finger Players' artistic interpretation of the set design and puppetry.



When staging *Dream of the Red Chamber*, one cannot overlook one of the most important motifs in the novel – the Daguan Yuan<sup>2</sup>. This vast interior garden landscape, situated within the compounds of the Rongguo House, is where most of the stories unfold. It signifies the state of the House, providing clear imageries of the events and relationships happening within the mansion. Therefore, it is no surprise that this staging of *Dream of the Red Chamber* will feature a set inspired by the iconic indoor garden. Illustrated by an exhibition of glistening stones, swaying lotus leaves, and oriental-influenced window designs, the stage is, in essence, the very definition of sublime beauty – exactly as envisioned by The Finger Players.

Besides set design, puppetry also plays a crucial role in shaping the stage picture. With a decade of experience in puppetry making and design under his belt, Properly Co-Founder Daniel Sim pulls no punches in this iteration of *Dream of the Red Chamber* as Puppet and Props Designer. He will be undertaking the seemingly insurmountable task of creating 11 types of puppets, such as the lotus leaves, 2D and 3D character puppets, and scenery windows, that will serve as the mise-en-scène as well as theatrical motifs of the play. While these puppets are inspired by traditional Chinese motifs and puppetry form, like Chinese shadow puppetry, they will be recreated with contemporary fabrication methods and performance style.

Sim will not be alone in this endeavour. Joining him on the puppet making and design phase are Ling Jiale and Shawne Kho Yzelman, two Makers from The Finger Players' capability development programme The Maker's Lab. Under Sim's tutelage, Ling and Yzelman will be making their debut as Assistant Puppet and Props Designers and Makers in TFP's Main Season production. Each piece of puppetry onstage will be materialised by this power team, coalescing to form stanzas of the visual poetry that is *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Mask puppetry will also play a significant role in this staging. Core Team Member Loo An Ni is responsible for designing and making 11 distinct character masks, each skilfully crafted to capture the quintessential facial features of the characters portrayed in the play. Mask work is not uncommon in Chong's repertoire of puppetry performances. In the staging of *OIWA – The Ghost of Yotsuya* (2021)<sup>3</sup>, the masks functioned as a theatrical device for quick character changes and

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<sup>2</sup> Other translations of Daguan Yuan include the Grand View Garden, Prospect Garden or Grand Prospect Garden

<sup>3</sup> *OIWA – The Ghost of Yotsuya* was presented by The Finger Players, as part of the main season in the Singapore International Festival of Arts in 2021. It has since received numerous accolades including Production of the Year, Best Ensemble, and Best Director at the ST! Life Theatre Awards 2022.

signalling the character's role in the story. *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a novel with a substantial number of characters. After condensing the story by extracting the key events, the staging still includes over 20 characters. The minor characters will be represented by 2D and 3D puppets, while the major characters are portrayed by six talented actors—Ashie Singh, Ellison Tan, Jamil Schulze, Joshua Lim, Lian Sutton, and Tan Wan Sze. Masks are therefore an indispensable component of the costume and puppetry in this production. Apart from facilitating quick changes, they offer visual clues to the characters' status, age, and personality, similar to the function of the costumes, which helps to expand the creativity and flexibility in Chong's storytelling.

With an incredibly talented and experienced team in tow, Chong's retelling of *Dream of the Red Chamber* leaves much to anticipate.



## Performance Details

Title:	<i>Dream of the Red Chamber</i>
Date and Time:	Thursday, 20 June 2024, 8pm Friday, 21 June 2024, 8pm Saturday, 22 June 2024, 3pm & 8pm Sunday, 23 June 2024, 3pm
Duration	2 hr with no intermission
Capacity	112 pax per show
Venue	Drama Centre Black Box
Language	English (with no surtitles)
Ticket Pricing	\$38 (Standard) \$32.30 (Early bird, 15%) \$34.20 (Concession 10%, Students, Senior Citizens and NSF)
Ticket Link	<a href="https://sg.bookmyshow.com/e/TFPDOTRC">https://sg.bookmyshow.com/e/TFPDOTRC</a>
IMDA Rating	Advisory (Some Mature Content)
School Booking	For every 20 tickets purchased, schools will be entitled to <b>one</b> complimentary ticket (subjected to booking fees).



## About The Finger Players

The Finger Players is one of Singapore's leading theatre companies, best known for inventively fusing traditional and contemporary puppetry elements, and integrating other artistic disciplines into its visually-arresting productions.



Founded in 1999, The Finger Players is Singapore's oldest contemporary puppetry theatre company. Since its inception, it has been invited to perform in Africa, Australia, Spain, Paris, Japan, Hungary, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand, to name a few, making it one of Singapore's most prolific international touring companies.

As recognition of its remarkable productions, robust track record, and strong advocacy of puppetry, The Finger Players is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Major Company status, valid for a three-year funding cycle.

The Finger Players has been awarded the President's Design Award (2007), the Singapore Youth Award (Team) (2008), and numerous accolades in The Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards for its efforts to engage the masses through drama and its pursuit of artistic excellence in theatre. Its body of work is extensive and has garnered recognition from both domestic and international media.



*The Core Team of The Finger Players. Left to right: Myra Loke, Loo An Ni, Daniel Sim, Oliver Chong, Lam Dan Fong, Ellison Tan, Chong Tze Chien. Not pictured: Sindhura Kalidas, Tan Xiang Yi, Ong Kian Sin. Photo by Tuckys Photography*



The company currently operates four branches:

### **(1) Main Season**

Through constant invention and innovation, and the fusion of traditional and contemporary puppetry forms, our main season aspires to be the maverick in employing puppetry through our edgy and original theatre offerings.

### **(2) International Season**

Promoting Singapore's brand of Puppetry internationally, the company is one of Singapore's most prolific international touring companies, and has actively been touring its productions since 2000.

### **(3) Outreach Season**

Puppetry gives voice to the silenced, and is a medium to connect and engage. The company reaches out to an average of 25,000 students and members of the public annually, through puppetry performances and workshops with schools, communities and institutions.

### **(4) Capability Building**

Through creating meaningful programmes that respond to the needs of the industry, we commit to make our processes and our art better, by empowering everyone we work with.

The Finger Players is a non-profit organisation with Institution of Public Character (IPC) status, a recipient of the National Arts Council's Major Grant for the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2026.

For past works and press reviews, please visit our website  
<https://fingerplayers.com/production>.



## Biographies of Performers and Puppeteers



**Ashie Singh** recently graduated from National University of Singapore with BA (Hons) in Theatre Studies. Her dream is to act and perform different stories – like the ones she grew up watching – to connect and inspire people. Ashie has performed in various productions since she was 12 years old. Her most recent work being *Happy Indian Women* (The Necessary Stage, 2023). Other works include *Blackout* and *End of the Line*, as part of the 2022 and 2023 NUS Arts Festival respectively, both directed by Chong Tze Chien. In her free time, Ashie loves to read, run, travel, watch movies, and play with dogs!

**Ellison Tan** is a Singaporean-Chinese performer, playwright and educator. Her background is in puppetry, playwriting, the Suzuki Method of Actor Training and Viewpoints. She was Co-Artistic Director of The Finger Players from 2020 – 2023, and also a Core Team Member. She was conferred the National Arts Council Arts Scholarship in 2020, and graduated from Rose Bruford College with a Masters in Theatre for Young Audiences (Distinction).

**Jamil Schulze** (he/him) is a graduate of the BA (Hons) Acting, and MA Arts Pedagogy and Practice program at LASALLE and Goldsmiths University. He is an artist, theatre-maker, actor-movement trainer, and co-founder of Nusantara Theatrics. Jamil furthers his own practice in Bali, training in Mask Work and the techniques of Chekhov and Grotowski at The Bali Conservatory. Selected theatre credits as an actor include *Make Hantus Great Again* by Teater Ekamatra, *The Glass Menagerie* by Pangdemonium, *The Lifespan of a Fact* by STC (formerly the Singapore Repertory Theatre), and *Monster* (Pink Gajah Theatre and T:Works). His feature film debut titled *More, More, More* is currently in post-production.

**Joshua Lim** is proud to be in another production with The Finger Players. He recalls the fulfilling time as an apprentice with the company, and credits his artistic growth largely to being challenged and pushed in the numerous productions with them over the years.

**Tan Guo Lian Sutton** is a graduate of the BA (Hons) Acting program at LASALLE College of the Arts. He was a recipient of Best Supporting Actor for his role in *Electra* at the 2017 Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards, and is currently a core member of theatre collective Dark Matter Theatrics and Co-Artistic Director of Nusantara Theatrics. In 2019, Lian completed his Masters in Arts Pedagogy and Practice where he researched the pre-performance rituals of professional actors in Singapore. As a trained martial artist from an early age, Lian constantly seeks to merge his talents to tell stories in varied and engaging ways. Selected theatre credits include *Temple* and *Electra* directed by Natalie Hennedige, *2 Houses* by Lim Yu Beng, *Acting Mad* directed by Haresh and Sharma, and *Those Who Can't, Teach* directed by Alvin Tan.





Currently pursuing her M.F.A. in Acting at the Korea National University of Arts, **Tan Wan Sze** is active in the arts and entertainment scene in Korea. She has appeared in *Blind* (tvN), *The Uncanny Counter 2: Counterpunch* (tvN), *Ajoomma*, *Citizen of a Kind* etc. In 2021, she made her theatre debut in South Korea with the Seoul Metropolitan Theatre's production of *Ten Million Cities*. Following that, she was part of the team that created and performed *Pour Vivre Ici*, commissioned by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Busan. Prior to her relocation to Korea, Wan Sze was part of the Artistic Ensemble of The Finger Players (2002–2003). Shortly after, she became a freelance theatre practitioner in Singapore. Her acting credits in Singapore include *Spirits Play*, *Turn by Turn We Turn*, and *Book of Living and Dying* (The Finger Players); *Without Reason* (ArtsWok Collaborative); *National Language Class* (Spell#7 & Buds Theatre Company); *Ignorland of its Time* (DramaBox); and *Body X* (Li Xie, Danny Yeo & The Arts House). She was part of the team that received the President Design Award 2007 for *0501* and Best Ensemble Acting at the 5<sup>th</sup> Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards for *Furthest North Deepest South*.

## Biographies of the Creative Team

A graduate from the NUS Theatre Studies programme, **Chong Tze Chien** is a core member of The Finger Players and an award-winning playwright and director. Some of the awards he has won include the Singapore Dramatist Award and The Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards. His plays have been staged in Singapore, UK, Budapest, Taiwan, and Japan. He has two collections of plays containing critically acclaimed plays such as *Charged* (The Business Times' top ten Singapore play of all time) and *PIE*. For his contributions to Singapore Theatre, he was awarded the Young Artist Award 2006 by Singapore's National Arts Council.

**Max Tan** started his eponymous label MAX.TAN upon his breakout collection at the Singapore Fashion Designers Contest in 2007, where he received an award recognition. What began as creating capsule collections to meet increasing interest, then became a full-fledged debut, with the S/S 2010 collection being featured as one of the top ten collections globally on premier trend forecasting report - Stylesight.com, alongside fashion powerhouses such as Alexander McQueen and Valentino. Over the past decade, Max has been recognised for his innovative designs that challenges fashion trends while incorporating his Asian roots. Max also lectures at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Singapore), and enjoys partnering with theatre groups in Singapore to design costumes for their key productions. MAX.TAN is represented by Boon showroom (Paris), and has started making inroads onto the international fashion design scene.

Awarded the National Arts Council Scholarship, **Ng Jing** graduated with first class honours from Rose Bruford College (U.K.) specialising in Performance Sound. Having designed for various companies and productions over 10 years of practice, he aspires to provide a wholesome sonic experience for the audience – what, why and how you listen through a live performance. As an arts educator at NAFA since 2017, Jing has been teaching the core principles and techniques of Production Sound Design. These modules foster future practitioners to develop a deeper understanding of sound in various artistic mediums and discovering the infinite possibilities of sonic arts. He was nominated for Best Sound Design in the 2014 Off West End Theatre Awards, and the 2018, 2022-2024 Singapore Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards. Jing is currently developing future iterations of his installation work - *Distance Makes The Heart Fonder*. Website: [www.jingngsound.com](http://www.jingngsound.com) // [www.soundcloud.com/jingsound](https://www.soundcloud.com/jingsound)

**Faith Liu Yong Huay** trained at The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in Lighting Design (2016), under the National Arts Council Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate). In September 2017, she co-founded 微 Wei Collective with theatre practitioner Neo Hai Bin. She is exploring giving breath to spaces, objects and bodies with light. She is honoured to have worked on numerous theatre and dance productions in Singapore. <http://liuyonghuay.tumblr.com>

**Daniel Sim** is interested in objects in performance, and the potential of their material and theatrical presence. As a Maker and Designer, he was responsible for the puppets, props, and gadgets in productions such as *Transplant* (2024), *Into The Woods* (2023), *The Zodiac Race* (2023), *End of the Rainbow* (2022), *Jun and The Octopus* (2022), *Oiwa – The Ghost of Yotsuya* (2021), *The Son* (2020), and *Urinetown The Musical* (2019). He has also created spaces for shows like *Love is the Last Thing On My Mind* (2020), *Flowers* (2019), *Both Sides, Now: Closer* (2018), and *MISSING: The City of Lost Things* (2018). Daniel helms The Maker's Lab, a programme by The Finger Players that focuses on research and development of puppet design and making. The Maker's Lab is now in its 4<sup>th</sup> iteration since its inception in 2020. Daniel is also a co-founder of Prop-erly, where he fabricates puppets, props and other performance objects.

**Ling Jia Le** is an interdisciplinary artist who embraces collaboration, risk-taking, and having fun. Inspired by everyday experiences and materials, Ling creates compelling experiences that urgently convey social issues through performance and puppetry. With a BFA in Interdisciplinary Sculpture from the Maryland Institute College of Art, Ling has designed theatre sets, produced immersive performances, and participated in exhibitions in the US and Singapore. He recently designed the puppets for ART:DIS and Gateway Art's production, *Smartypants and the Swordfish* (2024).

**Shawne Kho Yzelman** holds a Diploma in Arts and Theatre Management and is freelancing in stage management and props making. To enrich both her technical and design skill set as a theatre-maker, she is currently an Apprentice Puppet & Props Maker under the tutelage of Daniel Sim, as part of The Finger Players' The Maker's Lab programme. Beside stage management, Shawne also took on roles such as Set Coordinator and Costume Coordinator for The Second Breakfast Company's *The Hawker* (2019) and *The Paiseh Pieces* (2023) respectively.



**Loo An Ni** is fascinated with the tactility of objects and spaces. This brought her into theatre where possibilities are endless. Having taken on various roles behind-the-scenes from design and construction of costumes and puppets to wardrobe management, her current interest is exploring how these two fields can meld with or complement each other. She is currently a member of The Finger Players' Core Team.

**Grace Lin** is a designer of sets and environments for plays, musicals, and film. Arriving at Set Design from a background in architecture and graphic communication, she has over 10 years of experience working in commercial editorial design, graphic illustration, and environmental design. Grace holds a Bachelor of Arts in Architecture from the National University of Singapore and a Masters in Design Communication from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Selected credits for Set Designer: *Por Por's Big Fat Surprise Wedding* (Singapore Theatre Company), *Little Mournings* (The Finger Players), *After Life* and *A Monster Calls* (The Young Company), *Nightwatchers* (Juo Studios), *One Meter Square* (W!ld Rice), *The Odyssey* and *Two Weeks with the Queen* (UWCSEA), *Mixed* (Theatreworks). Selected credits for Associate Set Designer: *Falling* and *Into the Woods* (Pangdemonium), *psychobitch* (W!ld Rice), *Cinderella* (Singapore Ballet).

## Press Information

### Press Images

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Caption: Image(s) courtesy of The Finger Players.



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