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Adding a transforming touch to a seminal play



By **BEN MUNROE**

IN the 12 years since *The Vagina Monologues* was first staged in New York, it has already appeared in various guises in Singapore but the creative team behind this latest outing is confident that you won't have seen anything like this before.

For a start, director Loretta Chen has transformed Eve Ensler's text from a monologue into several dialogues between women, and she has also cast nine actors rather than the traditional three.

Ensler's seminal play famously deals with issues surrounding women and the treatment of women, including sex, menstruation, abuse and rape, and it has not been without its critics over the years for controversial scenes and messages.

The creative decisions that have been made with this latest production, by the newly formed Zebra Crossing, are apparently designed to enhance the relevance of this play to a Singapore audience.

"I have cast people who physically embody the roles as I see them, such as a butch woman and a transsexual, and I have consciously chosen a multi-racial cast," explains Chen on her choice of actors, which includes Bernie Chan and Loke Loo Pin.

Chen explains that the idea of increasing the cast size adds a sense of the universal nature of the issues raised by the monologues, which you do not get when just one person is doing all the talking. "There are literally no stage directions in the text, but I split the dialogue that was written for one person between two or more actors," she says.

Add some music, dance and videos to the production, and you have some idea of what you are in for. "Some will agree and some won't," she says of her approach to the play. "But then, I am not inviting everyone to agree with me and theatre is a good place to talk about these issues."

Before purists start complaining even before they

have seen the work, Chen's approach has the playwright's blessing, given just before rehearsals were due to start, following some tense correspondence with her agents. Perhaps ironically, given a title and subject matter bound to rub some people the wrong way, there has been little or no resistance from the

MDA to the staging of this project. "The word 'vagina' is not suggestive at all; it's pretty straightforward," says Chen. "But many people do find it objectionable, which made me realise that this project is needed to show that this is not a derogatory word."

Drama Centre Theatre
Oct 1-12

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