

► Kelvin Wong

IF YOU are hoping to see some bared torsos when 251 opens in April, you will not be disappointed.

And it does not matter what your gender is, there will be something for everyone, promises its director Loretta Chen.

The play, based on former porn actress Annabel Chong's life, is so named because of the reported 251 men she slept with in just 10 hours in 1995. This was captured in a sensational video which propelled Annabel – a persona created by Singaporean Grace Quek – to international fame at the time.

Exactly how this scene will be recreated in a "poetic and powerful" way has yet to be nailed down, Loretta says.

But the associate director of Toy Factory Productions assures: "You can expect to see some topless scenes. And not just of the women. That won't be fair!"

"We know a lot of women like to look at men. Some men also like to look at men. We will cater to every taste," adds the 30-year-old, who's also pursuing her PhD in theatre studies at the National University of Singapore.

The challenge when putting together the play, says Loretta, is in ensuring that it does not degenerate into "some cheap flick", further complicated by the fact that the protagonist is still alive.

"When someone is dead, you can have some poetic licence," she says with a laugh, but goes on to add in seriousness: "I do like the girl and I take it as a personal mission to portray her accurately."

Loretta, incidentally, is the younger sister of TV actor Edmund Chen, 44. Her other sibling Eric, 41, runs an events and production company. "So that makes me the baby of the family," she declares.

So, what would she say to someone who accuses her of being out to shock with her play?

"It is a controversial story but I think controversies are interesting... We as artists are quite psyched for these things."

Q You said you would be watching R(A) videos as part of the re-

THE E-MAIL INTERVIEW: Director Loretta Chen

Who says
only women
go topless?

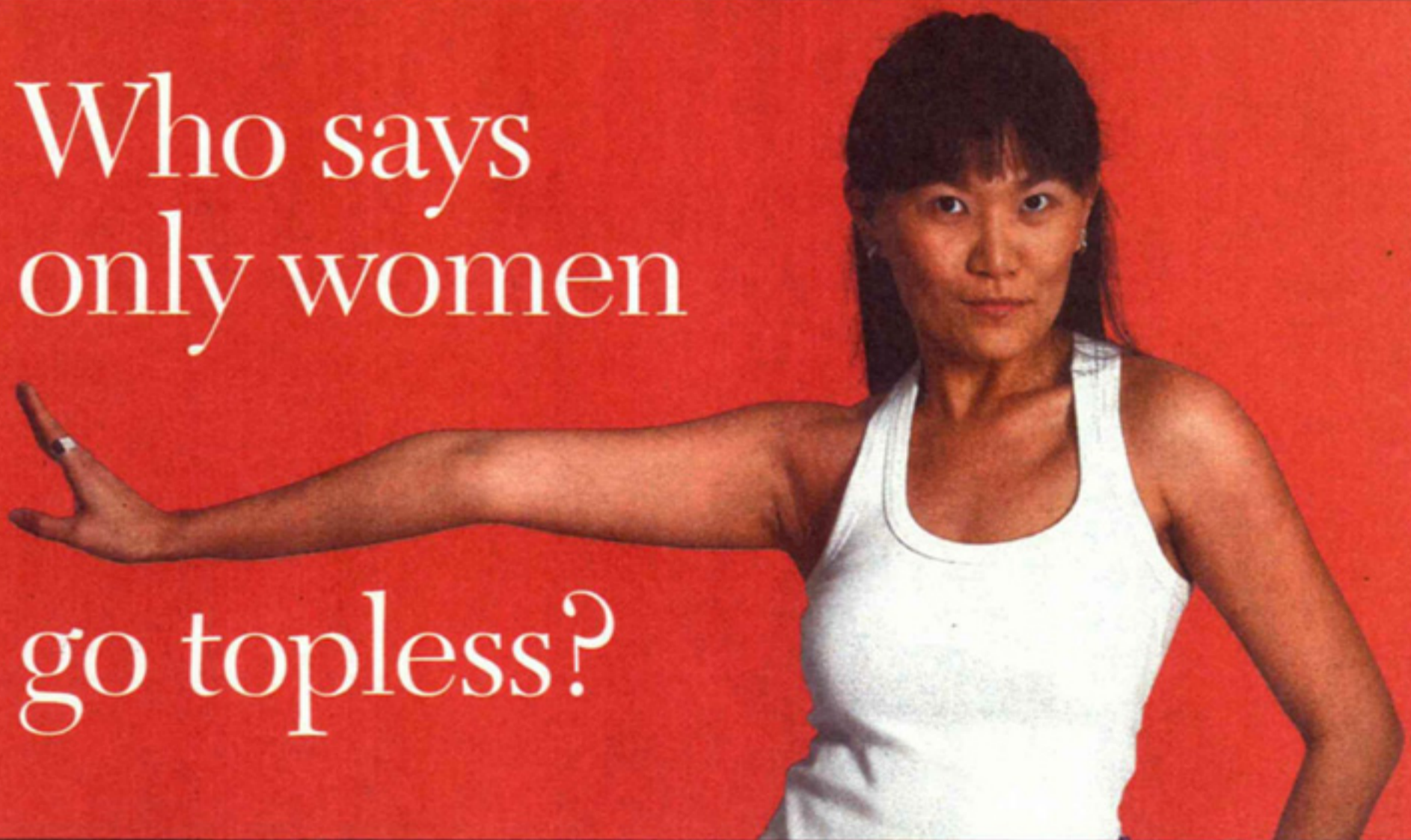


PHOTO: WANG HUI FEN

search for your play. Eh, is it going to be just business or a mix of business and leisure?

A Like the businessman who calls his wife after skipping yet another dinner date and saying: "Sorry honey, not tonight. I have to entertain the voluptuous blonde and blue-eyed Swedish models at the karaoke across Hotel 81 again."

What would you think leh? Of course it is purely business!

Besides, I am watching R(A) videos like Schindler's List, The Killing Fields, Boys Don't Cry, Dogville and History of Violence... What were you thinking? Tsk tsk.

Q Annabel Chong reportedly admitted that she had slept with just 70 men, as opposed to 251 as previously claimed. So why isn't your play entitled 70 instead?

A It's merely a publicity gimmick! We at Toy Factory just simply

love being salacious, controversial and the fodder of coffee shop talk! But seriously, there is truth to the title – she did have sex 251 times in a day. Some of the 70 men just went for seconds, thirds and dessert.

Q Staying with numbers, your mobile phone number contains the string "1188". Rather superstitious, aren't you?

A Choi, choy, choy! I am so not superstitious! Whatever gave you that idea? Just because I changed my two-year-old black sports car to a white SUV and completely revamped my otherwise predominantly black wardrobe because my fengshui consultant told me white is my lucky colour?

Oh yes, did I mention my black sports car came with the numbers 416 ("sei yat lok" in Cantonese or quite literally die-all-the-way) emblazoned on the number plate.

Q You had money and clothes, quite literally, thrown at you by an over-enthusiastic man who was auditioning for a role in another play. Apart from that incident, you haven't been properly propositioned, have you?

A Ahem, excuse me. As a matter of fact, I have, although that was the only time during an audition. I seem to recall getting propositioned a lot up till I turned 21. I was wooed by various wealthy young men!

But propositions have indeed been few and far between as the years roll by which probably explains why I happily offered the role to the actor who threw his money and clothes at me! (Lest you think I am a partial director, I will have it clarified that he was my ex-student and a pretty fine actor too. Phew.)

Q Let's just say 251 opens to a

full house – of DOMs (dirty old men) and very few others. Cause for celebration or time to weep buckets?

A Did someone say full house! Woo hoo! Celebration! Party! Champagne all round – the whole works! You know how difficult it is to get dirty old men to leave Yangtze, much less purchase a \$33 ticket and travel to Esplanade Theatre Studios and leave their umbrellas at the door? If they do fill the theatre, I will be thrilled and all the credit will have to go to the marketing team for sure!

Q A socially inept goon finds out that you're the sister of actor Edmund Chen and insolently asks: "What happened to you?" What would be your retort?

A I happened 11 years after Eric who happened three years after Edmund. Go figure. For full details, please ask Papa and Mama Chen.

Q You once described Annabel's infamous orgy video as "the most anti-porn porn video...that wouldn't arouse anybody". Am I supposed to take you seriously?

A Naturally. I always say what I mean and mean what I say. Have you watched the video yet (waves finger incriminatingly)?

Oi, don't sabo me – cannot watch porn in Singapore, okay! It is rather anti-porn, no tease, all grease.

Q Here's a brain teaser for you: Why is it that at dinner functions, formal wear for men means piling on the layers but for women, it's the case of the less you wear, the more formal it becomes?

A I suspect formality is equated with the amount of heat it generates for the men. If a man dons a suit, tie, shirt, trousers, the works, he will be hot for sure – hence formal. If a woman dresses in a skimpy tube top and a short, short skirt, she will also generate a lot of heat for the men and it is therefore deemed formal.

Q You once had to act in your own play after an actress fell ill. It's not entirely the same but you aren't planning on doing a M. Night Shyamalan for future productions, are you?

A Not an M. Night Shyamalan (because all his films after his big debut Sixth Sense performed dismally) but maybe an Alfred Hitchcock or even an Ivan Heng! To answer your question, I may consider doing a cameo in my own play – perhaps as the last man standing in 251?

Q Apparently, it was a toss-up between naming you Loretta and Bridget when you were born. Would life have been any different if your parents had chosen otherwise?

A Dramatically. I spend far too much time spelling out my name for far too many people. I may have already made my first million with all the time saved. To date, I am still being called Roretta, Roletta, Lorita, Rorata, Lolata, Lolita, Roti-Prata or the all-time favourite, Lor-rah-ter.