



PART **E**

Life!

THE STRAITS TIMES
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4 2008

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New Audi TTS overtakes Porsches

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life!

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Joy and tears of being women

From first menstrual cramps to love and sex, this feminist play is fun-filled and thoughtful

review theatre

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Zebra Crossing
Drama Centre Theatre @ National Library
Last Thursday

tara tan
This is Dim Sum Dollies-meets-Oprah -

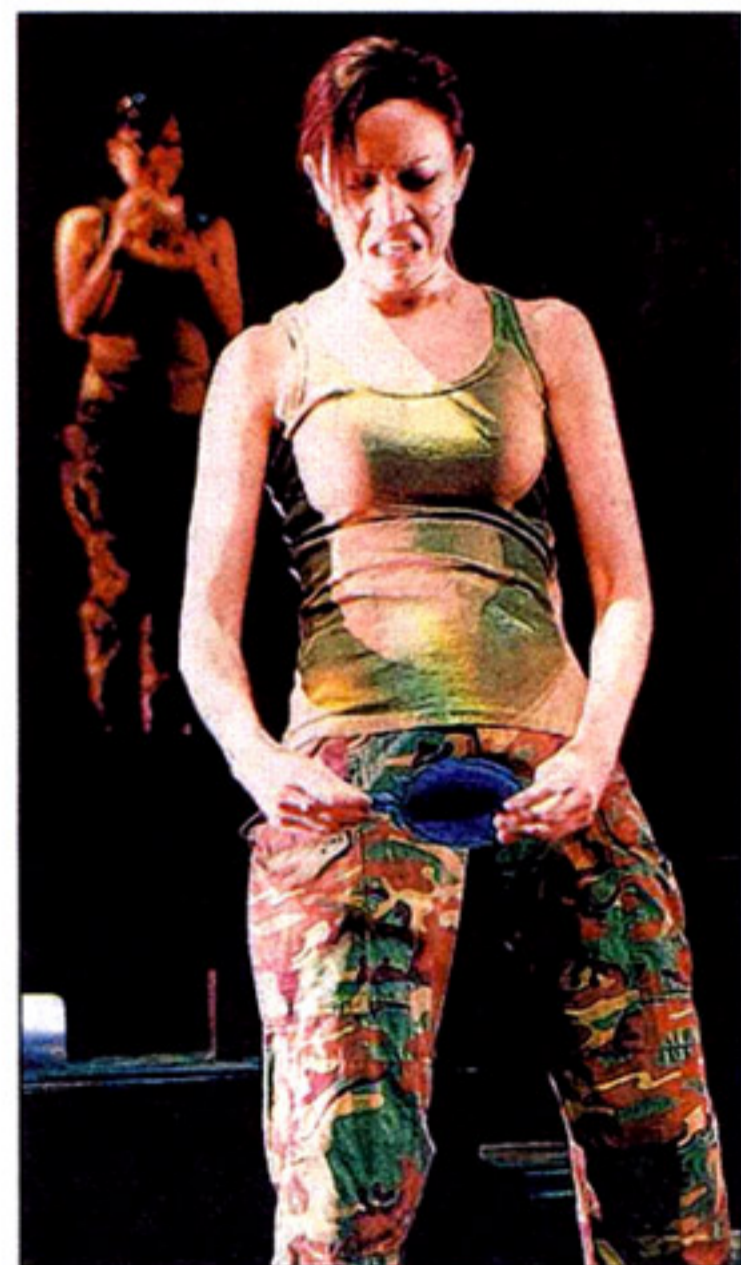
stories about love, family and sex doused with tears and showered with laughter.

Eve Ensler's landmark play, *The Vagina Monologues*, played here by nine women, is a series of vignettes that grapple with female issues from domestic abuse to the first menstrual cramp.

Directed by Loretta Chen, this play had no qualms about its anti-men slant: Father figures or male lovers are largely absent in this play.

Powerful feminist statements were made, such as chanting a certain derogatory word (that rhymes with 'aunt') to reclaim it as a word of worth.

Although the pacing in the first half was jerky, it hit a home run with Loke Loo Pin's monologue, *Because He Liked*



In one vignette, real-life model **Bernie Chan** confronts her femininity with a mirror. PHOTO: ZEBRA CROSSING

To See It. Playing an elderly woman coming to terms with her vagina, a word she can't even bring herself to say, Loke's deadpan humour - delivered with impeccable comic timing - was a lethal combination.

Another very funny scene was between a lesbian sex worker (played by Sabrina Chong) and a geeky girl on the cusp of sexual discovery (Eleine Ng) with their inventory of orgasmic soundtracks.

In another scene, transsexual Elnina's brutally honest telling of the trials and tribulations she endures was heartbreaking. The inclusion of this monologue, taken from another of Ensler's plays, added a significant dimension to this work.

Elizabeth Tan's young girl who goes through childhood sexual abuse but finds salvation with an older woman in *The Coochie Snorcher That Could* gave me mixed feelings, however.

Presented as a Dear Diary monologue, the text was hard-hitting but Tan seemed joyfully detached from her past. Having said that, the actress later put in an emotional turn in the role of an abused wife.

However, the series of short monologues sometimes felt too abrupt, with its transitions shaky and irreverent. The music was also often overly sentimental.

It did not seem as hard-hitting as previous versions staged in Singapore. For instance, the scene dealing with genital mutilation was played out with a video on butchery and accompanied with statistics. In Li Xie's *The Vaginalogue* in 2003, which was based on the same play, Li carved and sewed up a hunk of raw meat on stage, a visceral image that is seared in my memory still.

Kudos to Chen for letting her nine performers' individual personalities shine through. Most women would be able to identify facets of themselves in them.

Also, intriguing directorial decisions gave this piece an added edge, like how wealthy socialities laughingly exchanged stories of spousal abuse at a lush party.

The Vagina Monologues is an enjoyable, fun and thoughtful production, a should-see for women and their men. taratan@sph.com.sg

watch it

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
R18 (Adult Content & Strong Language)

Who: Zebra Crossing
When: Till Oct 12, 8pm (no shows on Monday), Sat & Sun matinees at 3pm
Tickets: \$17 to \$57 from Sistic (log on to www.sistic.com.sg or call 6348-5555)

TODAY

afternoon edition

Friday October 3, 2008 www.todayonline.com we set you thinking

PLUS 46 FRIDAY OCTOBER 3, 2008 TODAY

A lively, comedic take on a quiet classic

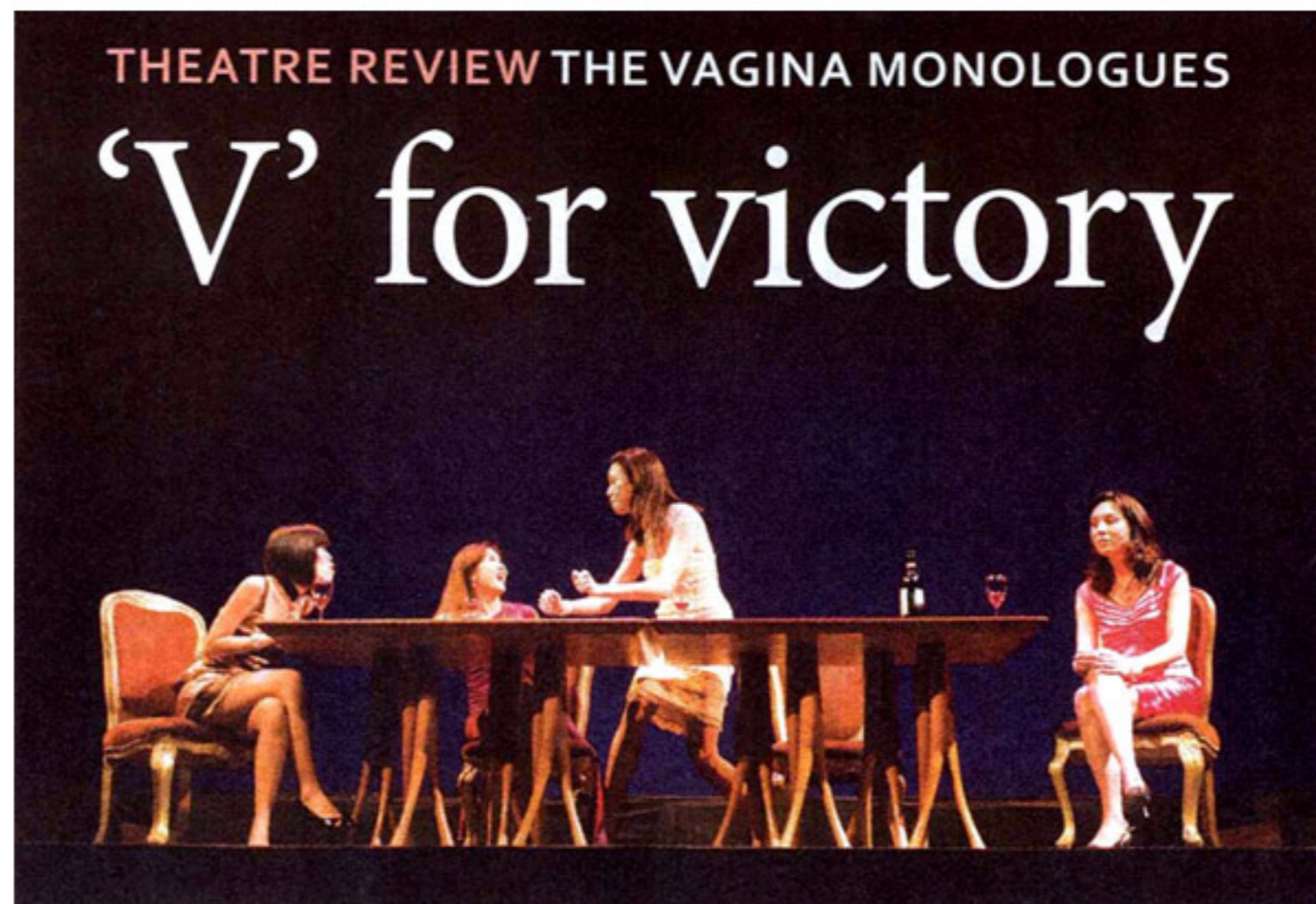
MAYO MARTIN
mayo@mediacorp.com.sg

YOU'VE seen one, you've seen them all, the saying goes. Not so with this version of *The Vagina Monologues* (TVM).

Despite this reviewer's initial doubts on the wisdom of choosing an arguably over-exposed piece as an inaugural production for new theatre company Zebra Crossing, director Loretta Chen has admirably eschewed conventions for a unique take on TVM (which is not an easy thing considering how notoriously hands-on the playwright Eve Ensler is).

Instead of three performers, there are nine. Sombre and minimalist? No, thank you, we're having fun.

Hence, monologues are shuffled around, public service announcements flashed onscreen along with video interviews of three prominent theatre personalities on motherhood, a clinical "vagina workshop" is re-imagined as an army boot-camp led by a hyperactive drill sergeant



with a French accent, shrill "schoolgirls" descend on the audience waving their (unused) sanitary napkins, and, seemingly out of nowhere, someone actually does a sexy pole dance. Naughty, naughty ...

Barring uneven scene transitions, (opening night jitters, most likely) TVM

was without a doubt a lively theatrical ride. There was a conscious effort to localise the experience, with phrases in Tamil, Malay and Chinese dialects thrown around.

That said, the flashy approach tends to occasionally distract, diffusing some of the more intimate, disturbing moments

of what is by nature a confessional piece of text.

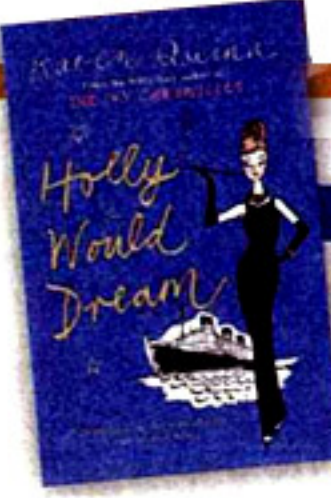
Despite a few over-the-top moments, new talent Eleine Ng showed a flair for the comedic with her scene depicting the various ways of moaning.

Soul singer Asha Edmund's own spiels on, er, hair "down there" and how to pronounced "c**t" were tight and snappy. Transsexual Elnina recounting a transformative experience was a bit too dramatic but intense, nevertheless.

My favourite was veteran actress Loke Loo Pin deadpanning her way through a monologue as a dignified old lady recounting her first sexual awakening. Too shy to even say the word "vagina", she flashes a "V" sign instead – which could very well stand for the word "victory", too.

While Chen's approach was a little too much for a play whose power lies in the intimacy that monologues offer, we're inclined to give it a "V" sign for being fun and, more important, fresh.

The Vagina Monologues runs until Oct 12, 8pm, at Drama Centre Theatre, National Library. With 3pm matinees. Tickets from \$17 to \$57 at Sistic. Rating: R18.



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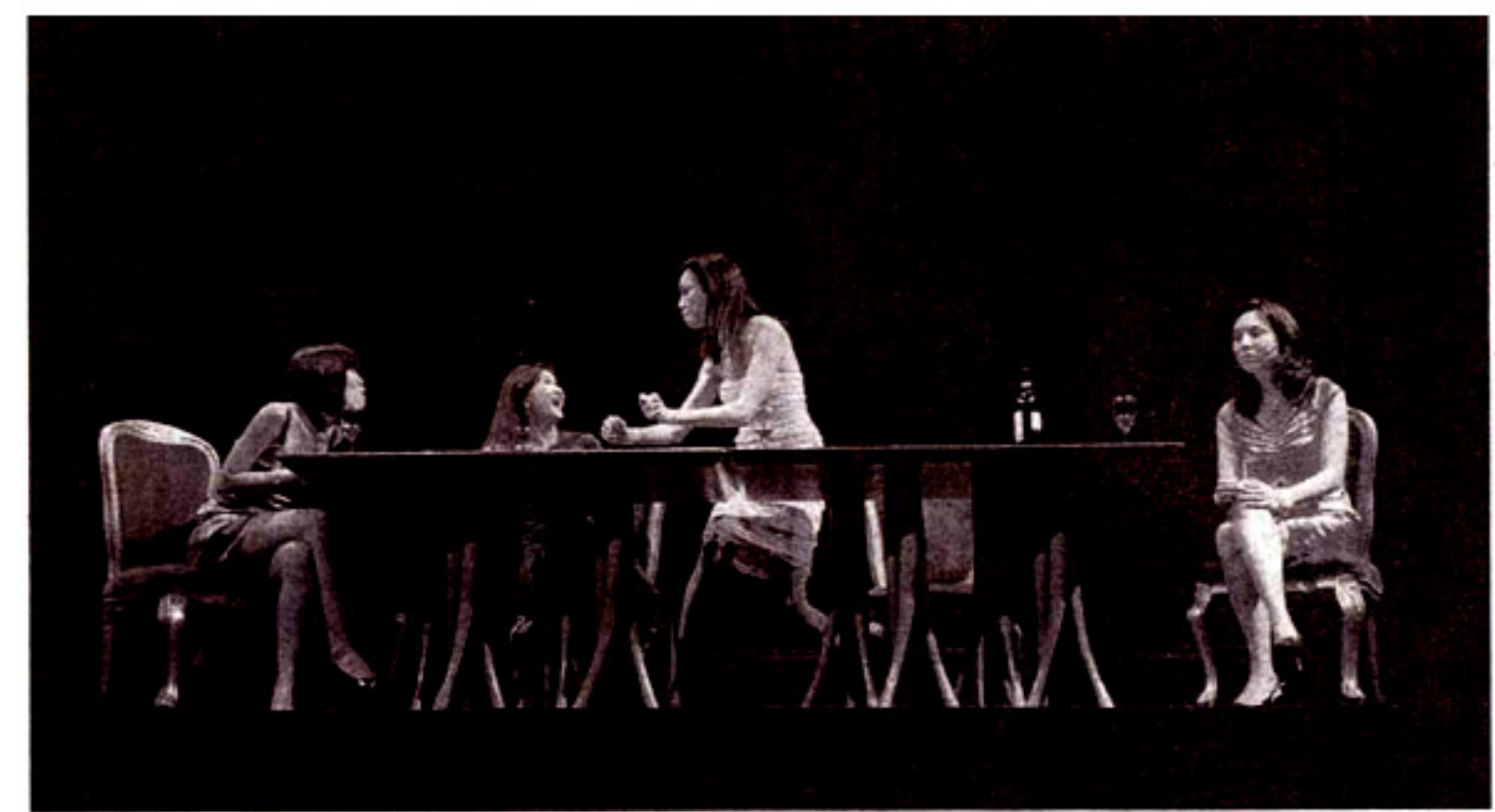
Nine women together are better than one

By **BEN MUNROE**

YOU can't fault the strategy of new production company Zebra Crossing in picking an inaugural play guaranteed to court controversy and therefore lots of attention. From the legs spread on the posters to the bold title and frank script, *The Vagina Monologues* is hard to miss and even harder to ignore. The play offers messages about the treatment of women and the pressures that society brings to bear at all levels, including through the mass media and intimate personal

relationships. The text is honest and humorous and covers issues such as abuse, menstruation and masturbation.

While staging a maiden production as striking as *The Vagina Monologues* might seem obvious, director Loretta Chen has posed herself a greater challenge by adapting the script and performance to be a nine-woman play rather than the traditional series of monologues performed solo by a group of actors. She has added action to bring the stories to life,



Frankly speaking: Chen has added characters, split up the text to support her reading and created some visually stunning tableaux

adapted some of the lines to be more locally resonant, split the text between performers to create scenes, given visual interpretation to large chunks of Eve Ensler's original text and added statistics about women in Singapore which are projected onto the backdrop.

It's an almost unrecognisable production from the version that first appeared in New York 12 years ago.

Lucky for us (and for Chen), it's a good thing she messed around with the text, as she brought us a fresh look at a familiar play, and in doing so added emphasis to its ever-relevant issues. The nine actors are of different ages, racial backgrounds and with wildly varying performing credentials, which helps create a sense of the universal nature of the issues discussed.

There are some awkward moments during which you're not sure

who's meant to be the focal point, such as the lead in to the finale song, and the preamble to the boot camp scene. But generally, the ensemble cast turn in passionate performances that create characters where there were none before.

Loke Loo Pin, Asha Edmund and host Bernie Chan stand out for their poise and versatility, straddling bawdy jokes one minute and gut-wrenching emotion the next. The scene in which former Boom Boom Room performer Elnina takes on the role of a gender-reassigned woman demonstrates the marriage of genuine talent

on the part of the actor and inspired casting by Chen.

Overall Chen takes an aggressive approach as director, adding characters, splitting up the text to support her reading and creating some visually stunning tableaux. Some of the decisions, such as throwing tampons into the audience have an ultimately hollow ring to them, others such as bringing on a pole dancer and the display of abuse statistics in Singapore help remind you that the messages in this play should not be forgotten when the house lights come up.

The Vagina Monologues at the Drama Centre Theatre until Sunday Oct 12

of Rauzan Segla, has now returned to its rightful place at the head of the class, Canon-la-Gaffeliere, Monbousquet, Moulin St Georges (second property of Alain Vauthier of Chateau Ausone, and one to watch), Pavie Maquin. In Pomerol, it is more difficult as productions are small and prices are naturally a bit higher.

Clos L'Eglise, Latour a Pomerol, Le Gay, Lagrange, Petit Village, Rouget, Vieux Chateau Certan (excellent value) in Pomerol. These are but a few of the names that immediately come to mind as I encounter them in most en primeur tastings.

The second wines of the top Chateaux are another treasure trove of value wines to be explored. Second wines of the First Growths are expensive though, and better values are to be found in those of the Second and Third Growths.

Reserve de la Comtesse of Chateau Pichon Longueville Comtesse de Lalande is possibly the best known and the most popular for its high quality and consistency from vintage to vintage.

In the same category, though less well known, are Pagodes de Cos (Cos d'Estournel), Dame de Montrose (Montrose), Chapelle de Ausone (Ausone), Carillon de Angelus (Angelus)

"class distinction" kept Rhone wines from being accorded the same status and prestige as Bordeaux Firsts and Burgundy Grands Crus.

The Rhone Valley is a vast area and abounds with modestly priced treasures. There are some great wines there - Guigal's single vineyard Cote Roties, Chave's Hermitage both red and white, Jaboulet's Hermitage La Chapelle, Chateau Rayas Chateauneuf-du-Pape to name the most well known.

But there are lots of great values. Amongst the best values are Guigal's Cote du Rhone and the straight Cote Rotie; Jaboulet's Crozes Hermitage "Domaine du Thalabert", Chateauneuf-du-Pape "Les Cedres", Gigondas; Chateauneuf-du-Pape Pignan, second wine of Chateau Rayas, and their Cote du Rhone Chateau de Fonsalette.

My other favourite values are Chateau Beaucastel, a great value, Domaine du Pegau's Chateauneuf-du-Pape Cuvee Reserve, a lovely wine; Domaine du Vieux Telegraphe's Chateauneuf-du-Pape consistent high quality and modest prices, and Rene Rostaing's Cote Roties.

The rest of Europe - Italy and Spain in particular - and the New World wines will be covered next week