



Alumna Loretta Chen
Subject Drama & Theatre Studies
Graduated 1999
Place of Work Theatre Events, Singapore
Position Creative Director



Loretta cuts a prominent figure in both academia and in the entertainment arena. She is a multi-talented scholar-turned-creative director and pioneered the Creative Communications, Drama and Creativity, Innovation & Enterprise (CIE) programmes in Singapore Polytechnic and is an Associate Lecturer in NUS, LASALLE, NAFA and NTU. Academia aside, Loretta directs various high-profile theatrical and large scale commissioned events.

Great minds go on to great places

Were you considering any other universities before starting at Royal Holloway?

No. I was always very headstrong and once I set my mind on something – that's it. I knew I wanted to study at Royal Holloway as it had the best drama department, a great campus, wonderful faculty and on a completely superfluous level, I wanted to say that I studied and lived near Windsor Castle.

What interested you in Drama and Theatre studies?

Theatre was always very close to my heart. It was my way of looking at the world. Theatre for me is a microcosm of the universe and I come from a family of artists (both my eldest brother and sister-in-law are veteran actors, my older brother is a producer and his wife is a designer) so it seems natural that I would pursue theatre.

How did you find your studies?

I enjoyed my course tremendously. It helped that I already had prior theatre experience so the practical sessions were right up my alley. I was always very intrigued by and had a natural aptitude for dense theory, so it was thoroughly enjoyable. Demanding, challenging, time-consuming but I lapped up every minute of it. I was never homesick and my family was miles away in Singapore.

Tell us about your Royal Holloway experience.

It was a university with a lot of history and an awe-inspiring campus. The lush grounds of Royal Holloway was the sole inspiration for my student direction of *Everyman* (I got a distinction for that project). My theatre community was my social life. We spent copious amounts of time rehearsing on campus or at my flat in Englefield Green. I never drove whilst I was at Royal Holloway so I got around everywhere by foot and train. I remember taking the bus to Staines and Windsor to do my groceries and weekend trips to London to catch some mighty powerful theatre. I always came back from London broke, but inspired and rejuvenated. It was a great time!

What is the most important thing that Royal Holloway taught you?

That I had everything it takes to be a good academic and an even better director. I had the most nurturing and supportive professors. Professor Richard Allen Cave was the best supervisor anyone could ask for. He was giving, generous, supportive and he even offered me a PhD scholarship. Professor David Wiles made me realise that I had an

aptitude for directing as he always gave me such positive yet critical feedback needed to take my work to the next (higher) level. In hindsight, Royal Holloway was seminal in giving me the confidence to become a working director. Being a director takes equal parts vision, commitment, a sense of daring, humour and a sense of humility – to take your work seriously but yourself, lightly. I cultivated this at Royal Holloway.

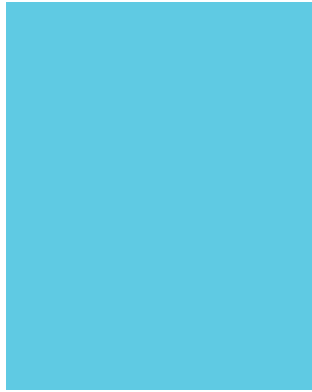
What has been your career path since graduating?

I started wanting to be an actor, then a theatre academic and a director. Now I do all three although now I am first a director and an academic, acting only on occasion. I never really deviated from what I set out to do.

What do you do now in your everyday job?

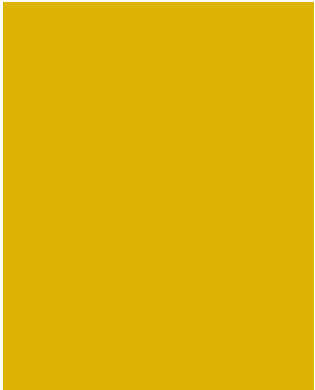
I direct, lecture, host (I am a professional master of ceremony), write and act – in that order.





people *with* passion

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What exciting projects have you been working on?

Every project to a director is a labour of love as you start with nothing more than an idea and it takes a village to put it together. It comes alive right in front of your very eyes. It is like having a baby – by that token I have had over 40 babies and each and every one of them is special. The biggest project was the Asian Premiere of *Victor/Victoria* starring international jazz legend, Laura Fygi and Grammy-nominated trumpeter, Ron King. It cost over £1 million (a lot of money in Singapore) and I helmed a team of about 100 people. It had grand 1930s style music with a large big band orchestra and amazing choreography and costumes. It was my dream come true but it was very demanding and challenging in every possible way.

What challenges have you come across in your role?

Perceptions – that women directors are indecisive or lack vision – I will gamely prove anyone wrong. Budgets – a perennial problem in theatre and the arts worldwide so no need to elaborate. Censorship – especially in my country Singapore. We tend to be afraid to push boundaries or speak up as you are better off as one of the huddled masses. We like assorted homogeneity

or controlled heterogeneity. Our Singapore government is not very tolerant of individuals who are too different or too vocal. As artists, we are always told to tread very carefully. It is a constant struggle and a delicate tango we practise with the authorities.

Have you had any international experience?

Yes, I have worked with the National Theatre of Japan, toured in Australia, collaborated with Shaolin monks from China and am now directing *The Vagina Monologues* in Toronto, Canada. I really hope to do more. I will be more than happy to direct a play on campus.

What are your aspirations?

To never stop learning, growing and developing as an artist. To create more good, powerful, socially relevant work. To constantly curate, engage, debate, innovate and create. To one day work with/for/like Julie Taymor, Tim Burton, Wes Anderson, Pedro Almodovar.

Why did you chose to start 360?

I wanted to fuse art and commerce whilst still being able to do my art (projects that may not necessarily translate to profits but are fund-raisers or awareness campaigns). I recognize the need for constant innovation, customized concepts, powerful communication and integrated solutions, so I wanted to create a one-stop shop for creative needs. Most of all I wanted to work with passion, integrity, dedication, a healthy dose of humour and a big smile.

I teamed up with J Phillips Creative Management which is based in the US, and we are now an internationally recognized company that provides artistic expertise to major Hollywood studios, production houses and independent film companies. We also provide creative consultancy and lend our talents to ‘live’ stage shows at renowned entertainment centres.

Do you have any top tips for students?

Always, be honest with yourself and do what you love and respect.



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