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PLUS 25 TUESDAY JULY 15, 2008 TODAY

THEATRE REVIEW

Magic moments

Cool illusions, a sweet story and good comedy make *MagicBox* a fun show for the entire family

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A MAN from the audience was sawed in half, doves appeared out of nowhere, people levitated and teleported.

But *MagicBox's* most impressive trick was enrapturing the audience – even when there wasn't any magic going on.

Thanks to a witty script and good comedic acting, this jaded reporter quickly changed his mind about the performance simply being a series of illusions hastily worked around a flimsy narrative.

True, it was a thinly veiled story about a father-and-daughter tag-team, played by real-life magicians Lawrence and Priscilla Khong.

They play the stars of the old Magic Box theatre, whose act is in danger of being swallowed by The Metropolitan – the integrated resort-like neighbour that's bent on pirating the restless daughter who's trying to escape from her father's old-fashioned routines.

Director Loretta Chen has a few tricks up her sleeve as well: A dazzling retro-glam set, composer Iskandar Ismail's band, and the rest of the "non-magical" cast.

Dwayne Tan plays the less-talented Charlie, Priscilla's overlooked brother destined to play supporting cast to dad and sis; while Jonathan Lim is hilarious as Magic

But *MagicBox's* most impressive trick was enrapturing the audience – even when there wasn't any magic going on.

Box's theatre manager George Chew, who has to put up with all the family drama.

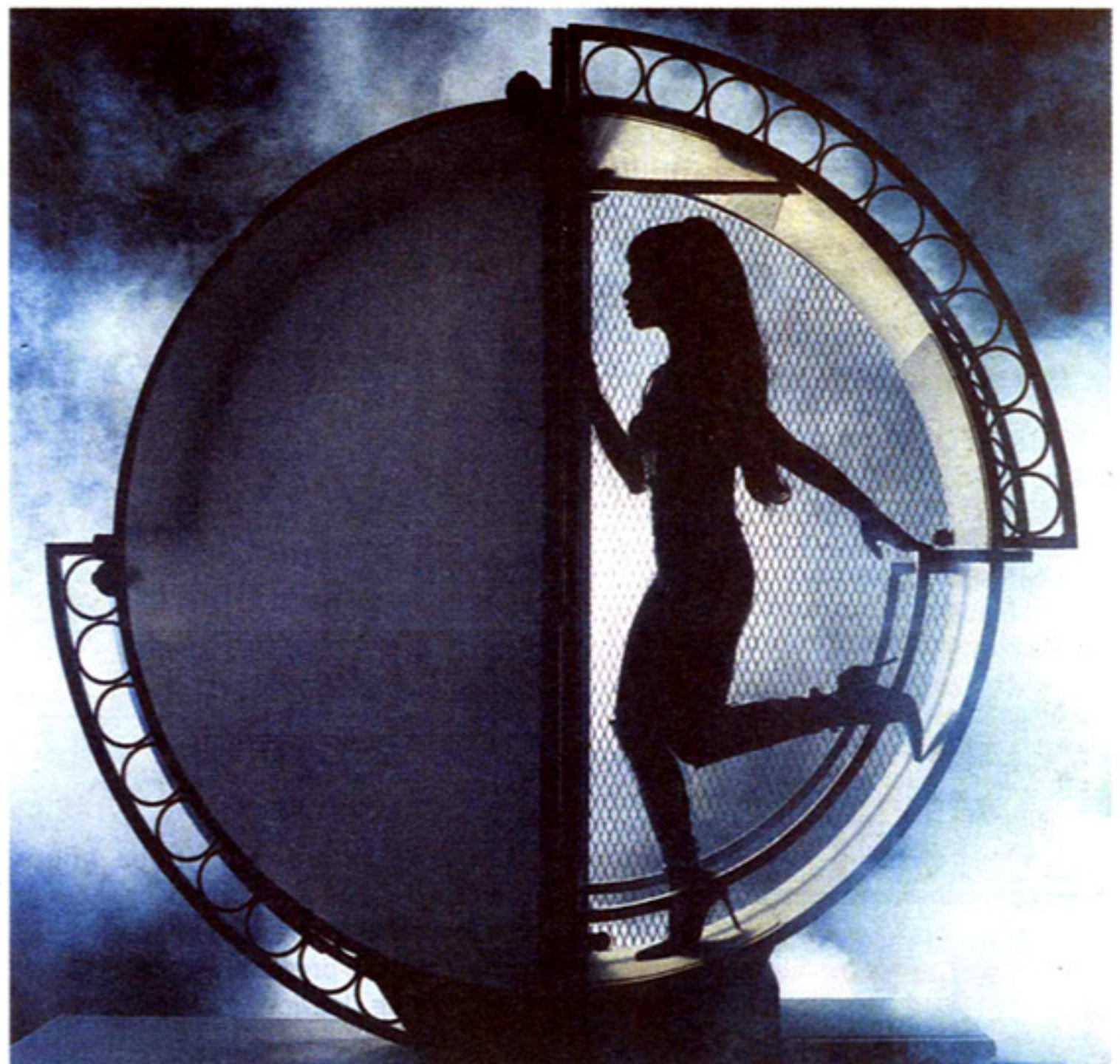
It's very much a family show, with the most diverse audience we've ever seen at the Esplanade (we were surrounded by aunts and uncles, an irritating guy trying to impress his date by explaining the tricks, poker-faced Caucasians on a date and a dad enthusiastically going "Wah" at every single illusion – presumably, he was hamming it up for his kid).

But what's great about *MagicBox* is that it doesn't present itself as an expensive children's show.

The jokes are self-referential, the illusions are impressive, and Lawrence even "reveals" to the audience how he turns a blue handkerchief into a yellow one (Clue: there are actually two hankies, *shhh* ...).

We shall not spoil the fun by revealing more, but there's one secret you should know: Magic is so much cooler live than on television.

MagicBox runs at the Esplanade Theatre until Sunday, 8pm, with 2.30pm matinees on weekends. Tickets from \$28 to \$128 at Sistic.



Priscilla Khong's Eclipse act – Magic is so much better live.

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THE STRAITS TIMES WEDNESDAY, JULY 16 2008

life!

Illusions of grandeur

Spectacular sets, live orchestral music and good old-fashioned magic make for a great show

> theatre

MAGICBOX
Esplanade Theatre, Sunday

Deepika Shetty

WHEN it stuck to magic, Magicbox, a two-hour-long show presented by Singaporean illusionists, Pastor Lawrence Khong and his daughter Priscilla, was truly magical.

When it morphed into a musical infused with magical tricks, it still retained its charm.

But when the show took on theatrical elements to narrate a tale of love and family values, it faltered just a little and became too preachy.

The young ones in the audience became restless when Pastor Khong broke into a monologue about raising children, for example.

But making up for dialogue that stretched a tad too long in parts were the eye-catching costumes, the spectacular sets and the live orchestral music composed by

Iskandar Ismail, who has also created orchestral arrangements for musicals such as Chang And Eng and Sing To The Dawn.

The show tells the story of the old MagicBox Theatre, a family-run enterprise that does magic shows the old-fashioned way.

The daughter packs her bags and joins another magic theatre, the sleek and swanky Metropolitan, a cutting-edge commercial enterprise.

Credit goes to American set designers Keaton S. Walker and Brian C. Bartholomew, who created two radically different sets to reflect the dramatically different worlds of MagicBox and Metropolitan.

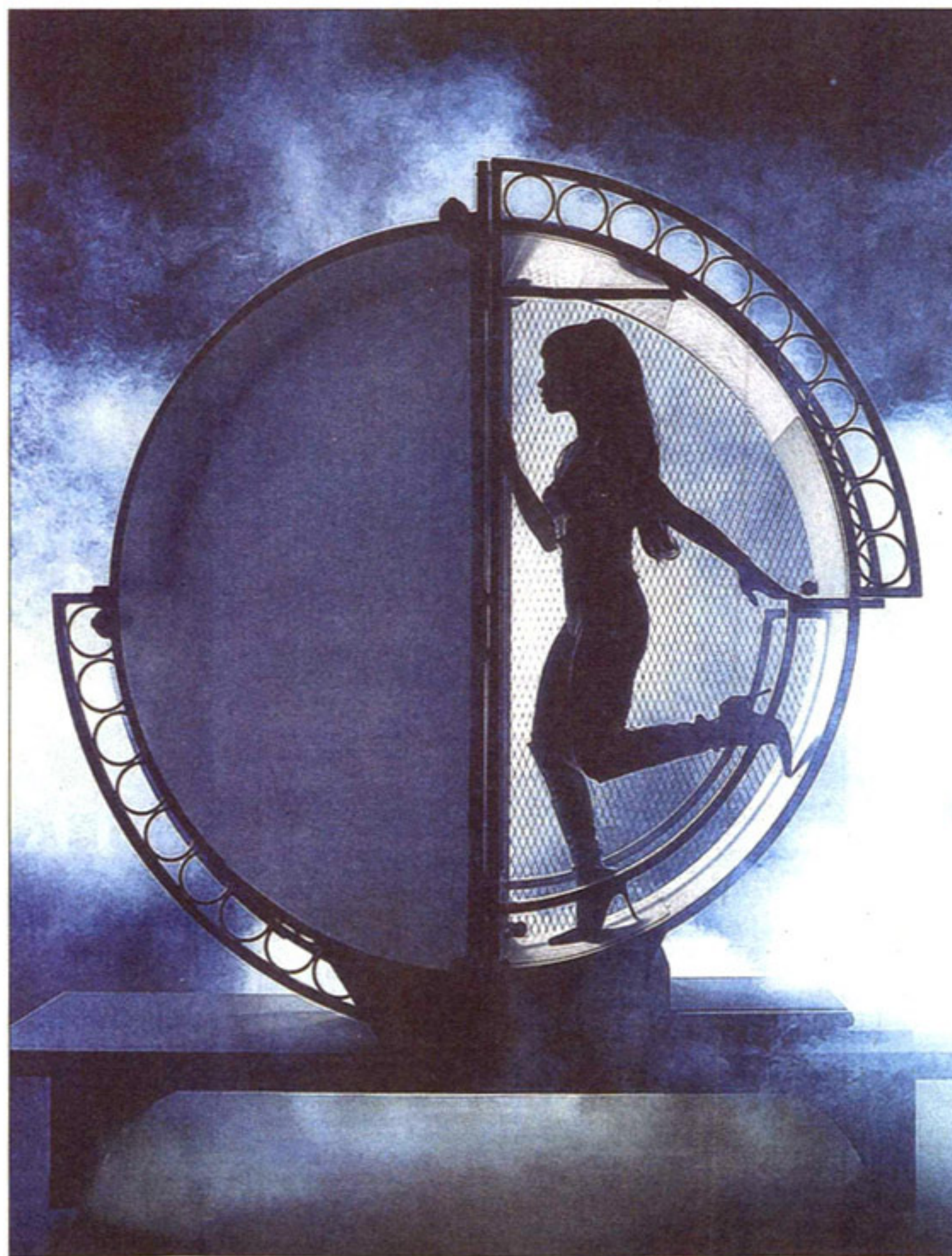
The transition between the two worlds was seamless. In an instant, the curtains went down and from the gold-lined trimmings of the MagicBox, one was transported to the modern steely look of the Metropolitan.

But the show was about magic, and the audience was treated to some old-fashioned tricks: Paper turned into snowflakes, and doves appeared out of thin air.

It also got to be a part of the show.

One young boy bravely stuck his hand out when the call went out for volunteers and gamely went on stage to be "sawed in half".

But the biggest gasps came with some of the more cutting-edge acts; such as Priscilla's Eclipse, which saw her appear and disappear in a ball. In Spinning Blades Of Death, she wove in and out of some sinis-



MAGIC TOUCH: Pastor Lawrence Khong and his daughter Priscilla drew gasps with their more cutting-edge acts such as Priscilla's Eclipse (left) and Spikes Of Doom (above).

ter looking and rapidly spinning fan blades.

Pastor Khong had the audience holding its breath with the finale - Spikes Of Doom.

It featured a menacing-looking contraption made of spikes. The trick called for him to be handcuffed and given a few seconds to escape before the spikes came down.

From the old to the new, MagicBox left me pining for a little magic in real life too.

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> MagicBox is on at the Esplanade Theatre until Sunday, 8pm, with 2.30pm matinees on weekends. Tickets cost \$28 to \$128 and are available from Sistic (www.sistic.com.sg or call 6348-5555).

PHOTOS: MAGICBOX