

Why Adrian Pang still reigns as Durian King

Until recently, I never went for an eye check-up on my own accord. But the old adage holds true : “Age creeps up” ... (*sheepish grin*) OK . You got me. I am really just sweet 16.

The truth is : it's the bad habits that creep up. I love reading in the bed, writing under a dim yellow light and watching television literally at arms length. So, rather naturally, my eyesight suffered. I was diagnosed with astigmatism and told to wear glasses. I took it all in my stride and chose stunning Oakley frames to go with my new state of less- than-perfect- vision. My New & Improved (vision cost me over \$350... and it didn't help it kept slipping down my tiny (read: flat) button nose. Which brings me to another old adage : Hindsight is always 20/20 (read :perfect) which translates into saying,, “ If only I knew...”

But life should never be about having “If only I knew” hindsight 20/20 or seeing things in perspective only after the fact. What life should be is insight 20/20 which entails a clarity of vision and sense of perspective at all times. Or better yet, foresight 20/20 that allows one to look beyond the parameters of the now and think ahead into the future. Is it beginning smell like entrepreneurial spirit? You bet it is.

I caught up with smooth talking durian-preneur, Adrian Pang and fell over twice laughing, bruising myself in the process. For all of you still recovering from your blurred vision inflicted by the sea of red from your Prelim battles, take heart. Adrian Pang is here to put things into perspective albeit with the devious dollop of durian-preneur humour! And p.s. : if you do see ****, it is NOT your eyes playing tricks on you!

L: Adrian Pang loves Durians. Fact or Fiction?

A: I used to love durians, but I have recently developed a bit of a phobia, mainly because people keep asking me about them... (writer's note : 8-x)

L: How did you manage to cross over to television after years of doing theatre?

A: That's a common misconception. Before I came back to Singapore, I worked as an actor in the UK for 8 years. Luckily my work there was pretty evenly divided between TV, film and theatre. During that period, I would occasionally return to Singapore to do a

¹ Visual acuity is usually measured with a Snellen chart. The Snellen chart displays letters of progressively smaller size. "Normal" vision is 20/20. This means that the test subject sees the same line of letters at 20 feet that a normal person sees at 20 feet. 20/40 vision means that the test subject see as 20 feet what a normal person sees at 40 feet. Another way of saying this is that a person with 20/40 vision has vision that is only half as good as normal - or, objects must be at half the normal distance for him to see them. A person with 20/20 vision is able to see letters 1/10 th as large as someone with 20/200 vision. However, 20/15 vision is better than 20/20. A person with 20/15 vision can see objects at 20 feet that a person with 20/20 vision can only see at 15 feet.

play. I guess then it is true to say that I had never done any television work here until I came back three years ago to join Mediaworks. My unofficial "deal" with my boss is that I am "allowed" one theatre production a year, as long as it doesn't clash with my TV commitments. (Writer's note : The rest of the comment got us at Choices rolling about laughing so hard it caused grievous harm so we decided not to print it to save you pain)

L: You are one of the few performers who are highly regarded both in the entertainment scene (i.e mass TV) and theatre scene - where do you see yourself - as ARTIST or ARTISTE? Or how do you make the distinction?

A: Frankly, I snigger at the words "artiste" and "artist" because they indulgently presume that "art" has anything to do with the work. What I do has less practical function than the guy who collects your garbage. Any "artistic value" attributed to my work is, at best, intangible and entirely subjective.

I am an actor. And please, that's not "act OR ... ". I am very lucky to be doing what I love as my means of making a living. As such, I have to treat my work with a measure of respect. But as with any other profession, it has its downsides. But while one should take his/her work seriously, one can't take oneself as an actor too seriously or one might risk disappearing up one's own a**.

L: Are there detractors that say that you are guilty of "selling out" your Artist roots now that you are an Artiste (read : house-hold name)?

A: My only "detractors" are theatre directors who can't get me to be in their productions where I am required to spin around on the spot 300 times screaming about my childhood nightmares. I want to, but I would probably throw up 3 portions of Hokkien Mee from the day's shoot on "Yummy King".

L: Tell us about your first love.... Theatre, Film or TV?

A: Within any given period, I need to work in all three mediums or I will go crazy. They say theatre is an art, film is a craft, and TV is furniture. But I wouldn't want to live in a world without furniture. Besides, TV is the only thing that is keeping the world's population in check. The fact that Singapore's birth rate is dropping over the last few years must be due to the quality TV we have been producing... ahem...

I also really love acting for film because I thrive on balancing the organic processes with the technical procedures that an actor has to apply. A big trailer also helps.

Theatre is more of an actor's medium. Nothing beats the adrenalin rush of being up on stage in front of hundreds of people and realising your fly is open.

But really, TV can be all of the above if it's a production I feel passionate about, but it can also be like a DIY root canal.

L: You are one of the few celebrities that managed to bridge the language barrier and now regarded as a bilingual performer. Share with us your thoughts on this.

A: If I am, as you say, a bridge, then I am likely to collapse any minute. I have had to perform all manner of dangerous stunts as part of my work, but acting in Mandarin is, by far, the most physically and mentally demanding stunt because I inevitably hurt myself. You should see my psychiatrist's bills. I have a clause in my contract that says that I will not be held liable for anything that may come flying out of my mouth when I speak Mandarin on TV.

L: Adrian Pang is a Neil Simon -kinda guy. Fact or Fiction?

A: I wish I had the wit and wise-cracking ability of any of Neil Simon's characters. But I certainly possess all his characters' neuroses. (Writer's note : Such humility.. coupled with self awareness...Truly commendable :-p)

L: Do you have a penchant for playing the underdog?

A: No one has approached me to play a romantic action hero hunk in a Roman gladiator epic...yet. My agent in London is obviously not doing her job...

L: You seriously buffed up for Forever Fever. When can we expect to see that again (not that you are not buff now :-P)

A: I only work out when a production I am doing requires that I look a bit more "presentable". The first time [I buffed up] was for a West End production of the musical "Hair" in London where I had to do a nude scene. So, I hit the gym everyday. And every night I prayed the air conditioning would not be too cold...

The next time was when I played the title role of "Hamlet". The director wanted the fight scene at the end to be done topless. So I had to work on the angst and the abs.

Then came Forever Fever. I didn't mind having to put in all that effort working out. What I did have an issue with was having to shave my chest for a 20-second topless scene. But let's face it, hairy chest on screen is a real turn-off...

At the moment, I have been losing weight for a new drama on Channel I called "Six Weeks" where I play a man dying of cancer. In any case, the only workout I get these days is carrying my two kids.

L: You acted in an indie film, Holiday by Silver Screen Award Winner Wee Li Lin. In it, you played a neurotic, overworked yuppie in serious need of a break. What we want to know is what is Adrian Pang's state of mind now and how does he cope?

A: I cope very badly, thank you very much. I think I am still at the tail end of my juvenile delinquency, not quite done with my pubescent adolescent angst and already having early onset of a mid-life crisis. But I'm lucky I'm an actor so I can channel it all into my work!

L : Tell us what might be your dream holiday.

² Neil Simon is an American playwright.

A: I'm actually pretty useless on holidays. I always seem to worry that I should be doing something "useful", or whether I forgot to switch off the air conditioning at home. But aside from that, I guess my dream holiday would be a month in Italy. With Angelina Jolie.

L: Tell us about Adrian Pang, the family man.

A: I live for my two boys, Zack and Xander. When I became a father, I suddenly discovered my purpose in this life and the reason for my existence. My family is my main motivation for everything I do. OK, sometimes it drives me crazy and I wonder how I got myself into this, but ultimately my family is my life.

L: So just how do you manage celebrity and family?

A: By laughing at the word "celebrity". I find that word faintly offensive and, frankly, absurd. Especially in a Singaporean context. As an overly-complicated person (as my darling wife refers to me), I am trying to lead as simple a life as possible. As long as I can remain passionate about and be challenged by my work, and balance that with quality time spent annoying my wife and growing together with my boys, my life is complete. (Writer's note : awwwww...())

L: What makes Adrian Pang happy?

A: A long, slow, comfortable, uninterrupted poo.

L: My sentiments exactly. Since we are "on" the issue of "the throne", define entrepreneurship.

A: A fancy word for a clever, innovative and opportunistic b**tard, able to re-invent in order to survive.

L: Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur?

A: Hey, I'm speaking Mandarin on TV, right? (Writer's note : Gotcha!)

L: What advice would you give to a young Singaporean who aspires to be an actor?

A: Get a good education because you need a good back-up plan. Brush up on your second language as it will creep up on you and bite you in the a**; and finally, keep your nostril-hairs well trimmed for those close-ups.

L: What is a motto you live by?

A: Seize the day, or if you can't seize it, at least give it a good fondle.

L: If you had just one more day to live, how would that day be lived?

A: As a porn star.

L: And finally, if you were to meet God, what would you say?

A: Your work has been a bit of a hit-and-miss, but I'm still your number one fan. Can I have your autograph?

And that ladies and gentlemen is why Adrian Pang reigns as Durian King...for all that pricks is not just thorns but a sharp, acute sense of wit, humour and a wicked way of always putting things into vision 20/20.