



“Travel with Mum” (和媽媽中國漫遊)

Based on a True Story

Travel with Mum is a touching tale of Wang Yi-Min, an old farmer born in 1932 who spent all his life with his mother in Liaoning, China. Wang Yi-Min's mother was a Manchurian, a sanguine woman who never complained about destiny, facing it with optimism instead, Wang's mother was healthy. Even at 99, she was clear-headed with near-perfect sight and hearing, and was very much intrigued by the world outside.

When Wang Yi-Min's wife passed away, and with his children having all grown up with families of their own, he started to contemplate on the idea of travelling out of his village.

He asked his mother if she wished to travel with him. He laid a map out and she drew a line on it, saying that she would like to visit Tibet, no matter how far away it is, declaring, "As long as we keep walking, we will reach our destination".

To fulfill his mother's wish, Wang Yi-Min remodeled a tricycle, gathered his entire savings of 30,000 yuan and another 10,000 that his children contributed, and embarked on a journey to travel through China with his mother. He had no idea what would happen, certain only of the start and end point of their journey.

At times, they stayed in places that charged a mere five yuan. At other times, they had to spend nights on the streets. They faced immense challenges, but also experienced joy when they overcame obstacles. His mother's words of encouragement fueled Wang Yi-Min's determination to press on and keep going. World of Wang Yi-Min and his mother's journey started to spread across the country, and the mother-

and-son duo became the focus of every news media outlet. Riding his tricycle, spurred on by his confidences, determination and filial piety to his mother, he rode 30 kilometers every day, covering a total distance of over 30,000 kilometers by the time his three-year journey was completed.

SYNOPSIS

"I don't know what it means to be filial, but I know what being unfilial is-it's as simple as that."

A 74-year-old man builds a tricycle and brings his 99-year-old mother on a journey across China. Starting at the northernmost part of China in Heilongjiang, they set off for Tibet on a 900-day journey that spans over 30,000 kilometers.

His mother, who has toiled her entire life for her family, has never travelled out of her rural hometown. The man is determined to fulfil his mum's wish to see the beauty of the world while she still can. Together, they travel on a rickety tricycle, pedaling through rural villages and fast-paced cities, valleys and over hills. As they ride on, he discovers that staying by his mum's side is the greatest reward he can give to both of them.

Drama in Cantonese with Mask and Sand

Stage Requirement:

Minimum size of stage: 10 meters (Wide) x 6 meters (depth)

Touring Staff: 14

These technical requirements are likely to be modified in the light of the provision theater.

Production Team

Director/ Cast/ Lyricist ---- Chan Man Kong Rensen

Producer/ Cast --- Ngai Yee Shan Jo

Cast --- 4 actors

Live Band --- Percussioni, Guitarist, Harmonica

Touring history:

23-26 May 2013 -- Studio Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Hong Kong (Premiere, 6 Performances)

12 Apr 2014 -- Studio Theatre, Zhongshan Cultural and Arts Centre, Zhongshan Drama Festival,
China (1 Performance)

May 2014 --- Studio Theatre, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Hong Kong (6 Performances)

Nov 2014 --- Shousan Theatre, Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong (4 Performances)

28 Feb – 1 Mar 2015 --- Theatre Studio, The Esplanade: Chinese Festival of Arts 2015,
Singapore (4 Performances)

26 Sept – 15 Nov 2015--- 20 touring performances in Hong Kong (Short version)

22 Oct 2015 --- Shanghai Finance University Studio Theatre, 17th Shanghai International Festival,
China (1 Performance)

23 June - 26 June 2016 --- Theatre Studio, The Esplanade: Chinese Festival of Arts 2016,
Singapore (6 Performances)

29 July - 31 July 2016 --- Damansara Performing Arts Centre (DPAC) Arts Festival, Malaysia (5 Performances)

15-16 Sep 2017 --- Gateway Theatre, Canada Pacific Festival, Canada (2 Performances)

13-15 Oct 2017 --- Taipei National University of the Arts Theatre, Kuandu Arts Festival,
Taipei (3 Performances)

8-9 Dec 2017 --- Yuen Long Theatre, Yuen Long Arts Festival 2017, Hong Kong (2 Performances)

20-23 Sept 2018 --- Damansara Performing Arts Centre (DPAC) Arts Festival, Malaysia (5 Performances)

Media Review:

“Travel With Mum deals so tenderly and sweetly with mortality that you forgive the preachy detours it takes along the way, which include less effective attempts to introduce other characters struggling with “family duty”, who all eventually learn from this duo’s adventures and their deep love and affection for each other.” The Starits Times .



Palpable chemistry between Jo Ngai and Rensen Chan, who play mother and son.
PHOTO: JACK YAM

媽媽！你听得嗎？
Mum! Can you hear me? Mum!



Grand tour with 99-year-old mum

Review Theatre

TRAVEL WITH MUM

The Nonsensemakers (Hong Kong)
Esplanade Theatre Studio
Last Saturday

Corrie Tan

When your feisty 99-year-old mother says she wants to go on a trip around China – do you go?

If you are loyal farmer Wang Yi Min, the answer is yes and you build a tricycle with a special back seat to take her around in, from your home in Tabe on the northernmost tip of the country to the far west of Tibet, a distance of more than 30,000km. Even if you are 74 years old, as he is.

This sweet, if moralistic, production about a deeply filial man is based on a true story, brought to loving life by Hong Kong's The Nonsensemakers.

The journey is not easy. Travelling is physically challenging, they encounter detractors and even fall ill. But, like a true modern-day parable, they soldier on.

The husband-and-wife founders of the theatre company, Jo Ngai and Rensen Chan, play mother and son respectively

with the clever use of detailed masks, some astonishingly well-studied mannerisms as well as a few choice props.

Set against the wonderful use of folksy live music, with percussion (Chung Sai Ying), guitar (Alfee Heun) and harmonica (Lee Chun Lok), this intimate show is irresistibly heartwarming.

Ngai is captivating as the elderly granny who turns 100 halfway through their journey, apple-cheeked and wrinkled, mouth ajar in a perpetual toothy grin, her back hunched but her spirit ramrod straight.

The stage lights up whenever she enters it, whether gently chastising her son or stubbornly insisting that she did not, in fact, wet herself. She is full of child-like wonderment and curiosity at the world, the wrinkled little dynamo who keeps her son pedalling.

Travel With Mum deals so tenderly and sweetly with mortality that you forgive the preachy detours it takes along the way, which include less effective attempts to introduce other characters struggling with "family duty", who all eventually learn from this duo's adventures and their deep love and affection for each other.

It is also to the show's credit that they

do not go easy on the mother and son after they become a media sensation, and the play grapples with this sudden, blinding limelight and fleshes out the convictions and principles they stand by, and when they are tempted to compromise.

The ensemble cast does capably, but it is the husband-and-wife duo of Chan and Ngai who steal the show. Their chemistry is so palpable, so stirring, that you feel for their aching bones; your heart lightens when they make it through a particularly arduous leg or when they meet a good samaritan or kind soul.

Even though death hovers constantly overhead, Ngai's infectiously optimistic granny makes no bones about it.

She declares that this is possibly her last trip, she keeps sampling the sea water because she cannot believe that it is salty and she steals the show during their first TV interview when her son is too shy to speak.

Swirling dust is a key image in many scenes in the production – a reminder, perhaps, that we all become ashes in the end and go back into the same earth we have pedalled and walked upon.

Perhaps that is the same pull that this elderly granny felt, to connect with cities and landscapes she had never visited, to touch the sand and look up at the stars.



Theatre couple Rensen Chan (below left) and Jo Ngai (below right), who play an elderly man and his aged mother in *Travel With Mum* (above), wear masks to show their age. PHOTOS: ESPLANADE

Acting better with a mask on

masks have long fallen out of fashion in theatre, but they are prominently featured in The Nonsensemakers' production, *Travel With Mum*.

The Hong Kong troupe's artistic director Rensen Chan, 48, tells *Life!* that there are many advantages to their use.

He points out: "When you are sitting in an auditorium, you can't see facial expressions very clearly. But with a mask, even if you sit in the last row, you can feel the energy of the actor when he uses his body to express his feelings."

Travel With Mum, which will be staged in Cantonese with English and Chinese surtitles, is inspired by the real-life story of a 74-year-old man who builds a tricycle and takes his 99-year-old mother on a journey across China.

Jo Ngai, 46, the group's executive director, plays the mother. Chan, who is her husband, plays the son.

She notes: "Because we have to act as very old characters, we would need a lot of special effects in order to be very convincing." Wearing a mask can accomplish that with very little fuss, she says.

Chan adds that it is also convenient for a "quick change" as the four other actresses in the play need to switch between characters smoothly in a short time backstage.

The interview unfurls in a mix of English, Cantonese and Mandarin and is punctuated with bursts of laughter from the lively pair.

The Nonsensemakers was set up in 1990 and for the first 10 years or so, it



Book it

TRAVEL WITH MUM

Where: Esplanade Theatre Studio
When: Feb 28, 8pm; March 1, 2.30 & 8pm
Admission: \$35 from Sistic (call 6348-5555 or go to www.sistic.com.sg)

put on comedies and farces that were playful and sarcastic. But in recent years, the group has become more reflective.

As Chan puts it: "We want to grow up with our audience, we don't want to stay at the same level without changing."

Their recent works include *The Notebook* and *The Proof*, adaptations of acclaimed Hungarian writer Agota Kristof's books of the same name.

Ngai says: "We love to read books and whenever one touches us, we would have this urge to put it up on stage. There are a lot of good themes and stories in these books and the world is much bigger than we think."

Chan sees theatre as a means of educating people as well.

"We should walk a step ahead of audiences and lead them to think about things that need to be thought about at the moment, be it values such as filial piety or problems in society.

"The relationship with our audience is

one in which we spur each other on. We give them something to think about and they give us feedback to mull over."

Given that Chan and Ngai are partners in both work and life, one wonders what are the pluses and minuses of such a tightly knit relationship.

Ngai warns jokingly, "Be careful" and Chan shoots back with a "No comment".

He then says: "Working together with my wife makes it easy to communicate because we know each other well. And if a play calls for us to behave in an intimate manner, there is nothing embarrassing for us."

Ngai adds that it is good that life and work are inseparable in their relationship.

"Our life goes on at the same pace. We work on the same project, our working and leisure times are the same. Even when we're not working, we'll go watch a performance together and discuss it."

Chan quips: "Also, we don't need to apply for annual leave."

Boon Chan