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## ST Life Theatre Awards: The Fourth Trimester wins Production Of The Year



Checkpoint Theatre's *The Fourth Trimester* is a portrait of three couples and a single woman. PHOTO: CRISPIAN CHAN



**Clement Yong**

UPDATED 1 HOUR AGO ▾

SINGAPORE – Checkpoint Theatre's three-hour portrait of parenthood and marriage, [The Fourth Trimester](#), has clinched Production Of The Year at The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards 2023 – the first time the company, which focuses on home-grown slice-of-life plays, has won in the top category.

Tracing the lives of three couples and a single woman in their 30s, it beat five other nominees, including Teater Ekamatra's *Bangsawan Gemala Malam*, adapted from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Singapore Repertory Theatre's (SRT) mental health play *The Almighty Sometimes*.

The Fourth Trimester's playwright Faith Ng has also been awarded Best Original Script for her work full of minutely observed details, questioning the invisible labour of wives and the sacrifices women are forced to make.



Playwright Faith Ng's *The Fourth Trimester* was a big winner at The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards, winning Best Original Script and Production Of The Year. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

It is also Ng's first win in the category, after two prior nominations in 2011 for *wo(men)* and in 2014 for *For Better Or For Worse*.

The ST Life Theatre Awards was inaugurated in 2000 by ST to recognise achievements in the theatre scene. This year is its 21st edition.

The judges are Life's senior culture correspondent Ong Sor Fern, former assistant Life editor Olivia Ho, former arts correspondent Toh Wen Li, and current Life writers Benson Ang, Clement Yong, Charmaine Lim and Shawn Hoo.

Director of *The Fourth Trimester* Claire Wong said: "I knew that *The Fourth Trimester* would be an important and impactful play from the very beginning, when Faith first proposed the idea.

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“The realities of parenthood in Singapore being made visible on stage with performances that were nuanced, real and honest resonated deeply with our audiences.”

The script took more than two years to craft and every detail of the set was considered to anchor the world of the play, Wong said.

This manifested in a cluttered space for the three-room Housing Board flat of new parents Sam and Aaron, with clothes and baby paraphernalia strewn over every available surface.

Meanwhile, a neighbouring couple’s flat is white and bare, reflecting the state of their limbo as they try for a baby.

However, the biggest winner of this year’s edition of the ST Life Theatre Awards, was still Teater Ekamatra – its *Bangsawan Gemala Malam* won in three of the five categories it was nominated in.



*Bangsawan Gemala Malam* is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. PHOTO: CRISPIAN CHAN/TUCKYS PHOTOGRAPHY

It tied for the most nominations with Wild Rice’s Moliere update *Tartuffe: The Impostor*, which did not win.

*Bangsawan Gemala Malam*, a Singapore International Festival of Arts offering, recontextualised *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* into a Nusantara setting, substituting English fairies with the supernatural *orang bunian* of Malay folklore.

The creative blend of Shakespeare with Malay operatic theatre won the company Best Director for Aidli “Alin” Mosbit, Best Actor for Rizman Putra and Best Costume for Max Tan.



Max Tan took home the Best Costume prize for his work on *Bangsawan Gemala Malam*. PHOTO: MAX TAN

Managing director of Teater Ekamatra Shaza Ishak said the wins are “an incredible milestone”, not only for Teater Ekamatra but also for ethnic minority theatre.

Teater Ekamatra is one of the longest-running ethnic minority theatre companies in Singapore.

In 2022, it had to move out of its home in Aliwal Arts Centre after being there for almost a decade, but Shaza said more than 5,000 people attended Teater Ekamatra’s productions and programmes – the highest number in the company’s 34-year history.





Bangsawan Gemala Malam's Aidli "Alin" Mosbit took home the ST Life Theatre Award for Best Director. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

“This strengthens our resolve to continue pushing boundaries of social discourse by staging works which are relevant to ethnic minorities here, paired with our trademark sense of humour,” she added.

“In the last year, we rented spaces from Goodman Arts Centre and Stamford Arts Centre to conduct rehearsals and put up three productions. Not having our own space will not stop us from making an impact on the Singapore arts scene.”

Rizman, who is a first-time nominee, snagged Best Actor despite his reputation for playing kooky sidekicks rather than leading men.

He beat out Oliver Chong in The Finger Players' Every Brilliant Thing, Hafidz Rahman in Teater Ekamatra's Make Hantus Great Again and Neo Hai Bin in Wei Collective & Collaborators' Being.

Rizman said his roles in Bangsawan Gemala Malam, from the pompous Egeus to blue-collar worker Rabu, were some of the most memorable he has played.



Best Actor winner Rizman Putra portrayed multiple characters in *Bangsawan Gemala Malam*. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

“It is heartening to see that others have found levity and connection with the misfit and oddball characters I identify with and enjoy playing,” he said.

The other big story to come out of this year’s ST Life Theatre Awards is the Best Actress win for newcomer Arielle Jasmine Van Zuijlen, who played Anna in SRT’s *The Almighty Sometimes*.



Arielle Jasmine Van Zuijlen won Best Actress for her work in *The Almighty Sometimes*. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

It is her first major role – a demanding one that required her to whimper and shout, by turns vulnerable and assertive as a young person with bipolar disorder.

She pipped veteran stars Mina Kaye in Pangdemonium’s *End Of The Rainbow*, Catherine Grace Gardner in Pangdemonium’s *The Glass Menagerie* and Goh Guat Kian in Nine Years Theatre’s *Between You And Me*.

Van Zuijlen said: “I found out about my nomination the day (local actor) Timothy Nga died, so I was very emotionally confused. After settling with it, I am grateful for the win.

“The play is very well-written and mental health is a prominent issue. Many elements came together to make it an exciting watch. I’ve now got more calls asking me to audition so I count myself very lucky.”

The *Almighty Sometimes* also gave Eucien Chia a win for Best Set. He had two nominations for Best Set this year, the other being his work for Pangdemonium’s *The Glass Menagerie*.

Best Lighting went to Alberta Wileo for his work on Gateway Arts’ *I And You* and Best Sound to Cyril Barbessol for SRT’s *C-o-n-t-a-c-t*. In the latter, audience members were given wireless headphones to walk around the Civic District as office workers ended their work day.





Best Lighting went to Alberta Wileo for his work on Gateway Arts' I And You. PHOTO: ALBERTA WILEO

Best Ensemble was won by the cast of Wild Rice's Pulau Ujong comprising Al-Matin Yatim, Ryan Ang, Koh Wan Ching, Krish Natarajan and Siti Khalijah Zainal.

In the play written by playwright Alfian Sa'at, they delivered a series of mini-lectures on environmental issues, sometimes while standing in ankle-deep water.





Pulau Ujong succeeds in conveying the diversity of views about tackling climate change and the practical difficulties of solving this crisis. PHOTO: WILD RICE

Director Edith Podesta said: “I was truly blessed to work with such an accomplished and intelligent group of actors.

“I’m in awe of how gracefully they handled the daunting subject matter, their multiple characters and the glacial water I made them wade through nightly. I hope one day they can forgive me for what I can only describe as a theatrical 5BX of mind, body and high spirits.”

List of winners for The Straits Times Life Theatre Awards 2023

**Production Of The Year:** The Fourth Trimester (Checkpoint Theatre)

**Best Actress:** Arielle Jasmine Van Zuijlen – The Almighty Sometimes (Singapore Repertory Theatre)

**Best Actor:** Rizman Putra – Bangsawan Gemala Malam (Teater Ekamatra)

**Best Director:** Aidli “Alin” Mosbit – Bangsawan Gemala Malam (Teater Ekamatra)

**Best Costume:** Max Tan – Bangsawan Gemala Malam (Teater Ekamatra)

**Best Lighting:** Alberta Wileo – I And You (Gateway Arts)

**Best Sound:** Cyril Barbessol – C-o-n-t-a-c-t (Singapore Repertory Theatre)

**Best Set:** Eucien Chia – The Almighty Sometimes (Singapore Repertory Theatre)

**Best Ensemble:** Pulau Ujong (Wild Rice)

**Best Original Script:** Faith Ng – The Fourth Trimester (Checkpoint Theatre)

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