



ANDSOFORTH



ANDSOFORTH  
JUNIOR

ANDSOFORTH  
ACADEMY

TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 2019 | THE STRAITS TIMES |

arts | life | D3

# Meet 22 characters in 22 rooms

Classic stories come alive in the interactive four-hour production *22 Stories*, where actors entertain the audience in themed rooms



## Desiree Loh

If you have ever wanted to interact with storybook characters such as Snow White or Ali Baba, you now have the chance to meet not one, not two, but 22 characters at *22 Stories*, a multi-room theatrical production by theatre company Andsoforth Junior, which specialises in family productions.

The characters will be stationed in 22 themed rooms spread out across four sections – Grimmsneyland, Storyland, Land Of Nights and Wonderland – that are based on classic stories.

For instance, Land of Nights takes inspiration from the Middle Eastern collection of folk tales *One Thousand And One Nights*, while Storyland is a fresh take on nursery stories such as *The Ugly Duckling*. Each room will house a character who will entertain audiences with original tales that last about six minutes.

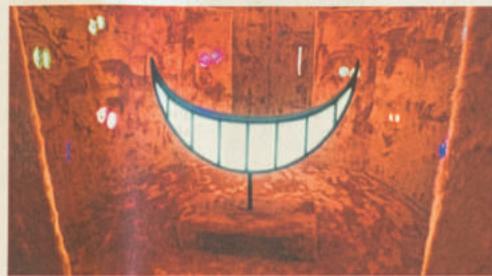
Creative director of Andsoforth

Junior Stuart Wee, 32, says the concept was inspired by multi-room experiences he encountered with his wife Emily Png, 29, Andsoforth Junior's events manager, during their trips overseas. The couple are also the co-founders of the company.

"We thought Singapore needed something like that. But instead of just going into these rooms to take pictures, we wanted to bring a theatrical element to it," says Mr Wee. "We put in actors to bring the rooms to life. It's more than just about photos because there's a story to tell."

It was also a priority to make the show interactive rather than have the actors deliver monologues, adds Mr Wee, who wrote the scripts. "Imagine meeting your favourite character... only to have them dumbfounded when you ask them a question about their past or what their favourite food is. That's how boring monologues are to us."

Although there are 22 different rooms, each four-hour session will



feature only 12 characters at a time. The show is divided into "even emerald" and "odd orange" weeks, with some characters such as Cinderella and Mariah Mackerel Mermaid – Andsoforth Junior's take on *The Little Mermaid* – making an appearance only on alternate weeks during the production's two-month run.

Ms Png says this will help make

the experience different for visitors who want to return for a second round. "Visitors may not be able to experience the entire production fully in four hours, so if they really like the concept, they can come back and see the other characters."

Shutterbugs can also look forward to aesthetically pleasing rooms where they can take photographs. The elaborate set cost

## BOOK IT / 22 STORIES

WHERE: PeopleUp @ Pandan, 200 Pandan Gardens  
WHEN: May 1 to June 30, 10am to 2pm or 5.30 to 9.30pm  
ADMISSION: \$38 (standard), family pack for four persons (\$140)  
INFO: 22stories.com.sg

At multi-room theatrical production *22 Stories*, you can meet characters such as Mariah Mackerel Mermaid (above) and take photographs in rooms like the Cheshire Cat Room (left).  
PHOTOS: ANDSOFORTH JUNIOR

around \$1 million and took four months to construct.

Mr Wee says: "We're in this generation where you're glued to your phone and you need Instagram. What better place to have everything? Here, you have theatre, entertainment, Instagram-worthy backdrops and characters to meet."

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## THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY BOOM

The power of experience over material goods

# THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY BOOM

As people prioritise experience over material goods, brands tapping into this trend are seeing results

▶ HELMI YUSOF



WITH THE TRIPLE rise of smartphones, e-commerce and streaming services, fewer people want to leave their homes for shopping and entertainment – unless what's out there promises a truly engaging and immersive experience that can compete with online diversions. Moreover, the experience must look great in photos because #millennial #genz #instagood #photooftheday #FOMO #YOLO.

For these reasons, some enterprises are choosing to prioritise experience over purchases. The “perfect experience” is one that is so absorbing, it makes you put away your phone for at least 10 minutes, before you take it out for that all-important shareable photo as #proofwasthere – followed by your wallet.

Like most trends, the boom in the experience economy was predicted years ago. In 1998, B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore wrote an essay in *The Harvard Business Review* about the next phase of the global economy. After the agrarian, industrial and service economies, the experience economy was predicted to rise in response to the consumer's demand to be pampered and entertained in a participatory way.

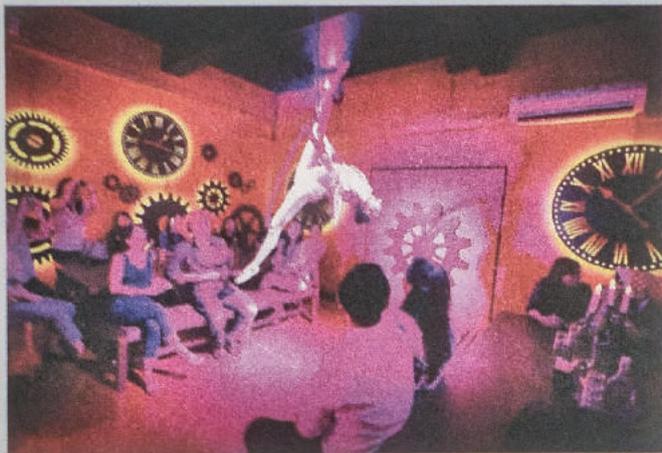
The experience economy is distinct from the service economy in that the service economy focuses on providing services in a smooth and

pleasant way; while the experience economy offers an exciting and memorable experience packaged with a product purchase.

Amazon, for instance, moved from just selling books (service economy) to offering clothing, groceries and now exclusive entertainment content (experience economy). Apple's iPhone not only lets you make calls, but also listen to music, play *Pokemon Go* and record life's special moments through videos and photographs.

Pine and Gilmore predicted the shopping mall needed to become more like an amusement park in order to survive. When they published a full book on the subject in 1999, it was titled *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theater & Every Business a Stage* – suggesting there's no business without showbusiness. Today, every shopping mall is attempting to go that way by hosting pop-ups, festivals and brand activations. Top airports are offering massage machines, swimming pools and cinemas. Restaurants are serving dinners amid roving performers enacting a tale.

We explore the strategies of four companies riding the wave of the experience economy, from the small independent dinner-theatre outfit (Andsoforth) to the world's largest manufacturer of cycling components (Shimano).



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**“We run a tight operation: Three months to set up the space, two to three months of running the production, one month to tear down the set, repeat... We want to keep innovating and evolving, so our guests don't get bored.”**

—  
STUART WEE



(1) Andsoforth founders Stuart Wee and Emily Png. (2) Scenes from Andsoforth's previous dinner-theatre productions.



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## ANDSOFORTH

INDEPENDENT DINNER-THEATRE COMPANY

During a trip to London in 2013, couple Stuart Wee and Emily Png attended a supper club event by an immersive dining company. Struck by how entertaining it was, and how Singapore lacked something similar, they returned to Singapore with heady plans to quit their jobs and start their own dinner-theatre company.

Today their company Andsoforth has become a leading dinner-theatre company. It has staged 40 experiential events in six years, ranging from public plays to corporate parties. Among them are Alice In Wonderland-themed dinners, an immersive adaptation of the classic ballet *The Nutcracker*, and a multi-sensory imagining of Goh Poh Seng's classic 1972 novel *If We Dream Too Long*.

Each event combines a multi-course dinner, a theatre production, strikingly-costumed actors ready to interact with you, and a colourful Instagrammable setting in a mystery location. Their newest production is titled *Valhalla And The Chambers Of Asgard* and centres on Norse mythology. Actors play Viking characters such as Odin, Freyja, Loki and Thor in the depiction of the great war known as Ragnarok.

The five-course meal will be prepared once again by Chef Jason Ang, formerly from Pollen Singapore. And tickets priced between S\$108 and \$128, depending on whether it's a weekday or weekend, include an alcoholic drink each.

Mr Wee says: "I've always wanted to do a Viking-themed production. So when the spirits company Edrington approached us

to collaborate on the launch of their latest Highland Park whisky *Valfather*, I jumped at the chance to create *Asgard*, which is the home of the Norse Gods, and have actors dress in Viking costumes."

Mr Wee says that typical productions cost between S\$300,000 and S\$500,000 to mount: "We run a tight operation: Three months to set up the space, two to three months of running the production, one month to tear down the set, and then repeat the process all over again... We want to keep innovating and evolving, so our guests don't get bored."

Each production attracts between 2,000 and 3,000 guests, a portion of which are corporate bookings. A large part of the appeal is the way each is designed to get as many diners to participate in the unfolding of the story as possible.

The other selling point, insists Mr Wee, is the food: "We are Singaporeans. We love food. No matter what kind of immersive experience we are offering, our food has to be well thought out, with flavours interesting enough to excite our palate and portions big enough so our guests don't leave hungry. Once the food is settled, guests will automatically start to pay attention to the performances, set design, lighting, soundscape, music, and whatever we have to offer.

"Food comes first, everything else is secondary."

*Valhalla And The Chambers Of Asgard* runs from Nov 21 to Dec 28. Tickets from [andsoforth.com.sg](http://andsoforth.com.sg)

## IMMERSIVE THEATRE

Multi-sensory experiences are all the rage now as arts groups and event organisers build in elements of drama, food, fantasy and technology into pop-up events. BT Lifestyle checks out how four creative outfits are upping their game with theatrical affairs

### A taste of the Matrix

By Tan Teck Heng  
titanesph.com.sg

LAST week, an Emerald Hill shop-house was the unlikely venue for a film premiere. There were just a small group of people, some food and wine, and they had to "act" in the movie themselves.

Such was the setting for the Danish virtual reality (VR) film installation, *The Doghouse* (Skammekrog), seen in Asia for the first time. Produced by Danish creative agency Makropol, the installation blends VR technology and film with site-specific theatre.

Guests put on a headset, which allows them to witness the story of a tense family dinner, all through the eyes of one out of five characters.

The installation was one in a series of intimate arts events organised by Pala—an indie arts platform which curates unique events revolving around arts, fashion and literature.

*The Doghouse*, for example, was a partnership with MasterCard under its "Priceless Cities" programme, offering special one-off events to selected credit card members.

Co-founders Olga Isleris (director of Twice events management) and Natalya Pavchinskaya (founder of Blatant resort The Sanchara) modelled Pala after the European salons of the early 1900s—think Gertrude Stein's salon

on the Left Bank of Paris—and see it as a platform for intellectual and cultural exchanges.

Pala is housed in The Sanchara (a 45-minute ferry ride away from Singapore), and most of its programming is tailored for resort guests.

But it sometimes organises events like *The Doghouse* in Singapore. Future events may be open to the public, or select groups such as art and fashion students.

"We have seen a huge demand for the physical installation that *The Doghouse* is," says Pala's producer Mark Isleris (Ms Isleris's son) of the trend towards innovative and theatrical entertainment. "I like the way *The Doghouse* resembles a travelling theatre, except you don't have the expenses for set design and actors."

During the screening, groups of five guests would "role-play" as one of five characters. As the story goes, Maya is visiting her boyfriend's family for the first time. The first-person perspective means that no single participant has access to the full story. The result is a simmering plot of family secrets and tensions that plays out over 20 minutes.

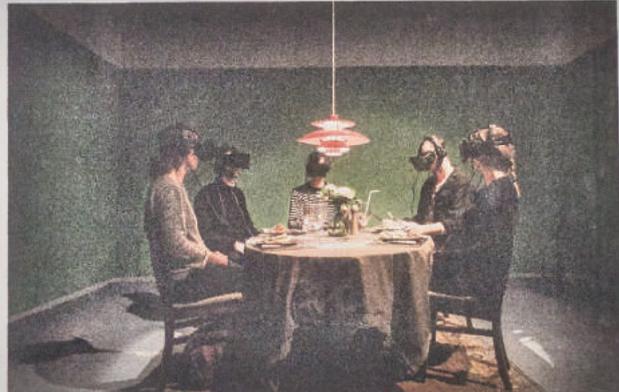
A round-table discussion following the film's conclusion allowed the audience to put the pieces together, revealing more layers to the family dynamics. Director Johan Knattrup



(Clockwise from above left) Indie arts platform Pala's producer Mark Isleris brought *The Doghouse* to Singapore for a one-night only showcase. The event last Sunday saw the Asian premiere of the virtual reality film installation by Danish director Johan Knattrup Jensen and producer Mads Dambo, of creative agency Makropol. Guests put on VR headsets and experienced the story from a first-person perspective.

Jensen explains that as the story unravels, participants tend to develop deeper empathy for other characters as they move beyond their own limited point of view.

For Mr Isleris, Makropol's work is a groundbreaking use of VR which goes beyond the usual hype surrounding



the technology, making it an ideal talking point for Pala's guests.

"There's currently a lot of buzz around VR in experiential technology, business, branding and mobile, but Makropol was doing such innovative things with VR from a narrative perspective that felt no one else was do-

ing," he explains.

Mr Isleris attributes his passion for the arts to his upbringing. "My mother raised me with the customary artistic imperatives of a Russian household: trips to the museum and the concert hall, a reading list mostly of 19th century classics, and a high-

ly-combative hour of piano practice a day," he recalls fondly.

"I think all these factors have led me home to the vision behind Pala—to create a melting pot of interesting people and ideas going on our small yet innovative island."

For future updates on Pala, please refer to <http://pala.live/>

### Try and escape from Haw Par Villa

By Rachel Loi  
rachel@esph.com.sg

ESCAPE rooms, as we know them, typically feature groups of people locked in a room acting out a scenario which requires them to solve puzzles to free themselves. In a move to bring this fantasy game into a larger arena, part of Haw Par Villa will be turned into a massive "stage" featuring its famously scary statues as props and actors playing Chinese folklore characters.

Titled *Journey to the End and Back*, the pop-up event takes place over the next two Saturdays and is a collaboration between escape game company Lockdown Singapore, and Journey's Pit Ltd—a local tour operator which manages and operates Haw Par Villa. It is a large-scale version of the conventional escape game, and a maximum of 60 players (in teams of four and six) will take part in each of the eight sessions spread across the two days.

Lockdown Singapore's founder Jonathan Ye, 32, explains that this version of the game goes big on the storytelling aspect as it centres around "the Chinese folklore that involves the 10 courts of hell."

"It talks about how, when people pass away, their soul goes through the different courts to assess their sins in their lives before they go for reincarnation," he says.

The premise of the game is that players are on a school excursion to Haw Par Villa, when one of their friends suddenly faints. It turns out that he was mistakenly scheduled for early reincarnation (and death). So after a "final master" opens players' eyes to see the spirit world, they have to explore the park and solve puzzles within the hour to save their friend's life.

Says Mr Ye: "When you play in one of our Lockdown rooms, everything is built by us and designed specifically for the game. But at Haw Par Villa, the whole area is our game zone. The sculptures there have years of herit-



To bring escape rooms (below) into a larger arena, Lockdown will turn part of Haw Par Villa (above) into a massive "stage", with its famously scary statues as props and actors playing Chinese folklore characters.



Mr Ye says.

In fact, if the upcoming event proves a success, there's a chance that more such games will take place at Haw Par Villa, as various sections of the theme park reopen after ongoing renovations.

Says Mr Ye: "This game is taking place in only about a quarter of the entire park, and STB (Singapore Tourism Board) said they will probably open another section by the end of this year. Hopefully, after this event, we will be able to do a series of games each time a new zone opens up, to generate more awareness and get people to start visiting Haw Par Villa again."

These two weekends are like a test for us, because STB is hoping to be able to sell Singapore as a unique destination with such events at our attractions. Haw Par Villa is just the first step."

*Journey to the End and Back* takes place on May 14 and 21, at Haw Par Villa. Timeslots are 1.30pm, 3.15pm, 5pm and 7pm, and last 60 minutes each. Tickets cost \$25 per person, and can be purchased at <http://hawpar140516.peatix.com> or <http://hawpar210516.peatix.com>

### A 'novel' dining experience

By Tan Teck Heng  
titanesph.com.sg

APPRECIATING literature doesn't have to be a solitary activity. This Friday, ANDSFORTH—a nomadic theatre group—is launching a pop-up event combining food, literature, and immersive theatre. Based on and named after Goh Poh Seng's 1972 novel *If We Dream Too Long* (often said to be Singapore's first novel), this spin-off secret supper is a one-hour, 40-minute affair with guided interactions and a four-course meal that promises a, uh, novel dining experience.

*If We Dream Too Long* is one of several fringe events leading up to the Singapore Writers Festival (SWF) later this year. ANDSFORTH's husband-and-wife team were first approached by SWF for a collaboration. The brief: "We were asked to pick a local book and to do our thing with it," says co-founder Stuart Wee.

"I went with Goh because the novel is so whimsical," he adds. "It's about this character, Kwang Meng, who likes to escape from reality and his clerical job; he'll take medical leave and run to the sea, dreaming about the perfect family."

For Mr Wee, it's really about simpler things: "Basically the Singapore dream back then in the late 60s was just about having a house, a wife, and a job."

While Mr Wee is coy with the details, participants are likely to be dropped into several significant scenes in Goh's novel, with set-pieces that mix reality with dreamscapes.

Audiences don't have to be familiar with the book to enjoy themselves, though coming with an open mind and being ready to mingle with fellow diners and actors will enhance the experience. "Singaporeans are typically shy and take time to warm up, but the complimentary drink will help too," quips Mr Wee.

They've also engaged poet Marc Nair to adapt the book. "The novel was probably one of the first to be written fully in the local vernacular," notes Mr Nair, who believes ANDSFORTH's adaptation has mass appeal.

"Hopefully, this event will reach people who love the arts but who might not go for, say, a poetry read-



ing," he explains. "While cross genre work is already being done elsewhere, here it's far more interactive, and also a touch more approachable and commercial with the F&B element."

On that note, expect authentic local fare by chef Chung Deming, of "mod' sin" eatery The Quarters and Kush at Timbre's. Don't be surprised if you're accosted by an actor playing a *Kuyup* relative while you're tucking into, say, curry chicken. The whole idea is to immerse yourself into the

novel's universe and Kwang Meng's life, warts, zits and all.

And judging from a visit to the site, *If We Dream Too Long* is no fly-by-night operation; on top of actors rehearsing on the elaborate set, we spotted excel sheets full of sound cues and food plating timings so the whole multi-sensory experience will be perfectly synchronised.

This production marks a departure from ANDSFORTH's usual fare: "We typically base our concepts on more commercial or light-hearted themes," says co-founder Emily Prag.

For instance, their last pop-up was an indoor picnic, where participants could lay their mats on a fantastical, gnomish wonderland in the comfort of air-conditioning. *The Picnic* viral on social media and sold over 1,500 tickets, making it their most successful production to date. Their next event, to be held later this year, will be a spy-themed affair.

"But we're trying to support local literature and culture, which hopefully audiences here will not take for granted," adds Ms Prag.

*If We Dream Too Long* runs for three weekends (Friday to Sunday) from this Friday till May 29. Tickets at \$88 (inclusive of four-course local 60s cuisine and a drink) available from <http://www.andsoforth.com.sg/>

When parties get theatrical ... Page 33



As part of Singapore Writers Festival this year, nomadic dining group ANDSFORTH is staging a theatrical feast based on Goh Poh Seng's 1972 novel *If We Dream Too Long*.

# Secretive yet dramatic

THE STRAITS TIMES

TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 2015

WHY just make a normal dinner booking or plan a run-of-the-mill evening at the theatre, when you can have an exciting three- or four-course meal in a secret location that includes a customised, interactive theatre experience?

Dinner theatre and total secrecy make an interesting business foundation for Ms Emily Png, 25, co-founder of Singapore event management company Andsoforth.

Locations of events are never released beforehand, she explains. "Guests are informed about the exact location only on the day itself, via SMS."

The company was started in March last year by Ms Png and her fiancé, Mr Stuart Wee, 28. They discovered "immersive theatre" and pop-up concept restaurants through their shared interest in travel. Both also drew inspiration from various art forms.

For their events, Mr Wee is involved in the writing of the script, directing, designing and building the set, designing the soundscape, engaging the chefs, and controlling the multimedia during the show. He sometimes acts as well.

Ms Png's role is no less wide-ranging — she sources locations, casts the actors, handles public relations and marketing, plans seat allocations, and makes sure the meals go to the right people with the specified dietary requirements.

Their scripts are written with the intention of engaging the guests. Says Ms Png: "Actors interact with them and they are very much part of the storyline."

This means that different nights can produce different outcomes, but that, she says, "is the fun of it".

Tickets cost \$88 to \$98, including the meal. Andsoforth has worked with chefs such as Mr Aaron Leow, who has interned at Noma in Copenhagen, and Mr Ryan Wee of Hambaoabao, a burger stall in a hawker centre that has been receiving buzz of late.



**Mr Wee and Ms Png (left) came across the concept of pop-up dinners in secret locations during their travels.**

PHOTOS: ANDSOFORTH

Each event runs from four to 10 weeks and can accommodate 80 to 100 people a night. The events attract a mix of Singaporeans, expatriates and tourists, mostly between the ages of 25 to 35.

Guests are drawn by the element of unpredictability. "Because we are ever-changing, full of surprises and extremely mysterious," says Ms Png, "we gain a curious and adventurous crowd of customers who are keen to attend the next 'thing'."

# 现在

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喜气“羊羊”迎新年特辑 P5-15  
福建经典节庆菜“聚宝盆” P17

2015年1月17日 星期六

## pop-up秘密晚宴 充满惊喜的盛会

不清楚地点、不知道菜单、不了解节目内容。这样的一场宴会，你敢参与吗？

对创意公司Andsoforth创办人黄德明（28岁）与方诗（25岁）来说，这是能够为本地饮食业注入新鲜感的点子。

他们在旅游伦敦时，发现一个称为“Gingerline”的地下餐饮文化体验，于是在去年创办公司，将相似的餐饮体验搬到新加坡。

据方诗介绍，这基本上是个pop-up秘密晚宴，宾客在网上报名后，就会通过手机收到蛛丝马迹，一篇用餐地点和宴会主题的线索。宴会当晚才会从确实地点，抵达后就和一票陌生人共处一室，参与充满惊喜的盛会。

黄德明说：“宴会中将出现演员叙述情节故事，宾客本身也参与其中。这场宴会是美食之旅、是戏剧，也是表演。要我形容的话，是一个互动、戏剧化，让参与者完全投入的体验。”

去年五月，两人策划了Andsoforth首场秘密晚宴

“The Hideaway”。它以海上航行的一艘船为场景，宾客在布置得如船舱的环境中用餐，菜单紧贴主题而主打海鲜，而宾客周围上演一场船长与乘客惊心动魄的故事。

要打造这样一场互动盛宴，他们必须同厨师、演员、剧场设计师、画家、音响设计师等创意人合作，将来自多方面的创意融合一起已经是一个挑战。但黄德明说，要落实这个概念的最大绊脚石是新加坡有限的场地。要配合主题和日期，找到适合的场地举办pop-up宴会非常困难。

他就“The Hideaway”为例子说：“好不容易找到适合的餐馆，因为三场宴会会在一个星期天举行，我们必须在前一天餐馆打烊后布置筹备到隔天凌晨，当晚宴会结束后又要把餐馆还原，如此装了又拆三次。”

第一次秘密晚宴爆满，Andsoforth过后为企业客户打造了一场主题宴会，去年11月底也推出名为“The Experiment”的晚宴。宾客受邀来进行各种有

趣的实验，菜色配合主题，用试管或是药物的形式送上桌，但结局却是个大逆转，原来大家其实都是外星人的试验品。

据黄德明观察，参与的宾客有结伴而来寻找未知刺激的伴侣，也有一些朋友订下整张餐桌来场另类的聚会。

“我们的宴会严禁使用手机拍摄或通讯，一方面让宾客完全沉浸在宴会氛围，一方面也鼓励他们结交同桌的新朋友。这种共同分享的经历，相信也是他们喜欢这类宴会的原因。”

网址：<http://www.andsoforth.com.sg/>



←黄德明（右）和方诗在本地推出pop-up秘密晚宴。

↓宾客最后一刻才知道The Experiment晚宴地点。



