



Singapore Youth Theatre, a youth troupe established by home-grown theatre company Wild Rice, will stage episodic theatre piece *Schooled* from March 17 to 20. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Voice of youth

I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

WHERE Esplanade Theatre, 1 Esplanade Drive
WHEN Friday and Saturday, 11am and 3pm; Sunday, 11am
ADMISSION From \$30 via str.sg/wsLi

SCHOOLED

WHERE Wild Rice@ Funan, Level 4 Funan mall, 107 North Bridge Road
WHEN March 17 and 18, 7.30pm; March 19 and 20, 2 and 6pm
ADMISSION \$30, \$35 and \$40 via str.sg/wsLT

INCANDESCENT – A CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS

WHERE University Cultural Centre Hall, 50 Kent Ridge Crescent
WHEN March 18, 8pm
ADMISSION From \$15 via str.sg/wslc

BETWEEN THE WORLD AND US

WHERE str.sg/wslG
WHEN Till March 31
ADMISSION Free

Pandemic no deterrent to youth and their art

Their creations range from artworks in an ongoing virtual exhibition to theatre and dance productions being staged amid Covid-19 restrictions

Kooi Xiu Min

Julia Yip was 10 years old when the Covid-19 pandemic started in 2020.

"There was this deadly virus going around and everybody was very scared. School became very boring because we couldn't interact with our friends," recalls the Primary 6 pupil from Mayflower Primary School.

"When I was young, my mother would let me draw things to express myself since I didn't really know how to talk yet," says Julia, who poured her fear, anxiety and hope into her drawings.

For *Between The World And Us*, an ongoing virtual exhibition of primary school pupils' artworks by Singapore Art Museum's Think! Contemporary initiative, she drew a veterinarian.

"I wanted vets to get more recognition because vets and other people help out in the pandemic too, but just in a different way," she says.

Covid-19 restrictions may have curtailed arts activities around Singapore, but many young artists like Julia have adapted to and even drawn inspiration from the pandemic to continue creating.

Singapore Youth Theatre, a youth troupe established by home-grown theatre company Wild Rice, made its stage debut in December 2020 to a reduced audience.

Rayen Hovinga, 16, who was part of the inaugural troupe, recalls being disappointed that many people could not attend the show due to restrictions on audience capacity. He says: "Besides our immediate family and friends, we wanted other people to come see the show and hear what we had to say."

The cast of 11 came together over

Zoom during the circuit breaker to conceptualise and write a full script from scratch.

Together with director Thomas Lim, they produced *Schooled*, an episodic theatre piece where each scene, modelled after classroom lessons, serves to educate and raise awareness on issues such as bullying, sex education and racial harmony.

The same cast, now aged 15 to 19, will be reprising their roles from March 17 to 20 with a reworked script.

Erin Chen, 19, who plays a teacher constrained by the sex education syllabus, says: "After our performance in 2020, we were constantly thinking about how we would do things differently."

She hopes audiences will see how the cast has matured as writers, actors and people through the pandemic.

Another theatre production for the young created during Covid-19 is *I Have Something To Say*, which opens at the Esplanade Theatre on Friday. It uses movement and music to create a safe space for children to discuss bullying.

Director Edith Podesta, 42, says she wished she had a production like this back when she was a girl.

"Bullying is universal. It hasn't changed in the past 30 years, it happens everywhere. In fact, it has evolved. There's cyber bullying now with learning from home, and it's really insidious because it means the bullying is no longer location-based," she says.

She learnt more about current forms of bullying from workshops with children as part of the Esplanade's March On programme, which aims to explore modern issues through art with children.

Podesta had the chance to under-

stand the "mentality and physicality of eight-year-olds" through a series of activities. They included body maps for children to show where they felt intense emotions, letters to adults about bullying and creating superheroes to stand up to bullies.

Podesta says: "Family theatre, theatre for children, whatever you call it – its purpose is to broach a conversation between children and their parents."

Youth dance troupe NUS Dance Synergy worked around the restrictions of mandatory mask-wearing and safe distancing to create *IncanDESCENT*, a piece about the effects of light pollution on the human body and the ecosystem.

The troupe of National University Singapore students used technology such as visual projections and filmed performances.

Choreographer Yarra Iletto, 39,

says: "The overall vision of the piece was to incorporate live dancing, music and multimedia into one integrated show that simply highlighted health and environmental issues."

As restrictions gradually eased, Iletto divided the troupe of 18 into small groups, even as the dance was choreographed with safe management measures in mind.

Still, being in small groups gave the dancers a chance to feed off one another's energy, something they feel is absolutely necessary for their performance on March 18.

Dancer Jan Nicole Si, 20, says: "Everyone has missed how it feels to perform. To be able to return to the stage, there is so much pent-up energy to expend – which naturally allows for a dance piece with so much more passion injected."

xmkooi@sph.com.sg