

I Got To Go On A S'porean Journey Through Time And Space

[stephanieh](#)



I must confess, my impression of Chinatown has been far from positive. With strings of obnoxiously red lanterns, numerous tourist shops with eager sales assistants ready to pounce upon their next victim, it isn't difficult to see why.

So it was with a slight dash of scepticism and curiosity that I registered my attendance at Chinatown Crossings, a roving theatre experience by Drama Box designed to immerse the spectator in the history and cultural heritage of Chinatown – or Kreta Ayer, as it was known fondly in the past.

I fully expected this to be just another walking tour featuring the main tourist attractions of Chinatown. However, all my expectations were proven brilliantly wrong.

It was so much more.

Transcendence



Source: *Drama Box*

Chinatown Crossings follows the Indian protagonist Kunalan, as he journeys back to the past to rediscover his childhood. This involves tracing the evolution of his friendship with the indomitable Ting Ting, as well as his relationship with Fong Cheh, a Ma Jie who soon becomes like a mother to him.

I was first given a receiver set, which would be the primary device to communicate the dialogue and theatrical experience. As we began to walk through the streets, noises from the present begins to mingle with sounds of the past resonating through the receiver.

Kunalan's story literally came alive through his narration and sounds from the past, and it was a surreal experience. As we weaved in and

out of his memories, I soon found myself transcending time altogether.

In the dark, humid night, we were led through the main streets of Chinatown, dimly lit alleyways and bustling food centres. We crossed roads, dodged traffic, and explored the quaint interior of old shophouses. It was an incredibly visceral and sensory experience that embodied a certain transcendence in more ways than one.

A Touch of Humanity

Chinatown Crossings is a theatrical experience with a big heart and lots of surprises. I was whisked from partaking in traditional arts and crafts, to meeting shopkeepers from the past, to tasting *ice kacang*.



Source: *Drama Box*

Through it all, the touch of humanity made what could have been a mawkish narrative real for me. While it did at times veer towards the overly-sentimental, boundaries between fact and fiction were continually blurred, and I was fully immersed in Kunalan's narrative.

I was no longer a spectator passively and sceptically observing the proceedings; I was really there.

Chinatown Crossings shines the spotlight on the stories of communities that have been forgotten. Kunalan's story, for instance, is a story that transcends time, race, and religion. It sheds light on the Indian community and their forgotten presence in Chinatown's history.

It endeavours to make spectators understand that perhaps we are not all that different from one another.



Chinatown Crossings also highlights the contributions of Ma Jies to modern day Singapore.

Jodi Chan's performance as Fong Cheh was truly outstanding. Despite barely understanding Cantonese, I was moved to tears by her performance. Fong Cheh's story was certainly a common one in the past for Ma Jies' to devote their entire lives to caring for families before dying alone and forgotten.

By the end of the night, my feet were aching due to my unfortunately poor physical stamina and the whirlwind of a journey I had just experienced.

But it was worth it.

As I slowly made my way towards the MRT station, I could almost see the ghosts of the past come alive in the streets of Chinatown, and was comforted by the fact that their stories will never truly be forgotten.

To follow Kunalan on this journey through time and space, get your tickets [here](#).

Drama Box Singapore

22 June 2018 – 18 August 2018

Friday – Saturday, 7.30pm