

hype

issue no. seven october 98

RETROSPECTION!



diana ser, eric khoo & sarah sechan

turn back time.

freebies!!

halloween h2o premiums,

tower books discount & warner music cds

THE STRANGEST THING HAS HAPPENED.

Instead of charging off to create an era of our own, we have hesitated to take direction from our parents' past. The 90s has seen youngsters celebrating the return of 80s music, donning bellbottoms, and even tripping over platform shoes. ¶

But it's not just the youth who have been caught up in this retro craze. Singapore as a nation has taken to retrospection, with SM Lee releasing his historic memoirs, *The Singapore Story* exhibition, and the success of the recent slew of retro movies re-released or remade this year. Even the local media has jumped on the bandwagon with *Forever Fever* and the third season of *Growing Up*. ¶

Just what is it about the past that so intrigues us? Who, among us, can honestly say that they remember the 60s or 70s? Although many of us were already around by the 80s, most of us were singing the theme songs to cartoons like *My Little Pony* and *Silver Hawk* instead of Madonna's "Like a Virgin". ¶

Yet here we are, looting our parents' wardrobes and skulking through Nexis' Worn Again department for the very clothes that our parents cast off, mindlessly selling out to retromania. ¶

Every generation has left its indelible mark on history. The 50s gave us Rock & Roll, the 60s bred hippies preaching peace, love and flower power, the 70s heralded the coming of bellbottoms and embarrassingly tight polyester shirts with an infectious disco beat, while the 80s celebrated extravagance, kitsch music videos and really big hair. ¶

What about the retro-maniac 90s? All this borrowing, plagiarizing and recycling has resulted in a soulless, unimaginative generation with no culture of its own. ¶

While mama shops may not exactly be retro, they are an unforgettable part of our past. Begging for 10 cents to run downstairs to buy *sng pao* (a.k.a. licles) is a common experience shared by almost all Singaporean children. But the unthinkable has happened – despite the current celebration of all things old, mama shops are facing a decline. Will buying *kaka* from super-marts be the same without our neighborhood stalls? ¶

The thought of losing mama shops tugs at the heart – we are losing something well-known and loved. Maybe that's the underlying sentiment at the threshold of the approaching new millennium. ¶

The past has made us what we are now and what we will be tomorrow. The future signifies uncertainty and loss of some sort, and we are retaliating against that by clutching even tighter to that which is reassuringly familiar. ¶

Call it homage, a fad, or even an obsession. We choose to call it a last look back. ¶

Lee Amizadai



Has our generation lost its culture? Liam Yeo finds out



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hype is a bi-annual publication by final year students of the diploma in mass communication programme.

S\$50.00 (inclusive of GST)

hype number seven october 98.

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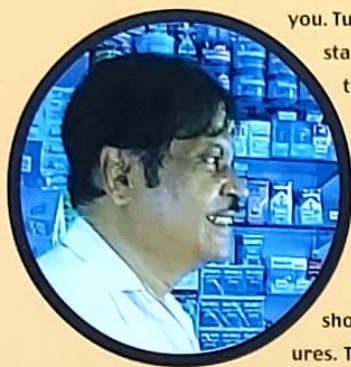
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Engrossed in battling between choosing yen yen biscuits or Sarsl sweets, you are startled by the shuffle of slippers behind you. Turning around, you see an Indian man of about 65 staring at you from the shadows. He licks his red, betel-juice stained lips before demanding, "Are you going to buy anything?"



Hardly the friendly shop assistant at 7-Eleven, the mama shop man however, carries with him a unique part of Singapore's fast-fading culture.

Secret niches in an urban jungle, mama shops carry a multitude of familiar, forgotten treasures. To many, they represent fond childhood memories: hot lazy afternoons spent browsing second-hand comic books, fraternising with the mama shop uncle (if he's in the mood) and mulling over which three sweets you should buy for all of 10 cents.



No doubt, we are guilty of patronising its air-conditioned and more posh rivals, but when there is an urgent need for some Brylcreem to smooth unruly locks or a dose of heady cologne to woo the neighbourhood babe, the humble shop is indisputably king. This is especially true for our parents - when there were hardly any supermarkets or mini-marts during the 50s and the 60s.



For 52-year-old David Lim, the mama shop was the place where he got his kicks as a child. He says, "I used to be an avid reader of comic books and would often make trips to the mama shop to sift through a stack of *Billy the Kid*, *Lone Ranger* and *Spiderman* comics. Once, I didn't have any money and I actually hid a few comics in my shorts and marched straight out of the shop!" he chuckles.

With the advent of modern day grocery shops, many youngsters are now spoiled for choice when it comes to satisfying a snack attack. What then, is it that draws

today's youth to the humble box of a shop in a block? Is it our undying loyalty to all things old? The cheap tidbits? Or, the infamous mama shop uncle? Love him or hate him, he is one hardy species who faithfully tends his wares from dawn to dusk, rain or shine. Duane Lawrence Lee, 21, a Business Studies student from Ngee Ann Polytechnic recalls, "I hated visiting mama shops alone when I was a kid. I only felt safe when I was with my pals, otherwise, the fierce uncle would be too scary for me to handle!"

On the flip side, Mass Communication student Teo Suan Lin, 19, cherishes sweeter memories of her encounters. "The uncles were really nice and friendly. Sometimes, they even gave me free sweets!" she reminisces.

Crabby or courteous, the mama shop man adds a distinct flavour to his little corner, with a tiny transistor radio blaring the latest Bhangra hits by his side. Do not, however, be fooled by his seemingly placid and unseeing gaze. He keeps a vigilant eye on his rows of colourful magazines hung like new washing on a clothesline and his endless selection of timeless goodies like Kaka, Chickadees crackers and other such bric-a-brac.

However, rapid modernisation in the past few decades has seen the gradual dwindling of such historic corners. Many of these dingy shops are facing stiff competition from brightly-lit, air-conditioned mini-marts. This is clearly illustrated by the Econ Mini-mart association which franchises Econ outlets to willing parties. Set up in 1982, it has 180 outlets spread across the island. Of these, 80% used to be old provision shops, including an unspecified number of mama shops.

One thing is clear - those who give in don't do so without a fight. Manager of the Econ Mini-mart association, Jason Tan said, "Once, there was this elderly shop owner who refused to join the franchise. It took us five long years of persuasion before he finally relented."

Their resistance to change is understandable as many of them have set up shop since the 50s. Forced to survive in a strange country, they have clung on to tradition. Permanent resident Hamid Sultan, 61, who has been tending his shop at Allenby Road for 35 years isn't ruffled by the competition posed by modernisation.

Perhaps this is due to the fact that his shop is along a main

Mama no enou

by florence fong



road and faces no immediate competition. He claims that although business has dipped slightly within the past few decades, the change has not been significant. He caters to passing motorists and is happy to earn an average of \$1,000 a month just to get by. Mr Sultan sends most of his earnings to his family back in India. And if he were forced out of business by spanking new mini-marts, he says he "will retire and relax with my hard earned savings!"

Many other elderly mama shop owners also adopt this optimistic and carefree outlook on the future of their businesses. "After all," says Besara Hamad, 68, "it's enough that I have food to eat and a roof over my head, there's no need to upgrade or anything like that. I enjoy my relaxing job." Possibly the closest step taken by mama shop owners to move with the times was to relocate to more sanitary HDB void decks. Even then, an executive estate officer from HDB estimates that the last time they offered such shops for rental was 10 years ago. That means that the mama shops you see now are all you're going to get.

Given the choice of air-conditioned comfort and variety however, it is no surprise that many people prefer to do their grocery shopping at mini-marts. Not only are they visually more appealing, they also offer goods you'd find in large supermarkets.

However, when it comes to hard-to-find tidbits, long forgotten toys, old comics and magazines, the gleaming mini-mart is left trailing in the dust. Who could forget the marvellous barley sweets that the mama shops sold individually? Or the styrofoam tasting 'Xiao Ding Dang' and 'Tora' chocolates people bought primarily for the free toy inside? Just as irresistible were childhood toys – plastic guitars, springy rubber balls, and those realistic 'doctor' play sets.

It is the lingering aura of nostalgia surrounding these shops that ensures its humble but faithful following of customers. Wei Cheng Wei, 19, who studies Marketing at Temasek Polytechnic says, "I try my best to patronise mama shops because they're the only places that still sell my favourite 10 cents per packet Bee Bee (crackers)!"

With constant effort to strive for the highest possible standards, it is sad but inevitable that the elderly uncle and his mama shop will slowly be phased out to make way for snazzier alternatives. Grumpy uncles and sometimes dubious expiry dates notwithstanding, the mama shop will always occupy a special niche in our hearts.

Just imagine that!

- * Most mama shops double up as homes. Shop owners bathe in public loos and sleep on makeshift beds placed within the shop or along the corridor.
- * You can sometimes find the odd forbidden item like firecrackers.
- * According to a survey of 10 mama shops, a fairly successful mama shop averages \$1,000 in profits a month.
- * Another survey of 10 Econ mini mart shows that these shop owners earn about twice as much.
- * Thambi Magazine Store, the mama shop at Holland Road Shopping Centre, claims to offer a staggering 3,000 local and foreign magazine titles and 20 newspapers.
- * This outlet pays a monthly rent of \$13,500 for the small shop, the corridor that runs along it and the open space in front.



gh

How many times have you skipped along the dusty lanes of your childhood haunt only to be seized by a sudden craving for an ice lolly or some good old Hacks sweets? Where then, were the 7-Elevens and Tops supermarkets? Rediscover the charms of that dingy haven that is the mama shop.





"I've always loved action figures. They reminded me of little human beings that I could control, that I could create stories around. And I guess all those days of playing with these figures and coming up with stories were in a way like directing."

And direct he did. Eric, now 32, cut his teeth on corporate videos and short films, the most memorable of which was **Barbie Digs Joe** (1993), shot guerrilla-style on a Hi-8 camera with real G.I. Joe® action figures and Barbie® dolls. It was also animated using pixilation techniques he discovered in some horror comic book. Then came full-length features, **Mee Pok Man** and multi-award-winning **12 Storeys**, ventures into SingTel's "hello!" ad campaign and a six-part TCS anthology—**Drive** with an episode on voyeurism under his directorship. Eric's now working on the set with Jack Neo to lead TCS8 **Comedy Night**'s "Liang Po Po" onto the big screens.

"I started playing with them when I was five."

He's talking about G.I. Joes. Eric is very particular about his G.I. Joes. He takes pains to highlight the fact that he only means the authentic 12-inch ones with sculptured hair which predated even his childhood, not the later editions we see at Toys 'R Us these days. He is so into them that he began educating **hype** on the societal impact of the Vietnam War which generated much negativity against G.I. Joe. There is no doubt that this man knows his toys. How many figures does he own? Let's just say, he flatly refused to count them.

"I love the 60s/70s issues. They were so great. I've collected them since I was a kid..."

G.I. Joe isn't his only passion, he loves Spiderman too. Which explains why a Spider T-shirt and bermudas is his outfit of choice at most location shoots. Here, too, his preference for the original Spidey drawn by John Romita (Sr.) is said in no uncertain terms. Todd McFarlane may have impressed comic-dom with **Spawn**, but his version of Spiderman only elicits two words from Eric—"so ugly".

"... and I remembered when she died, *sheesh*, I was crying. I was so upset."

So attached was he to Spidey that he broke down when Gwen Stacy, Spidey's girlfriend died. Eric finally met up with Stan Lee who was the creator of the pioneering Spiderman. He asked the man why. He was told that despite being a babe, Gwen was downright "boring".

"Seriously, the first girl I fell in love with was Barbie. I want to get that Audrey Hepburn Barbie—Breakfast at Tiffany's."

Eric doesn't really collect Barbies. His sister does, though, and that's where he got it for **Barbie Digs Joe**. Eric, blissfully married with three sons, also makes public his fascination with Audrey Hepburn and who he calls an Asian Hepburn—TCS actress Ann Kok whom he finally got to direct in that SingTel commercial.

"My sister had all these Barbies right, and when she comes home, they would all be massacred by (G.I.) Joe! And I had this good friend and we would make Joe do the worst things to Barbie!" (laughter)

After so many years, the mischief is still there. But lest you think him sexist, he's the first to tell you that he'd have Joe do something to *Vik*-man too, that is, if he was ever made into an action figure...

A MAN ALWAYS HAS HIS **TOYS**. AND SO HAS CRITICALLY
-ACCLAIMED LOCAL DIRECTOR ERIC KHOO WHO HAS
GONE FROM DIRECTING G.I. JOE TO JOENG. ERIC TELLS
CLEMENT CHOO HOW PLOTTING AND PLAYING WITH TOYS LED
TO TOYING WITH PLOTS AND PLAYS.



Our emotions – be they joy, pleasure, anguish or confusion – mark our humanity. **Fray** weaves these common threads of humanity into a website of short stories that show that, despite our differences, all of us are on the same roller coaster ride that is life.

Fray is divided into 4 different categories. "Criminal"

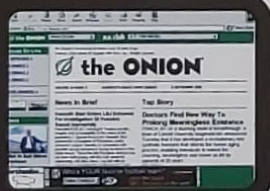


speaks of all things offensive to the human spirit – the loss of a loved one and conformity. "Hope" revolves around desires – for companionship, of reminiscences, of infidelity and temptation. "Work" shares with us stories that deal with problems in one's career, and "Drugs" is about addictions in life, be they sex, cocaine, or even a good old cup of coffee.

the Onion A Breath of Fresh Air

With headlines like "Sudanese 14-year-old has Midlife Crisis", you know you're in for a no-holds-barred ride into the world of satire and, well, just rude humour.

For example, a section from an article entitled "Freak Accident Paralyzes Man From Waist Up" reads: "Roberto is back on his feet. Unfortunately, he has



Break-up Pick-me-up

Move over, Spice Girls! Breakup Girl's taking Girl Power one step further to rock your cyber-world with the motto: When it's over, she'll be right over!

Breakupgirl.com is a website specially created for girls who have just broken up. Even if you a) haven't been dumped, b) were dumped long ago, or c) don't have a boyfriend, you can still visit the website and laugh yourself silly.

Along with the red and white background, there are stunning graphics and cool comics that will tickle your funny bone even on a bad day.



What's Your Story?

Each story ends with a simple question to the reader – are you lost? Have you been touched? Thousands answer the questions, and reading through their contributions, you realise that everyone has a story to tell.

Creative use of frames, photographs and graphics enhance each story told. **Fray** is not just a site about stories, but a site about life with the hopes and pain that come along with it. Surf on to www.fray.com to read these stories, and maybe you too can share how your life has frayed.

- Chia Yueh Jean

lost all feeling in his head, arms and torso. Doctors said (he) should be able to resume his career as a professional soccer player as early as next week."

Irreverent? Maybe. Hilarious? Definitely!

Make no mistake though – this is no amateurish site created up by a 17-year-old computer nerd with a poor excuse for a social life – **the Onion** is serious about humour. The articles are mainly features and are usually accompanied by pictures (although one suspects the editorial team takes special pleasure in selecting completely irrelevant pictures just for the heck of it). Editorials and advertisements abound, telling you that this is not an effort to be lightly dismissed.

After visiting the *International Herald Tribune*, the *New York Times* and other intellectual online rags, check out the **Onion** at <http://www.theonion.com> for a little less intellect and a little more humour.

- Sheela Sarvananda

a book free Courtesy of the Dead

It's late and you can't sleep. You get up and scour around for something to read, but with every book you own memorised, and no god-fearing bookseller open at such an unholy hour, what do you do?

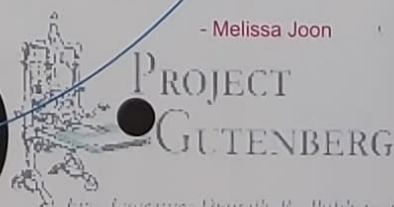
Start up that PC, dial in to the net, and in minutes, you could find yourself reading the great horror classic, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker.

All this is made possible by **Project Gutenberg**. With **Project Gutenberg**, you have a choice of over 1,400 e-texts (computerised texts), which vary from *The Bible* to the works of anti-religious philosophers like Bertrand Russell. This site

Humour-filled pages tell you what to expect when you're rejected, how to chant the empowering 'Breakup Creed', or even send an electronic postcard to someone you love or hate. If it's the latter, then you'll have plenty to choose – from insults to satirical humour.

The section that really takes the cake must surely be the 'All New Advice Column'. Nobody can read what BG has to say to dumped readers without breaking out in guffaws. This light-hearted section is guaranteed to cheer you up instantly and bring a smile to your tear-stained face. *whether you're male, female, single, jilted or attached*, visit *Breakup Girl* at www.breakupgirl.com.

- Melissa Joon



even carries books for readers with unconventional preferences, like an e-text entitled *The Square Root of 7*, to 1 Million Digits.

The best thing is that all the books in **Project Gutenberg** are entirely free. All the user pays for is the Internet time used for downloading the e-text, which could take an average of 3 to 10 minutes depending on your connection and computer processor speed.

Don't worry about violating copyright laws, because a writer's work becomes "public domain" 50 years after his or her death. That means you won't get to see Sidney Sheldon's or Stephen King's works at **Project Gutenberg**... not yet, at least. Search for the books you want at www.gutenberg.net

- Liam Yeo

expag

love keychain

by Eileen Oh

You long to talk to her and wish she knew of your existence. Yet, your courage vapourises at the sight of this person—the woman of your dreams. Instead of burying your head in despair, turn to your personal messenger to express those fluttering feelings on your behalf.

From the makers of Neo Print, the Neo Messenger conveys anything you want to say, in less than 10 seconds, to that special someone. Simply step into the brightly coloured booth, lift the handset, speak, and your voice will be recorded in a small keychain in the shape of any of five heart-melting cartoon characters (a boy, girl, cat, Ultraman or bear) available.

For a more professional result, help yourself to a selection of background music to complement your sweet-nothings. Now, she can hear your voice with the mere touch of a tiny button on the bottom of the keychain. The Neo Messenger then plays back 10 seconds worth of recording. No more fretting about how to speak calmly before her—let the Neo Messenger do the job!

The best thing about the Neo Messenger is that for just \$7, your message can be replayed up to 2,000 times before your voice goes whining like a broken record.

Comprehensive instructions on how to record your voice are found on the doors of the Neo Messenger booths.

Here's a tip, though, spontaneity may be best, but if you don't think and script carefully what you want to record, you'll end up going "hmm" and "uhh" in the booth just as you would in front of her.

The Neo Messenger booths are at #B1 of Takashimaya Shopping Centre. Each keychain costs \$7.

celestial stars

by Chia Yueh Jean

Don't envy Class 95's Jose Unbelievable and his view of the stars through his glass ceiling. Glow-in-the-dark structures and stickers from Star Shine allow you to reproduce the Big Dipper and other constellations in the sky in your room too.

Those with morbid fantasies can even indulge their overactive imaginations by throwing in space cruisers, alien bugs, insects and celestial shapes to form their very own alien-infested galaxies.

These 3-D structures imported from the US are made of a special phosphorescent material. For the larger structures, a 1-3 minute exposure to light will allow special pigments to absorb and re-emit the light, creating a ghostly, glowing effect that lasts for more than half an hour. The stickers, on the other hand, only require 20-30 seconds for the pigments to absorb the light. The phosphorescent material is safe, non-toxic and glows each time it is exposed to light.

The Star Shine product range is fairly extensive. There are 7 kits that contain luminous parts to form structures like space ships and insects. One kit even offers parts to construct structures for a space station.

These kits come with removable, reusable adhesives and detailed information. The insect kit, for example, contains step-by-step instructions on how to piece together 8 different alien creepy crawlies from 22 parts. There are another 4 different phosphorescent sticker kits featuring a range of over 300 celestial shapes, planets and stars. Most of these kits come complete with constellation charts and enough facts to provide even the most unwitting buyer a mini-lesson on astronomy.

In the darkness, the backdrop of carefully arranged stars, planets, comets and asteroids stand out to form a make-believe universe that is truly mesmerising.

With patience and plenty of imagination, you can transform your study area into an operationally-ready space station complete with an efficient cosmic cruiser fleet ready to defend your space station against the ever-resilient alien bugs.

The "Celestial Sky" sticker kit is priced at \$13.50 while the "3-D Spaceships" kit is priced at \$20.90 for 22 mix-and-match pieces. All Star Shine products are available at Kiddy Land in Parco Bugis Junction, #03-02/03. Opening hours are from 10.30am to 9.30pm.

war game

by Jennifer Ong

Be an entrepreneur in minutes, build a business empire in the next hour. And not by consulting another of those yawn-evoking self-help books you ever so deliberately miss on the shelves either. Read closely if you're from the Business or Accountancy faculty: Enterpriser, a challenging board game, offers the thrill of building a financial empire to the intellectually curious!

Sponsored by **The Economist** newspaper and leading international companies like CNN and the New York Stock Exchange, Enterpriser transforms you into a General on the business battlefield. Watch the rolling dice spin up tension, as mundane business theories and principles you've learnt in school suddenly spring alive. Strategise, negotiate for raw materials and labour, work on your people skills and try to outsmart your competitors!

To inject reality into the game, you'll deal with respected MNCs like Citibank, United Parcel Service and Shangri-La hotel. If you're as clueless about the nature of your business as you are your lecturers' moods, don't panic. The game's rule book and magazine briefly describe the companies, their services and goods. The name of the game is to beat the two or three other players in building your financial empire. Risks are inevitable and you're compelled to learn quickly from mistakes to survive in this highly competitive environment.

As with all businesses, luck plays a large part in determining the success of your company. In the face of a sudden economic downturn, negotiating with your unsympathetic dealers and competitors can turn out to be highly exasperating!

Whether or not you have a business background, Enterpriser promises to be exciting and challenging. Children as young as 10 years old have enjoyed the game, as have many students, young adults and even professionals. Enterpriser is a board game to accompany you through your tertiary, working and even retiring years. For starters, perhaps you should propose playing this highly educational board game during tutorials!

Enterpriser, priced at \$59.95, is available at Toys 'R' Us stores at Forum The Shopping Mall and Tampines Mall, open daily from 10am to 9.30pm.

THE LATEST SPACEY PRODUCTS

e

projector clock cat polish retro beads

by Wong Wing Onn

by Lynn Lee

by Sue-Anne Lim

Ever woken up in the middle of the night wondering what time it is? Your alternatives are either to switch on the lights and start searching high and low for that elusive mini-alarm clock or to buy the new projector clock.

With the choice of a cute, white sheep or a simple yet stylish black and silver geometric design as the background for the projected image, looking for the time in the middle of the night needn't frustrate you to insomnia. Besides, sheep are commonly used to conjure up the zzzs. The projected image can also brighten up your room and add life to a plain wall.

Newly imported from Japan, the clock will help you see time in the dark with minimum fuss. The projector clock is slightly bigger than a videocassette and it runs on electricity. What's more, it's simple to operate as well. No pressing of complicated buttons or flipping through thick instruction booklets to make it work.

Simply plug it into a power point, point the lens of the clock to the wall and with a quick flip of the switch, the face of an analog clock with a cool background appears on the wall. This clock is only meant for use in the dark as the projected image isn't as sharp during the day.

It makes a perfect gift for friends who are perpetually late for school or appointments. Now, they'll never have a problem finding time, anytime.

The projector clock can be found at Retro-Space located in The Heeren, #b1-05 (beside Marche). It costs \$60 and comes in two designs.

Just when you thought you had every conceivable Hello Kitty product, Sanrio, has come up with a new range. Kitty cosmetics are here to tempt our avaricious appetites for anything cute, lovable and HIPI!

Two in this cosmetics line worth recommending are the Kitty nail polish and Kitty nail pen. A must-have accessory for the fashionable and young at heart, the Kitty nail polish comes in zesty colours like yellow, blue, green, pink, white and orange. Its allure lies in the two-inch tall cap, designed as a Hello Kitty figurine. A definite plus for Hello Kitty fans and collectors alike.

If you've always admired nail art but lamented the limited ready-made designs available, the Kitty nail pen will give you reason to cheer.

It looks and works just like a correction fluid pen except that its non-toxic paint comes in four exciting colours- red, white, orange and yellow. This enables you to express your artistic capabilities and allows infinite control too- even intricate designs will not daunt you. It can be used on any nail surface, painted or otherwise, and can be easily removed with a nail polish remover. Do hurry as stocks will not be replenished when current stocks are sold out.

And don't worry, it's so simple to use you won't have to go crazy trying to decode the Japanese instructions.

The Hello Kitty nail polish and nail pen are priced at \$13.90 and \$9.90 respectively. Also available in its line of cosmetics are compact powder, foundation, eye shadow, eyeliners and even moisturisers! For the complete range of Hello Kitty cosmetics and skin care products, pop down to Kalms' booth or branches at Takashimaya Shopping Centre, Seiyu Bugis Junction, Wisma Atria, Marina Square, Centrepoint and Junction 8. Opening hours are from 10am to 9pm daily.

Add that 60s cabaret feel to your room instantly! From way back when bell-bottoms first got trendy, doorway bead curtains have been the easiest way to add kitsch to your living quarters. Why, what better way to make a dramatic entrance than to push aside those clackety swishers with one noisy sweep?

Bead curtains used to be the interior adornment of the past, adding that charming, rattling ambience that so befitted the glitzy nightclubs of yesteryear. Not that they're just a relic from your parents' hey day either; they've now made a comeback as the trendiest ornaments around, with campy-looking plastic bead curtains seen adorning the windows and doorways of trendy shops like Asylum and Zoom at Far East Plaza and Icon in Orchard Emerald, and even dangling daintily from the ceiling in clubs like Zouk.

But don't just hang bead curtains in your doorways, be creative! Hang them up on your ceiling, in front of the mirror, use them to line your table edges, make groovy headpieces... a little imagination goes a long way!

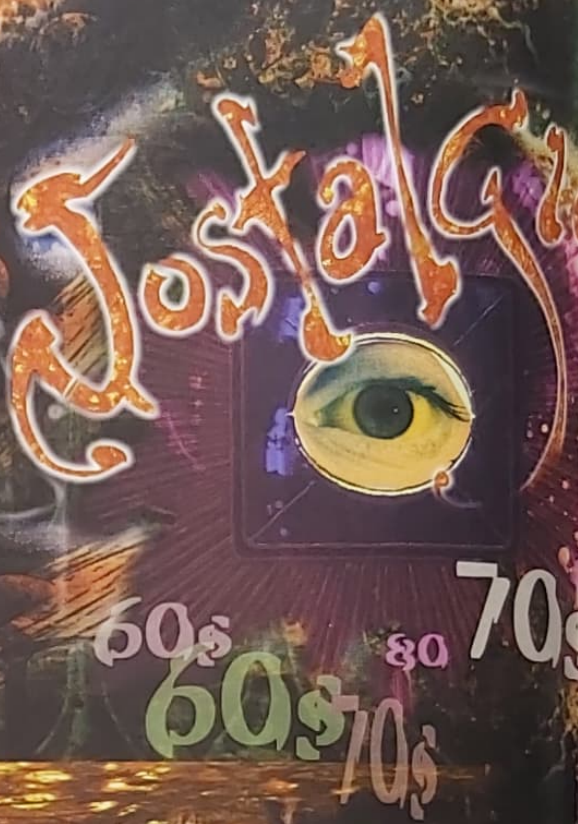
The ethnic, wooden-bead type is the easiest to lay your hands on, but you can also find the gorgeous, bright, plastic variety too, in colours like red, yellow, blue, pink and purple.

Buy yourself an ethnic set in places like Little India, Arab Street and Geylang Serai, but be prepared to scout around first before finding them, as the shops that sell them are pretty small and obscure. You can also try haggling for the best bargains, even though a set costs less than \$20. Decorating your room has never been simpler!

Both the ethnic and plastic beads can be found at Kong Bee Goldsmiths & Jewelers Pte Ltd at Block 2, Geylang Serai, #01-42.

09





Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, 70s and 80s pop culture have made a comeback in Singapore. As retro-mania hits town, unhip Tan Boon Leng braves the winds of change to investigate.

These days, whether you are in school or on one of your weekend sojourns in Orchard Road, chances are you will see numerous teenagers clad in bell-bottoms or platform shoes. Rifle through your classmate's schoolbag and you may even find one of *The Best 80s Party* albums nestling snugly inside.

Indeed, the word "retro" is fast becoming the catchphrase of the late 90s.

What does retro exactly mean? Webster's dictionary defines it as "designating, or suggesting a style of an earlier time that has been revived". The alt.culture website suggests that the baby boomers, people who were born just after World War II (between 1946 and 1960) are rediscovering their youth culture because they now have greater economic clout. This probably explains the profusion of movies dealing with the 60s, 70s and 80s being made in recent years. 1998 examples include *The Ice Storm* which dealt with 70s' American sexual mores and manners, and adaptations from former prime-time series to the big screen, like *Lost in Space*

and *The Avengers*, both epitomes of 60s' campy adventure serials.

After *Grease* reaped in US\$360 million worldwide to become the top-grossing movie musical of all time, the well-oiled engine was re-released in June to commemorate its 20th anniversary. The original *Star Wars* series was also digitally fine-tuned and re-issued as a trilogy in 1997; Jamie Lee Curtis, who made her debut in *Halloween*, is back in its sequel *Halloween H20* (see page 21 for review) a full two decades after it was first screened; and *Saturday Night Fever*, which catapulted a young John Travolta to fame with his Grease-y hair and slick dance steps, even spun off a Singaporean tribute in *Forever Fever*.

These films were made or re-released to capitalise on the nostalgia element for the baby boomers and to maximise profits from a target group which is economically very viable.

But the 'baby boomer' reasoning is not applicable in the local context. Because, here, people riding the retro wave are mainly teenagers and adults in their 20s, not middle-agers.

Most of us were not even born until the late 1970s and were probably just learning how to crawl when the early 80s came round. Why are we now so fascinated with eras that were more like our parents' times? This phenomenon is especially evident these days with youths plugging into retro music and straddling 70s


and 90s fashion.

Youths have been swaying their hips and gyrating to the catchy beats of retro music since 1991 when 'Mambo Jambo' nights were ordained every Wednesday at Zouk. Jumping on the bandwagon not long after were pubs like Wong San and more recently, China Jump at Chijmes. Even the airwaves were not spared from the invasion of retro music. Radio stations like Class 95, Perfect 10 and Power 98 have made 80s retro music a regular staple on their programmes. In fact, Class 95 started a regular three-hour slot every Friday and Saturday for people with a taste for 80s party music. But wherein lies the appeal of retro music?

"Mambo Jambo (nights) have become a culture. It's happy music that people can sing along and have fun to," Zouk deejay Adam Low told *The Straits Times* in August.

Beyond the nostalgic element, the melodic beats and joyful lyrics are probably the reason why 80s pop is experiencing a revival in Singapore. Teenagers, who were just babies and toddlers in the excessive days of the 80s, and young adults who grew up listening to Bananarama and Alphaville are lapping up retro music hungrily.

Up to August, last year's *80s Party Album Vol.1* has sold over 30,000 units and even its follow-up has chalked up sales of over 20,000. To get a measure of the success of these two albums, compare these



or is it just

A FAD

figures to the top-selling *Titanic* soundtrack, which racked up sales of over 50,000 copies. Tower Records alone boasts about 50 compilation titles for 80s music. According to Joanne Chng, Marketing Executive for Tower Records at Pacific Plaza, 10 retro compilation titles were released by local labels and another 20 were brought in by overseas record companies this year. Peacey Lee, 18, a sales assistant at Supreme Records, Far East Plaza, says that 50 to 100 copies of retro music compilations are sold monthly at the outlet. In addition, Bananarama and Alphaville, two of the hottest acts in the 80s, performed to packed crowds when they were in town recently.

Third-year Mass Communication student, Jasmine Sim, 19, who "pops into pubs playing retro music once in a while" gives her opinion for its popularity. "I just like the songs. The beats get people dancing."

Classmate, Wesley Teo, 20, also gives a thumbs-up to retro music, saying that music of the past has a more enduring appeal, "unlike current pop songs."

Mr Chan Seek Kian, 53, a management consultant and father of two children aged 11 and 20 does not agree with Wesley and Jasmine.

"Basically, it's plain repackaging. All the modern technology such as digital remixing...has made it more appealing to the younger generation," he says.

International artistes started rehashing old music years back when the Beatles, the hottest group in the 60s and early 70s released their *Anthology* albums. Just a year ago, The Bee Gees released *Still Waters*, a compilation of their hits from the 70s. Before then, 90s boy bands like Take That and Boyzone had been covering Bee Gees' numbers like "How Deep is Your Love?" and "Words" respectively. Elvis Presley's 50s love anthem, "Can't Help Falling in Love", has also been covered to death by UB40 and U2.

Even Asia has got into the act with Taiwanese musician, Harlem Yu cutting an album comprising 70s English covers in 1997 and Tracy Huang's latest retro-hip release, *Crazy for love* (reviewed on page 22). Just recently, a tribute album covering the former hits of popular 70s Hong Kong band, Wynnners, was released. On the homefront, local diva, Jacintha Abisheganaden did a rendition of Police's 70s hit, "Every Breath You Take", in her album last year.

It is obvious, however, that the craze with 70s and 80s pop culture did not originate from us. Americans have been rehashing 70s fashion since the late 80s and early 90s with velour V-neck sweaters, platforms, jumpsuits and wide cords. Hip-hop artists have been sampling 70s tunes in their songs and compilation albums featuring 70s favourites are hawked on late night television. The kitsch, glitz and ostentation of the 70s are being replayed all over America.

Indeed, most 70s denizens are unlikely to forget aptly-named British supermodel Twiggy. The early 90s saw the rebirth of the "Thin is beautiful" mindset with Calvin Klein

employing waifish teenagers to model its clothes.

Anorexic-looking supermodel, Kate Moss, typifies the new look. Internet newsgroup, *Alt.culture*, describes 70s fashion nostalgia as "evoking drug culture and sexual revolution...and flouting the tyranny of good taste."

But, American baby boomer Paul Bisnette, 51, Deputy Head of Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Film & Media Studies Department, thinks that retro pop culture never did go away but was simply "dormant".

"The audience is still there and people are interested. Maybe due to creative marketing or that films and music are running out of ideas and going back to formulae that worked, retro pop culture is experiencing a revival now."

Still the popularity of *The Avengers* and *Lost in Space* with the local teenage movie audience is quite confounding. But Mr Bisnette has a reason for this.

"The setting is irrelevant. Because it (the film) has got a story that contributes to universal values such as a struggle between good and evil or search for self-identity, people can identify with it and will watch it," he says.

The lecturer who has spent more than 8 years in Singapore draws a parallel between this and the popularity of the locally-produced nostalgia drama, *Growing Up*, in its third season, among teenagers. He

attributed this to the fact that youths can identify with the story's plot.

Older people watch it for the nostalgia element whereas younger ones watch it for the good, old family values that the show preaches.

"It's a yearning...for the values and attitudes of the times. It was a time of good old-fashioned family values and togetherness - qualities that aren't so strong these days - that draw the viewers," Mr J.T. Koh, assistant vice-president at TCS Productions 5 and former executive producer of the show told **8 Days**.

Professor Esther Tan, Head of the Division of Psychological Studies, National Institute of Education, agrees with Mr Bisnette that the nostalgia element is just a small factor in this current retro revival. Group dynamics actually play a more significant part, she believes.

"Basically, this retro revival is more due to teenagers' needs to conform rather than them experiencing nostalgia. Teenagers tend to follow what their friends wear, what music their friends listen to. Conformity to peers is a strong reason."

Her theory is substantiated by 18-year-old Nicholas Lew, who is re-taking his 'O' Levels.

"All my friends wear bell-bottoms and they ask me to buy, so I follow them. Peer pressure," he quips.

Teenagers may also be influenced by the celebrities on television or fashion tips in youth magazines, to follow 70s fashion. 19-year-old Singapore Institute of Management students, Della and Charlene both profess that they look to popular magazines for fashion tips. Della thinks that the idea of flares and polyester "coming back is cool."

Mr Bisnette suggests that another important reason is teenagers' uncertainty with the future. With the economy sliding downhill and the recent slew of films like **Armageddon** and **Deep Impact** perpetuating the idea of global doom in the next millennium, teenagers are looking towards the past for security, hence the retro craze.

"The past was there but the future is uncertain. People may feel more secure about looking towards the past," he says.

While there is definitely no agreement as to why teenagers and young adults are so obsessed with things retrospective, many believe that this will pass.

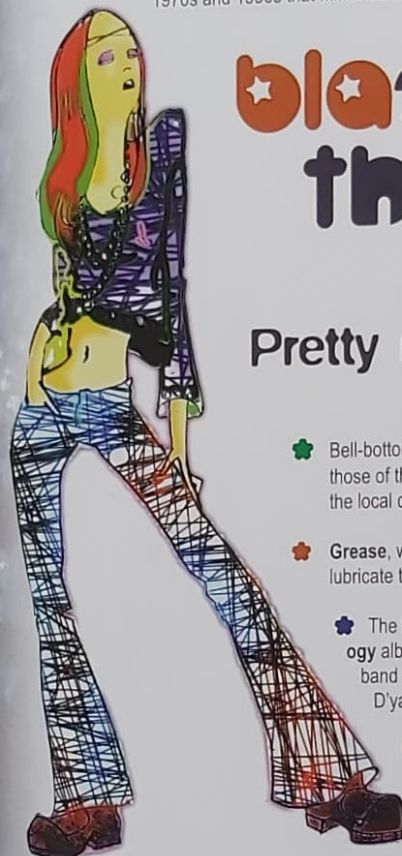
Peacey Lee is matter-of-fact about it. "It's just a passing fad. Fashion comes and goes, and it's not going to stay more than two years, unlike music which has a longer shelf-life."

Professor Tan agrees this will not be the last time pop culture recycles itself. "This (retro revival) is cyclical. You had it happening before, 10 years from now, 90s pop culture itself will be considered retro," she says.

Who knows, maybe the children of the new millennium will be grooving to the Spice Girls dishing out "Wannabe" in a new timescape, snapping their fingers and saying, "Ah, retro!"

Mimi, a 1970s teenager is listening to the Bee Gees' song, "Words", on her cassette player when there is a sudden flash of glaring light.

She passes out. When she awakes, she finds herself listening to the same song but it is coming from an oddly-shaped contraption (a discman). She somehow manages to prise open the device only to find an unidentifiable silver disc labelled Boyzone. Mimi is getting anxious. Looking at the calendar on the table, she realises it is October 20, 1998. Here are some of the similarities and changes between the 1970s and 1990s that Mimi notices when she takes to the street.



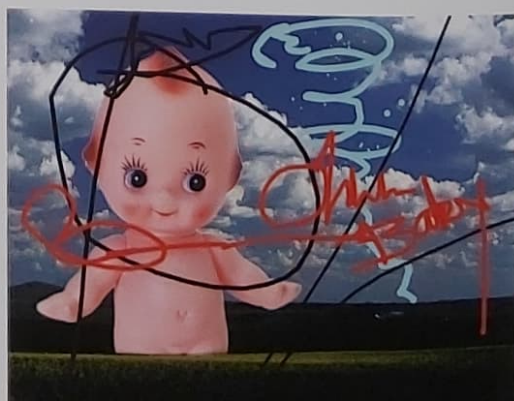
blast from the past

Pretty much like the old days...

- ★ Bell-bottoms are still alive! Except that they're not as flamboyant as those of the 1970s. No sign of polyester shirts for guys, though. Maybe the local climate is too hot?
- ★ **Grease**, which stormed the box office worldwide in 1978, continues to lubricate the box office in its global re-release.
- ★ The Beatles' popularity hasn't waned a bit. Sales of its **Anthology** albums just about confirm them as the world's *bona fide* biggest band unlike a bunch of spitting, uncouth Brit youths. D'ya know what I mean?
- ★ Sean Connery was the Brit hero controlling unpredictable womankind in the Bond movies of the late 60s/early 70s. Now, he's the ornery Scot villain controlling the unpredictable elements in the remake of **The Avengers**. Must be the El Nino phenomenon.

Times, they are a-changing...

- ★ The Village People's "YMCA" got teens grooving at discotheques in the 70s. Harlem Yu's 90s' remake of the same song got the same teenagers of the 70s (now parents) gagging.
- ★ Twiggy was emaciation personified in the 70s. Kate Moss is now the 90s emaciation personified disguised as thinness-chic.
- ★ Hashish, the number one drug of 70s denizens is a has-been. Ecstasy and ice are now the "market leaders."
- ★ John Travolta was absolutely cool in the cinematic icon of the 70s, **Saturday Night Fever**. Adrian Pang, in the local version, **Forever Fever**, is well...er...too hot to be cool.



SARAH ENERGY



Catch the shortest MTV VJ, charismatic Sarah on MTV Most Wanted (Mon-Fri, 7pm), MTV Interactive (Mon-Thu, 5.30pm) and MTV Select (Mon-Thu, 5pm) on Singapore Cable Vision (Channel 11). MTV Interactive also airs on Premiere 12 (Fri, 7pm). Sarah alternates hosting these shows with other MTV VJs.

**Do You Know
that the bubbly
and vibrant
Sarah you see
on telly:**

Was a quiet, moody girl
who never approached
anyone when she was
young?

Spent her childhood living in
places like Pennsylvania,
London and New York?

Often felt intimidated by
Caucasians towering over
her?

Began to 'open up' and hang
out with friends only in high
school?

Returned to Indonesia in
1993 after completing high
school and got involved in
modelling, acting, presenting
on Indonesian government
TV station TVRI, and
deejaying at the radio station
Hard Rock FM before joining
the MTV gang last year?

Has only a few close friends
as she doesn't believe in
trusting people too easily?

SARAH ENERGY

PERSONIFIED



new - improved
formula

SARAH
ENERGY

Indonesian Sarah Sechan, 24, is the latest addition to the MTV block along with Thai babe, Sonia Couling. Touted for her wit and dynamic personality on telly, she exudes the familiar boundless energy off-screen. Jennifer Ong catches up with her and finds out how she's adapting to life as a VJ, and brings up the teasing behind that infamous eyebrow pencil incident!

Sarah, the babe with no eyebrows...

I used to have very thick eyebrows, almost joined together. Just before I came to Singapore, I was modelling for the cover of a magazine. There was this make-up artist who's famous for plucking people's eyebrows. After the shoot, I went home and when I removed my make-up, I was bald! I had no eyebrows, nothing. I'm not used to putting on make-up first thing in the morning and it took me three months to learn how to draw my eyebrows properly. When I came to Singapore, everybody thought I looked like an alien. Friends and family couldn't get used to it and kept saying, "Omigod! Sarah, you have no eyebrows!" They're always teasing me about it, even now.

Sarah on the stereotype: MTV VJs equals sex symbols...

People see Sonia as a sex symbol. She's sexy, sensuous and beautiful. It's the same for Nadya Hutagalung. What they can't see is that she (Nadya) has strong principles in life, or that she believes strongly in saving animals or the oceans. She has something deep within her and so does Sonia.

Sarah versus Sonia...

I'm not going to scream, "No! Don't compare me with Sonia!"... On television if I'm having a good time, and if viewers are enjoying it, I don't care. If I'm going to stress myself out thinking, "Hey, they're comparing us, I have to be different from Sonia. I have to dress differently, speak differently," I won't be enjoying myself. What's the point?

Sarah, the unsexy...

Well, they (viewers) say Sonia's the sexy one. I'm not sexy. But I can't say I'm funny. I'm this or that, it's how different people see me. I'm just me. I don't care what people say, as long as it's positive, not like, "Oh, that Sarah's a slut!" I haven't heard anything like that about me yet, which is good!

Sarah, what annoys her

Sometimes, it's a burden because I have the feeling that people (viewers) expect me to be funny all the time. It's hard when they expect you to be bubbly and all, when sometimes you just feel like sitting there. It's annoying if people (viewers) say, "There! She's the funny one. Listen to her." And when I don't crack any jokes, they go, "She sucks."

Sarah's philosophy: "Do what you want to do and never have any regrets."

I see friends wanting to do something but who were scared to do it. They have regrets after that. I don't want to be like that. When I was offered a job at MTV (in 1997), I was unsure because it would mean the first time I'm away from family. It took me two months to sign the contract because I couldn't make up my mind. But I knew I really wanted to do it. When I'm old, I can talk about it. I don't want to sit down and groan, "Why didn't I do it?"

Sarah in her element... finally

When I was a little kid, I wanted to be an architect, to build a big house with a big garden, I love flowers. Then I wanted to be a banker, like my father. At one point, I wanted to be Madonna, the material girl, and a singer, but of course, I can't sing for nuts. My sister and I would lip-sync in front of the TV set for hours. After working as a presenter in Indonesia, I was planning to study broadcasting in New York when MTV approached me. I'm just thankful that I have a job where in the morning, I wake up and tell myself, "Yes, I like going to work". I can't imagine myself in a situation where I'm working just because of the money, just to put bread on the table."

PERSONIFIED

WARNING: Over exposure to Sarah's shortwave radiation can result in addiction.

time out

WERNER'S OVEN



WERNER'S OVEN

Authentic German food doesn't have to mean a trip to some boisterous beer house or an exorbitant restaurant. For unpretentious yet delicious home-style German fare, look no further than **Werner's Oven**.

Manned by Mr Werner, who hails from Hamburg, and his Singaporean wife, the café cum bakery is as German as you can get. Inconspicuously tucked at the base of a private residential apartment block, it is beside the more slovenly Siglap Coffee Shop. Best of all, **Werner's Oven** is a place where shorts and slippers are the order of the day.

Peering into the cosy café and its adjoining bakery leaves one with an incredible urge to charge in and sweep up all 26 varieties of fresh German bread along with a couple of smiley, palm-sized gingerbread men. Hastiness, however, will leave you so stuffed you'll have to pass up other tempting German delights to be discovered if you take time to explore.

Items on the menu range from world famous German sausages to humble cabbage rolls. For a quick pick-me-up, order the hearty oxtail stew. The piping hot, rich and dark brown gravy is generously peppered with flavourful spices, thick, tender chunks of meat, round potatoes and carrot slices.

For something more substantial, try the Crispy Pork Knuckle or German Meatloaf. The former is an European alternative to pig's trotters, except it is served in a much larger portion and is crunchy, unlike the local variation. The hunk of meat is fried till the skin is incredibly crispy and the flesh like chewy fried chicken. Coupled with sauerkraut (chopped pickled cabbage) and mashed potatoes, this dish makes a scrumptious meal.

The meatloaf, on the other hand, tastes like a springy sausage, so don't go expecting the mushy American version. It is tangy and tasty, however, and is topped with an egg (sunny side up) and sautéed potatoes on the side.

When your craving for savoury fare has been satisfied, cross an open doorway to the adjoining cafe for a taste of some sweet temptations. Even if you've grossly over-eaten and feel incapable of moving an inch, go by your instincts and order from the menu.

The apple strudel is heavenly; its pastry melts in your mouth like butter on a heated griddle to leave you savouring the gorgeous apple filling. Other treats include the cream cheese cake which gives the famous one at Hilton a run for the money, despite being priced at a mere \$2.50 per slice. Also try the Rum Ball and the unbelievably rich Walnut Brownie.

Diners comprise mostly of a motley crowd of locals, Germans and other expats. With stained glass lamps over every table, red-and-white checkered table cloths, cheery German songs and authentic German bric a brac adorning the walls, Werner's is perfect for dining in if you're in the mood for a nice quiet meal. This is one place where you can dine in style while wearing your favourite ratty T-shirt and shorts.

Best of all, Werner's also offers friendly prices - from \$9 for a large bowl of oxtail stew that is served with a bread roll to \$13.50 for the Crispy Pork Knuckle.

So, for mouth-watering grub that's prepared with veritable German fervour, simply put on your slippers and head for **Werner's Oven**.

Produce your NP student pass and get a crunchy Anzac cookie OR a nutrient croissant (while stocks last) with a purchase of any meal of \$12 and above in a single receipt. Offer is valid till January 31, 1999.

Werner's Oven is located at 6, Upper East Coast Road #01-01/02 and is open from 8.30am to 10pm daily except for Mondays. For reservations, please call 442 3897.

by Florence Fong

red house



red house

Forget about Starbucks already! If you're tired of all the slick, commercialised coffee joints, you'll find **Katong Bakery and Confectionery**, or **Red House**, as it's affectionately known, a refreshing change.

Step into the cosy shophouse's first floor and you'll be brought back in time. Everything in Katong Bakery is bona fide vintage, after all, it's been around since 1925! From the glass-and-wood cabinets that hold the kind of butter cakes your grandma used to buy, to the springy, wood-and-metal chairs and tables, to even the Peranakan-style floor tiles, you'll feel like you've just stumbled onto the set of **Growing Up**. Even the friendly uncles who bustle from table to table wear casual cotton shirts and pants reminiscent of the 60s.

Located in Katong, **Red House** is literally just that, as the entire facade of the two-storey shophouse is painted red, achieving a quaint, old-world charm. The second storey is out of bounds to customers, who range from people in their teen to twilight years. **Red House** also attracts patrons from all walks of life. Walk in anytime, and you're likely to see a group of youths sitting a table away from a couple of cigarette-smoking *ah peks*, or a *tai-tai* or two. It's easy self-service here—help yourself to the cakes in the cabinet and later tell the waiter how many you had. This system of trust, as old as the place itself, is still put in practice, so please be honest!

There are a fair number of regulars who come in and buy the old-fashioned cream-filled cone cakes and icing cakes by the boxes, or who just come in for tea, served in heavy glass cups with matching saucers. Choose from the simple array of pastries and buns in the cabinet. The good old fashioned butter cakes never fail to please with their light, spongy consistency, and the *char siew* and curry buns are a savoury delight.

If you're in the mood for something more refreshing, order an ice-cream sundae for three no-frills scoops of chocolate, strawberry and vanilla ice-cream served in a thin metal bowl. The plastic-wrapped, soft white bread is also a hot seller, perfect for toasting lightly with kaya, which you can also buy. All the confectioneries are made in the bakery behind the cafe area in small batches at a time, so they're always fresh from the oven. And the best part is that they each cost 50 cents, not much more than when they were sold years ago.

It's easy to lose track of time in **Red House** when you're under the soothing whirr of the ceiling fans, especially if you're enjoying the privacy of being behind one of the sturdy wooden partitions. It's the ideal place to catch up with friends, while you soak in the quiet, laid-back atmosphere at one of the few places in Singapore where time stands still.

Katong Bakery & Confectionery is located at 75 East Coast Road, opposite Roxy Square. Opens daily from 10.30am to 9pm.

by Sue-Anne Lim

monkeys cafe



monkeys cafe

Don't bother hauling yourself to the zoo just to have lunch with Ah Meng. The **Monkeys Café** has swung into Singapore, offering good food and a jungle ambience that will transport you into the heart of the jungle and bring out the Indiana Jones in you.

The first thing you notice when you walk into **Monkeys Café** is the backdrop of stuffed toy monkeys, trees, and more monkeys. Whether they're hanging from the branches of the plastic trees at the entrance, sitting funky on a grand piano, or lounging at the bar with sports jackets on, there's no way you can miss them. With a backdrop mural of trees and vines, one almost expects Tarzan or George of the Jungle to swing by in loincloth preceded by his thundering animal cry.

So it's no surprise that the items on the menu have been tagged with monkey monikers. Choose from a wide array of cuisine like Monkeys Italian (spaghetti), Gorilla Burgers (that come with huge fries), Monkey Mexicana, or Asean Monkeys (authentic local food like *laksa*). There are also Italian Monkey pastries, or Nice and Naughty Monkey Desserts, to name a few.

What makes this café so special must surely be the King Kong BBQ Beef Ribs (\$25.80) which is so good that it comes with a "Monkey Says Very Good" rating on the menu. This is a dish not only for rib lovers, as it comes as an incredibly huge rack of succulent ribs drenched in the chef's secret sauce. A note to diners: It's impossible to finish this by yourself, so bring a friend to share and you'll see what good value it is.

The law of this jungle is that you shouldn't leave without trying the Nice and Naughty desserts. Choose from banana crepes, ice cream, drinks, and a commendable dessert called Bananarama. Not exactly the 80s pop trio, but delectable nonetheless. This banana and ice cream confection arrives in a frosted cup on top of a crisp biscuit shell, smothered with a generous helping of heavenly strawberry sauce. If you find it too sweet for your liking, you can counter it with recommended Monkey Drinks, which are specially-mixed fruit juices called Chimpanzee Smoothie, Jungle juice, Monkeys Iced Brew, or the Gorilla's Hideout Special.

Apart from eating, you can also watch your favourite movies like the recently released *Godzilla* or *Tarzan* movies, projected on the big screen.

So why not come down and see for yourself? It's guaranteed to make you go ape.

PRESENT THIS COUPON AT THE MONKEYS CAFE TO GET A FREE PASTA DISH WITH THE PURCHASE OF A PIZZA!

OFFER IS VALID ONLY TILL NOV 31 '98

ONLY ONE COUPON IS ALLOWED PER PERSON

THIS COUPON IS NOT FOR USE WITH OTHER OFFERS, DISCOUNTS OR SALES.

hype

The **Monkeys Café** is located at 400 Orchard Road, #01-20, Orchard Towers. Opens daily from 11am to 3am.

by Melissa Joon

the sugar vault



the sugar vault

Combining the best of the past and the future is the latest pub in the Mohamed Sultan Road stretch. Alongside popular nightspots such as Club Samsara, Zeus and Venue, **The Sugar Vault** looks set to take its place among trend-spotting clubs such as Zouk and Venom, which are placing Singapore on the world clubbing culture map.

Standing outside the heavy wooden doors listening to the heavy bass beats thumping from within, one gets the feeling that only the privileged are allowed to enter. And the experience of stepping into the vault, which has three sections, does not disappoint. Confronted with hand-painted floor-to-ceiling murals on stone walls, the experience is awe-inspiring.

The second section sets an entirely different scene, in which trance music, along with silvery cushioned walls, tables and stools, gives the place a futuristic, space age feel. The glamorous, yuppie crowd with wine glasses in their hands only add to the feeling that one has just stepped into another epoch.

When the crowd gets to its most vivacious, a chandelier of disco balls descend from the ceiling to the accompaniment of state-of-the-art lighting and sound, which instantly showers the bar with a dizzying display of kaleidoscopic colours. If not for the absence of a dance floor, clubbers would throw caution to the wind and boogie the night away.

The courtyard, the third area of **The Sugar Vault**, reflects yet another period. Oriental in nature with century-old pots and an authentic water well, it is a welcome respite for those who wish to wind down and relax, away from the ambient, trance music within. Open-aired and breezy, it is ideal for catching up with old friends, or simply contemplating the fragility of life.

Though it may seem schizophrenic, there's no denying its concept is different from other clubs. Those who have had enough of 80s music and conventional, laid-back decors of pubs all over Singapore are advised to develop a sweet tooth for **The Sugar Vault**.

The Sugar Vault, located at 13 Mohamed Sultan Road, is open daily from 6pm to 3am. There is no cover charge and drinks start from \$10 for house pours. For more information, call 836 0010 during office hours.

by Galvin Soh

very decade in recent memory has had its own popular culture identity, its own style, its own contribution to the history books. Flower Power was in full bloom in the 60s, the 70s had Disco, while MTV redefined entertainment in 80s.

The 90s, however, have dashed earlier hopes that it, too, would herald a new identity, a new soul. Eight years down this decade, with grunge decomposing in the dustbin, where it was originally founded, and the promised "cyber-punk" culture a reality only in movies like **Hackers** and **Johnny Mnemonic**, our fingerprint has yet to materialise.

Chicago Tribune journalist Steven Johnson said in 1995 that this may be due to the fact that "there are trends galore in the 90s". Bombarded with so many choices, the 90s "demonstrated remarkable facility at shrugging off labels, like a greased pig eluding yokels [country bumpkins]."

Nearing the end of our decade, it is becoming clear that the one "label" that has stuck with this decade is, ironically, the antithesis of all that is new and technologically advanced in our "Age of the Information Highway". That phenomenon is Retro, or what the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines as "relating to, reviving, or being the styles or especially the fashions of the past".

Judging from movies like **The Avengers** and the re-release of **Grease** in our cinemas, the popularity of oldies, and even that most inventive fashion sphere, whether mass or *haute couture*, also borrowing wholesale from earlier decades, it is clear how much our popular consciousness has been invaded by the past.

This tendency to look backwards for inspiration has led British newspaper

The Observer to note, this year, that

"there is a depressing soullessness to the 1990s"

Ironically, it may be the fast-paced technological changes that have driven so much of this decade, and its effects on people's lives that account for this *soullessness* and our dependency on Retro.

"People are pummelled by a virtual Babel of media voices—from 150-channel TV to the global Internet on personal computers," says Jack Corazzini, director of University Counselling services at Virginia Commonwealth University, in an interview with **Richmond Times**.

history is a "cotton" when things are looking unpredictable," in a 1993 interview with **The Age**.

THE ORPHANED

by Liam Yeo



A more practical explanation for our fascination with old ideas is offered by Gary Goh, 19, a student at Ngee Ann Polytechnic—"there is no room for improvement anymore".

"We are reusing the stuff from the past, because we don't have the creativity to produce anything original," contends the third-year Mass Communication student.

But a local sociologist said that "it is too simplistic" to match a specific concept or identity with a generation. Which is why, in a phone interview with **Hype**, Dr Chua Beng Huat warns against making hasty conclusions on our own lack of identity on the basis of Western evidence.

The Associate Professor of Sociology at the National University of Singapore notes that although local youths are widely exposed to and embrace Western, and especially American, pop culture, they do not really identify with it.

Citing the hit American sitcom, **Friends**, he said, "these people [the characters of **Friends**] are living in abject poverty, loafing around, waiting for that big break. Singaporeans like watching it. But do you see any Singaporeans acting the way they do?"



Prof Chua, adds that it is up to us, the 90s generation, to define who we are, and not someone whose youth was rooted in another generation.

Generation

He adds that it is this discomfort with technology that has stunted the conception of our own unique culture and led to us "hankering for simpler times".

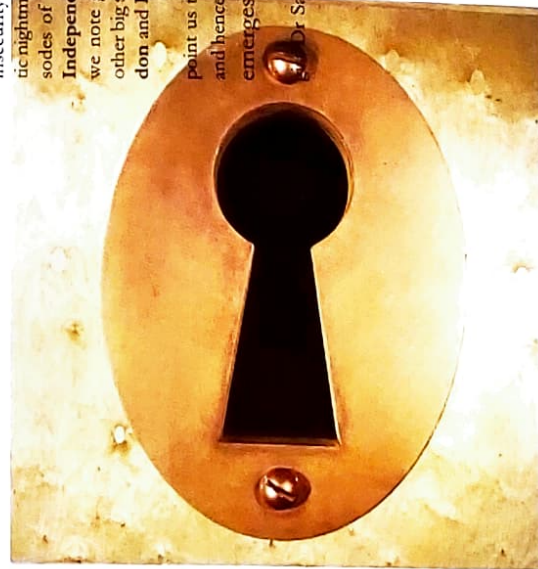
Another reason for our reluctance to embrace the present, could lie in our fears of the apocalyptic and transitory nature of our decade.

"Whenever you have the dawning of a new century, there's a certain degree of insecurity. We don't know what's going to happen," says Gary Hoppenstand, associate chairman of Michigan State University's department of American thought and culture, in the newspaper **Buffalo News**.

Hoppenstand argues that this insecurity manifests itself "in apocalyptic nightmares" and is seen today "in episodes of **The X-Files** and films like **Independence Day**". This is a trend we note gathering steam this year in other big screen releases like **Armageddon** and **Deep Impact**.

He concludes that such fears point us to a time of greater certainty and hence, "Retro popular culture emerges".

Monash University sociologist Dr Sarah Finkelstein concurs that



We alone can decide if history will remember us as the orphaned generation.

DIANA SER : THE LITTLE PRINCESS NO FAIRY TALE

Diana Ser, in the midst of basking in her success on Caldecott Hill, was a wild kampong girl whose forte included bashing up boys and breaking all rules. Eileen Oh meets up with her to relive her kampong days, treasured moments and turning point of her childhood.

Think Diana Ser and the image of the effectively bilingual, composed compere-actress comes to mind. Behind her onscreen competence, however, Diana reveals herself as an uninhibited child most parents would shudder at.

"I used to beat up boys. Once my younger sister and I were playing one-leg (a game where one person tries to catch other players while hopping around on one leg) when the *pasang* pushed my sister from the back. I was so angry with him that I chased him around the canteen wanting to *hantum* (beat) him.

In the end, the poor boy saw doom as he approached a dead-end stairway where there was no escape from Diana. Just imagine a fiery girl kicking and punching the lights out of someone twice her size!

She recalls other triumphs as a 'fighter', saying: "There was another incident where I became very impatient with a boy who refused to play with me. I simply dragged him into a corner and slapped him several times!" This time, however, her display of girl power did not go "unnoticed" after the boy's grandmother who complained to her grandma. Diana was given a good scolding.

Living in the kampong with her grandmother gave her many opportunities to be defiant. "We used to do stupid things like lay newspapers on the corridors of houses and sleep on them till midnight. All of us didn't want to go home early as we felt it was 'adult' to stay out late. To think I was even the only girl then!"

But Diana wasn't a total tomboy either. Remember zero-point, the game where two players would hold the ends of a rope made from rubber bands while the others tried to jump over it?

"I used to be a zero-point queen in my primary school days. My partner was a guy and together, we *chuang tian xia* (conquering the world)," she said, with a gleam of pride.

Still, to say her childhood memories were all innocent would be to ignore the ups and downs which she partly owes her current achievements to.

"The scenario in that movie **Money No Enough** [where loan sharks were haunting those who owe them debts] was an exact replica of what happened in my family. It made me grow up very quickly and I became very independent, finally knowing what to do with my life. After all, I had my younger sister to look after."

As a result, the responsible elder sister came to the fore and her world started revolving around books. No more zero-point, one-legged fun or slapping rude and rowdy boys.

So driven has she become that while studying Mass Communication at the National University of Singapore, she was already co-presenting on the infotainment programme **Consumer News**. And in a recent interview with TCS' MediaCity website, she lamented that her days in school were so filled with school work and filming, there was little time to enjoy her University days.

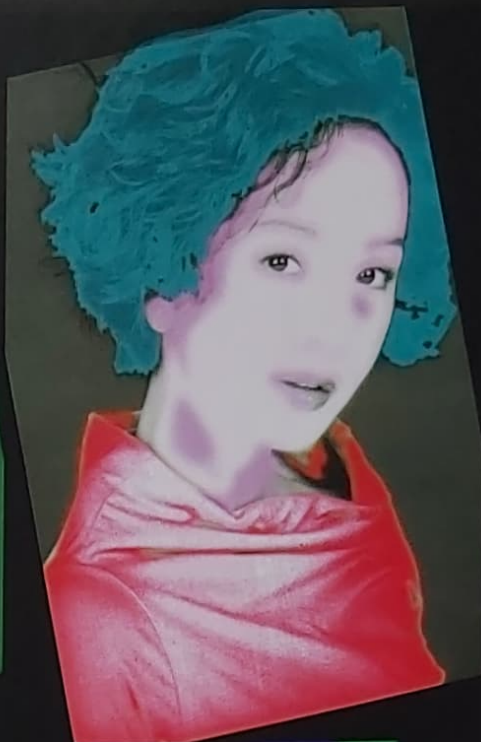
Today, Diana is one of the few local artistes equally adept at handling both English and Chinese hosting jobs, and she has helmed major productions like **President's Star Charity**, as well as starred in English sitcom **Three Rooms**. She insists this has been a childhood fantasy come true.

"When I was young, my younger sister and I would role-play with each other. One of us would act as the compere while the other would be a famous celebrity. The compere would then introduce the celebrity to the 'audience' and the celebrity would perform. After a while, we would switch roles and repeat the same procedure," she laughs.

"I WOULD SAY THAT IT WAS SORT OF A MENTAL PREPARATION FOR ME NOW THAT I'M IN THIS LINE."

Diana concludes that although she had an 'overdose' of hosting jobs, she is not quitting TCS, as rumoured, as the station has already lined up a few Chinese drama serials for her. She plays a doctor in an upcoming Chinese drama serial, tentatively titled **Doctor Files**, which films this month.

While fans of Diana wait in anticipation for the serial to air early next year, we hope her bedside manners are better than her violent outbursts as a child might suggest.



PEEP
SHOW

the star system
rating guide



Watching frozen meat
defrost would be more
interesting.



Slightly more interesting
than counting the hairs
on your chest.



More satisfaction than
finding 10c some poor
loser left behind at the
coin phone.



Even better than
knowing the difference
between "stationary" and
"stationery".



Definitely more gratifying
than getting an extra
McNugget.



Oh, this is half a star, in
case you're wondering.

RUSH HOUR

Starring :: Jackie Chan
& Chris Tucker
Director :: Brett Ratner
94 minutes



Die-hard Jackie Chan fans expecting a feast of kung fu fighting in **Rush Hour** are likely to leave the cinema disappointed. This film, which is supposed to be Chan's bona fide Hollywood vehicle after his early 80s stinker, **Cannonball Run**, falls short of his trademark physical action. The 90-minute action-comedy is instead a smorgasbord of wisecracks and jokes where the closest thing you get to a punch even after an hour of the show, are the punchlines which keep coming hard and fast from talented comedian, Chris Tucker.

Tucker plays James Carter, a quick-talking LAPD cop who looks more like a ghetto superstar-wannabe than an upholder of justice, with his flashy clothes and even flashier sports car. He is drafted by the FBI to "baby-sit" Lee (Jackie Chan), a Hong Kong policeman who arrives in America to rescue the kidnapped daughter of his Chinese government official friend.

The self-centred Carter resents having to work with Lee. The pair get into numerous verbal duels before finally hitting it off and pulling off the ultimate rescue after a series of foul-ups.

Carter and Lee's frequent squabbles provide ample comedic relief in the absence of physical action. The plot is nothing much to rave about, but the rapport between the two actors is admirable. Tucker, especially, steals the thunder from lead actor Chan, with his madcap antics and sidesplitting jokes.

Director Brett Ratner of **Money Talks** fame surprisingly breaks a Hollywood tradition by casting a Chinese and Afro-American as the protagonists. The head honcho of the Hong Kong triad responsible for the kidnapping surprisingly turns out to be a white American.

The American race issue is also examined rather cynically in one scene where the ignorant Lee tries to befriend a black bartender by asking him, "Wassup, nigger?" and ends up scuffling with the latter and his chums.

Although **Rush Hour** falls flat despite its pre-release hype, the verbal ripostes between the lead actors and Tucker's perfectly-timed wisecracks make this more tolerable than sitting through Los Angeles' notorious traffic congestion.

by Tan Boon Leng



THE NEGOTIATOR

Starring :: Samuel L. Jackson
& Kevin Spacey
Director :: F. Gary Gray
135 minutes



Just when you are sick of all the mindless, blood-splattering action flicks Hollywood has the budget to offer, here comes a rare one which actually does not take you for an idiot savant with a body-counting obsession.

Director F. Gary Gray makes his major debut in this engaging action-drama with the support of a big boy cast of Samuel L. Jackson, Kevin Spacey, Ron Rifkin (**LA Confidential**), David Morse (**Contact**) and John Spencer (**The Rock**).

Samuel L. Jackson plays Danny Roman, a Chicago cop whose job is to negotiate with hostage-takers. Ironically, he gets framed by bad boys in blue for the theft of US\$2 million in disability funds and ends up taking hostages to secure justice for himself.

When friends can't be trusted, Roman turns to a stranger whose professionalism he respects, Chris Sabien, a big league negotiator from another precinct. He only wants to negotiate with Sabien (Kevin Spacey) and the ensuing process reveals more than meets the eye in this true story set in St. Louis.

The Negotiator goes deeper than another good-cop-turned-bad show. Roman is sharp. Sabien is cool. Very distinct styles at play, very intriguing characters to watch.

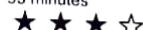
Kudos to Gray for the faultless casting of Jackson and Spacey. Individually they are incredible "talk" actors: Jackson as the philosophising hitman in **Pulp Fiction** and Spacey as the deceptive conman in **The Usual Suspects**. **The Negotiator**, however, is the showdown. This is it—two most brilliant actors meeting for the first time.

Buy a big bag of popcorn 'cos you're gonna enjoy this one.

by Clement Choo

THE BIG HIT

Starring :: Mark Wahlberg &
Lou Diamond Phillips
Director :: Che-Kirk Wong
93 minutes



Mark Wahlberg stars in this action comedy as Mel Smiley, an unlikely hitman whose obsession with popularity sees him being taken advantage of. When he and fellow hitman Cisco (Lou Diamond Phillips), Crunch (Bokeem Woodbine), and Vince (Antonio Sabato Jr.) go out on killing assignments, he does the dirty work while they get the cash bonuses. Even the women in his life take him for a ride—both his fiancée and mistress pocket his money before leaving him.

Things take a turn for a worse when he agrees to take part in Cisco's get-rich-quick kidnap plan. The girl they kidnap turns out to be the goddaughter of their furious boss, who puts Cisco in charge of bringing him the culprits. Desperate to save his skin, Cisco lays the blame on Smiley, who is tipped off by Crunch a minute before being ambushed. To complicate matters sparks fly between him and his charming young abductee (played by newcomer China Chow), who makes him realise that he has to stop living for other people.

While **The Big Hit** may not have a terribly original script, even resembling Alicia Silverstone's **Excess Baggage** at times, it's the colourful characters who make the movie watchable. Wahlberg manages to live up to his post-**Boogie Nights** status as a respectable actor while endearing us to his character. In a scene after he escapes his assailants and survives several car crashes and explosions, he dutifully walks into a video store and returns a long-overdue copy of **King Kong Lives**.

Phillips turns in a wicked performance as the double-crosser we love to hate, and the rest of the characters, especially his caricatured parents-in-law, are exceptionally well cast. The one exception is Sabato Jr., whose meagre screen appearances are less memorable than even the obnoxious video store clerk.

All in all, the movie makes for an entertaining one and a half hours. **The Big Hit** might not be a blockbuster hit, but it has its moments of witty dialogue and a few good stunts which make it all the more enjoyable. If you're the type who likes cheesy flicks of the **Lethal Weapon** meets **Naked Gun** variety, this one's for you.

by Sue-Anne Lim

MOVIE

RE-

VIEWS



HALLOWEEN H20:

Jaded horror fans should rejoice.

Starting October 27, moviegoers will see Jamie Lee Curtis reprise her role 20 years later as the original scream queen in *Halloween H20*, the latest movie to add to the ranks of the new breed of horror movies.

20 YEARS LATER

After 20 years, Laurie Strode, who spent the majority of the *Halloween* movies screaming and cowering by night, finally becomes in *H20* the strongest into a strong 90s woman to do some axe wielding of her own.

Twenty years after her ex-husband's brother first began his terrifying attempts on her life in the first *Halloween*, Laurie Strode has raised her daughter to a safe crash and assumed a new identity to protect herself and her son. Now Keri Green is the mother of a private school, which her 17-year-old son, John (played by Josh Hartnett) is also attending.

As the 20th anniversary of her brother's murderous rampage approaches, nightmares and flashbacks of her evil brother Michael Myers haunt her. The students decide to throw a Halloween party, and it is there and then that Michael turns up, knife in hand, with more on his mind than carving up pumpkins.

This sequel's eerily masked villain is played by stuntman Chris Durand. Calmly stalking his victims, Durand's performance as Myers is nerve wracking to say the least. The mask he wears was designed specially to terrorise audiences with its emotionless facade, which is all the more frightening for its semblance to the human face.

But where other horror movies rarely deal with the killer's psyche, content to give him as much massacre time as possible, *Halloween H20*'s portrayal of the psychopathic killer is refreshingly unconventional. Behind the unstoppable maniac, we get insight to the tortured man whose dependence on his mask is almost pitiable.

Director Steve Miner cut his teeth on *Friday* the 13th parts 2 and 3, and his experience gives him a keen eye for what works for horror aficionados. His skilful manipulation of the dark and shadows helps him create the right atmosphere to better build up suspense and apprehension.

Miner's love for the genre is evident with the various tributes to other horror movies, both classic and recent, in *H20*.

In a scene that pays homage to Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Jamie Lee Curtis' real mother Janet Leigh appears in a cameo role. Best known as the woman who met her end in the famed shower scene in *Psycho*, she is shown next to the same model car that is shown in the movie that propelled her to stardom.

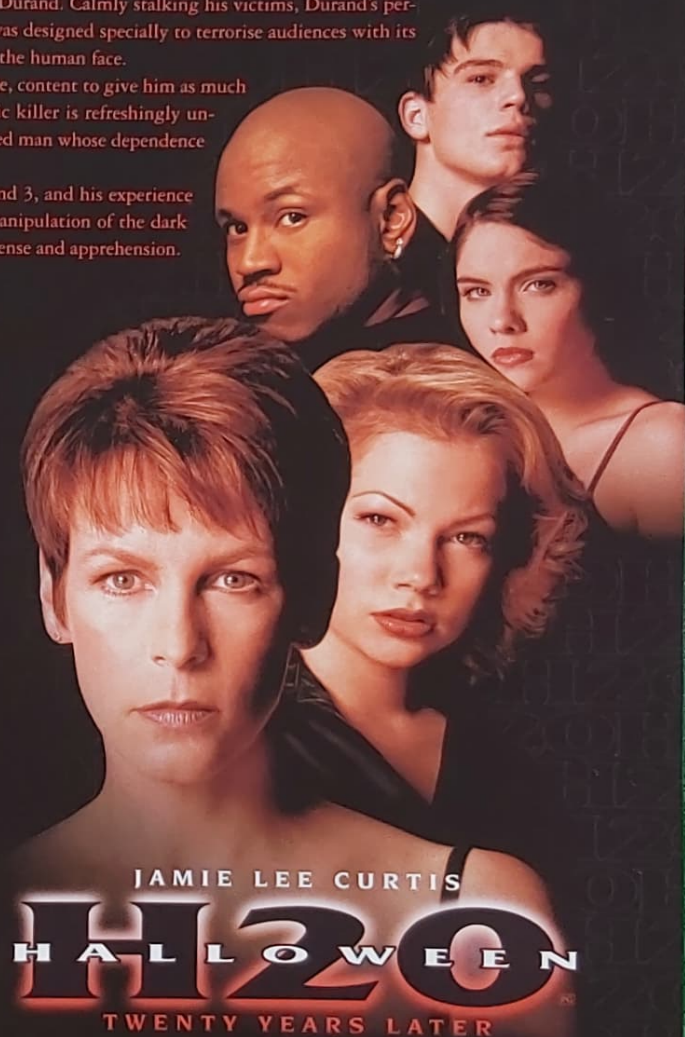
In another instance, *Scream 2* can be seen playing on the

dormitory television. That comes as no surprise, however, with Kevin Williamson as scribe. As screenwriter for *Scream*, he was directly influenced by the original *Halloween*.

Halloween H20 steps away from the B-grade horror movie tradition of insulting its audiences' intelligence with the assumption that blood and violence is all they want. Instead of playing up the gore and splatter scenes, the thriller emphasises its almost unbearably suspenseful sequences.

Halloween H20 has done well, catering to the more discerning MTV generation who grew up on a steady diet of screen violence, with devious plot twists, better character development and a female protagonist who is more realistic in today's world of strong, independent females.

It also injects new and much needed blood into the genre, giving know-it-all movie buffs a new reason to embed their nails into the theatre seats.



WIN tickets to catch HALLOWEEN H20 & exclusive HALLOWEEN H20 posters and stickers.

The first 20 correct entries get a movie sticker and a pair of tickets to watch *Halloween H20* with a friend. The next 10 get a free *Halloween H20* poster. Each person is entitled to only 1 coupon.

Submit your entries on Friday, 13 November '98 between 11 am and 5pm to Hype at the Newsroom, located at room 52-02-01 on the Ngee Ann Polytechnic campus.

Prizes will be given out on a first come, first serve basis, so hurry!

A. Name the actress who plays Laurie Strode in HALLOWEEN H20!
B. Name the serial killer who returns after twenty years in HALLOWEEN H20!

A. _____

B. _____

name: _____

department: _____

student no.: _____

contact no: _____

music reviews

* * * the platters that matter



Brandy
Never Say Never
Warner Music
★ ★ ★

Although she started out as a 15-year-old teen actress in the TV series **Thea**, Brandy surprised the R&B scene by emerging with an impressive self-titled debut album in 1994, which sold four million copies.

Brandy, now 19, is back with a new album, **Never Say Never**, which proves that she is not a one-hit wonder. Containing a total of 16 tracks, it is a healthy mix of R&B, pop ballads and soulful tunes. Her first single, "The Boy is Mine", a duet with fellow R&B singer Monica, not only shot up the **Billboards** charts soon upon its release, it has also won her a nomination for MTV's Best Video of the Year. The fact that she co-wrote and co-produced the song, must make success all the sweeter for Brandy.

"Top of the World", a collaboration with hip-hop star MASE, addresses Brandy's insecurities about life. Combining a catchy, funky rhythm with the faultless rap of MASE and Brandy's sexy vocals, the song is bound to find its way to the top of the chart, if not get you down on the dance floor. However, the album's last track, a cover of Bryan Adams' "Everything I Do (I Do It For You)", is disappointing. Brandy fails to infuse her characteristic sexy edge and style to the song, thus spoiling the overall feel of the refreshing album.

Brandy's sultry but weak vocals has never been an asset, and this is perhaps the main kink on an otherwise satisfyingly well-crafted album. However, this second album of Brandy's is still pleasing to the ears, and well-worth the sticker price.

by **Pauline Tan**



Tracy Huang
Crazy for love
EMI
★ ★ ★

Tracy Huang's last *magnum opus* was arguably the poignant and sincere "Crying Sand". Since then, she's churned out run-of-the-mill love songs like "Inclined to Believe", "Restriction" and "Changing the Mind" which still managed to strike a chord with listeners.

But in **Crazy for love**, her latest and 50th offering after 25 years in the business, Tracy clearly sheds her image as a crooner singing about unrequited love. She does this by boldly experimenting with drum and bass in "Midnight sky" and even hip-hop for the languid "Lower with two faces". Alas, she distances fans with her new musical direction.

One can't help feeling that Tracy should stick to her tried-and-tested formula, such as the high listenability factor of the title track and "None of us is right", which distinctly brings out her trademark emotive and slightly breathless vocals.

"None of us is right" is a hit in the making. Penned by local composer, Zhang Meijie, the track's beautiful piano and string accompaniment leads on to the repetitive chorus where Tracy brilliantly essays empathy in subtly conveying the emotions of dejection. And in the 70-ish sounding and poetic "Sunset Boulevard", her voice floats lightly and sensually, *a la* the late Teresa Teng.

The only bright note in her dabbling with new music genres is "So near yet so far away", penned by Sezgo, the frontman of Japanese pop group, Luna Sea. His New Age musical arrangement coupled with her hypnotic vocals induct listeners into her world of unreciprocated love and regrets.

Tracy should be applauded for trying to reinvent her music. But her forte remains in crooning heart-rending love songs. After all, they're the secret of her longevity in the fickle world of Chinese music.

by **Tan Boon Leng**

Five copies of Brandy's latest album, Never Say Never are yours to win.

WIN!



ALANIS MORISSETTE

what you oughta know

by **Galvin Soh**

Judging from the frequent airplay allocated to "Uninvited", Alanis Morissette's contribution to the **City of Angels** soundtrack, fans' appetite for Morissette's angry, bitter tunes have only grown in her two-year hiatus since **Jagged Little Pill**.

But they won't have to wait any longer. Morissette returns with a vengeance on November 3, with her new album **Supposed Former Infatuation Junkie**, containing 17 songs, including "Uninvited".

Morissette once again teams up with Glen Ballard, with whom she co-produced this album. "Thank U", the first single off the album, is an ethereal ode to Morissette's recent stay in India. Led Zepplin-styled "Baba" is rockish, while "Front Row" is Morissette at her ironic best – familiarly caustic yet exotic. In "So Pure", Morissette goes pop with buoyant lyrics "I love you when you dance / When you're freestylin'... So pure" – no doubt a big step away from songs which typified her as an angst-ridden rocker chick.

While things were quiet on the Morissette front after her Grammy-winning spree in 1996,

similarly angry females rose to have their say, such as Paula Cole, Sarah McLachlan and Fiona Apple. All of them were part of the phenomenally-successful **Lith Fair**, a travelling festival celebrating women in music, touted as one of the best musical events of 1997.

Given her talent, Morissette, however, should have no problems making up for lost time. She was awarded the Best Music Video (Long Form), for **Jagged Little Pill** at the Grammy's this year, adding to her string of awards including four Grammys in 1996, an International Achievement Award at the 1997 Juno Awards (Canada's answer to the Grammy's), and other American Music, Brit, Juno and MTV Music Video awards. All these were achieved because of her third album, **Jagged Little Pill**, which sold more than 24 million copies worldwide.

Morissette, 24, recently released a limited edition box set, containing "clean" versions of "You Oughta Know" and "Hand In My Pocket", along with other singles recorded live while she was on tour in Australia in 1996.

Cut out the album cover above and mail it along with your name, student number and contact number to: The Editor, Franny Contest, hype magazine, Dept. of Film & Media Studies, Block 23, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, 535 Clementi Road, Singapore 559489. Send in your entries now! Closing date is January 31, 1999.

WIN! Win yourself a limited edition, individually-numbered copy of **Alanis Morissette – The Singles Box**.



All Saints
Bootie Call (Single)
London Records
★ ★ ★

When the spark of the Spice Girls started to fizzle with the departure of Ginger Spice, British dance-pop quartet All Saints were slated by the music industry to supplant them.

Their latest single, **Bootie Call**, distills their soul, hip-hop and R&B influences into a mild blend. Yet, the music maintains its flirtatious style as sensual vocal harmonies glide smoothly over underpinnings of stirring feelings and a slow, catchy rhythm. This is a delightful variation from their first and anonymous album that spawned several hit singles like "Never Ever" and "I Know Where It's At".

Their success has proven itself in less than two years, with their songs constantly on MTV's hitlists and Top Ten charts in Europe and Asia. Not bad for a group (sisters Nathalie and Nicole Appleton, Melanie Blatt and Shaznay Lewis) that started out in a tiny studio at All Saints' Road in London, and hence their name.

The single consists of three tracks – two different versions of **Bootie Call** and "Get Down", a bonus track. The single version has an alluring and funky quality to it while the "Director's Cut" version embodies more soul. "Get Down" is a refreshing change from soul to pop, with their voices conveying a range of moods,

by **Melissa Joon**

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THE TEARDROP STORY

WOMAN

Catherine Lim

Orion :: \$28.33

★ ★ ★ ☆

TO BE BORN FEMALE IN

a conservative Chinese household is curse enough; but to be born one with an unlucky teardrop mole that presages disaster for the family compounds the calamity.

Set in Malaya in the 1950s, the story revolves around Mei Kwei, the beautiful and precocious youngest daughter of an opium addict who favours sons more than anything. The object of her father's contempt, she is, however, a magnetic force among the boys in her small Malaysian town of Luping.

The intensely spirited Mei Kwei is faced with the challenges of having to fend off the attention of three men she cannot love. There is her own Big Older Brother who is fiercely possessive and Old Young whose financial help to her bankrupt family depends on her consent to become his fourth wife. Young, rich, handsome, and English-educated Austin Tong also loves her deeply for being the only girl who can rescue him from his tormented childhood.

But ever the tragic figure, Mei Kwei falls in love with a man who cannot and must not love her back - Father Francois Martin, a French priest sent as a missionary to Luping.

Local author Catherine Lim colours her story with her trademark blend of English and local dialects. Familiar words like *Ah Soh*, *Ah Chek* and *ang moh*, direct

translations of dialect and un-PC phrases like "I will have to eat my own shit first before I smell the white man's", are rife in her book.

The story explores the idea of true love in a time when family duty and responsibility were of utmost importance. Lim injects sarcasm-laced humour into her story as she manoeuvres through sensitive issues like politics, culture and religion.

You will find the writing style familiar as it is similar to her previous works like *The Bondmaid*. If you're tired of books by foreign authors, and really crave something nostalgic and closer to home, *The Teardrop Story Woman* is a good alternative.

by Pauline Tan

AN UNDERACHIEVER'S DIARY

Benjamin Anastas

The Dial Press :: \$24.90

★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

AT FIRST GLANCE, ONE WOULD be inclined to think that *An Underachiever's Diary* is a careless publisher's mistake, for one, the book jacket is frightfully empty - a white expanse, pure blankness. Only upon closer inspection does one notice the obscure book title and author's name inconspicuously placed at the far bottom of the cover. The author is clearly out to prove a point.

In his debut novel, Benjamin Anastas, a prize-winning fiction writer from American magazine *Gentleman's Quarterly* (GQ), pens a semi-autobiography on being the weaker, less perfect of a pair of twin brothers. Shamelessly self-derogatory, Anastas gives a detailed account of his life as the doomed half.

Heartbreaking and hilarious at turns, Anastas has no qualms about pouring forth his experiences as the born loser. His story begins at the age of two, when the best he could manage was an indecipherable 'buh' as opposed to his twin's articulate "bedtime!", and stretches to adulthood when his brother became a capable lawyer and he, an errand boy.

More than just appealing to our compassion for the underdog, the author endears himself by entwining their glaringly opposite destinies with nothing but love for his flawless twin.

Any bitterness that might be evident is directed at himself.

Moreover, the purpose of this novel is neither to garner sympathy nor to lament a far from perfect life. Rather, Anastas says, "I have come to recognise the beauty of everything I've missed. I have learned a reverence for broken things, for our fragile bodies and for the transitory nature of human relationships. Like a modern day ascetic, I will call this beauty *holiness*."

Whether he likes it or not, this novel has just heralded the end of Anastas' underachieving days.

by Florence Fong

PROZAC NATION.

Elizabeth Wurtzel

Orion :: \$27.99

★ ★ ★ ★

THERE IS SOMETHING seriously wrong with Elizabeth Wurtzel.

She's smart and good looking, and yet finds reason to mutilate her ankles with razor blades. She feels like she's a defect. She's suicidal. Her favourite pastime is crying. All she wants are pills, pills and more pills.

Elizabeth Wurtzel's memoir traces her life as a manic-depressive, from the instant she plunges into this mental disorder as a bright little girl of 12 to her subsequent maturity into hopelessly miserable womanhood.

Note, however, that this book is not about recovery from a mental disorder. It isn't heart-warming. Most of all, it isn't about hope. It is dark and depressing, declaring right from the prologue that she is still a manic-depressive despite treatment under the drug "Prozac", which is where the book takes its name.

Wurtzel's wry, almost demented humour throws the reader whizzing and reeling onto a roller-coaster ride full of booze, pot, pain-killers and sex, and into the private mental confines of a truly tortured soul.

Uniquely post-modern, Wurtzel writes in a style that typifies Generation X and the MTV culture with its fast-paced, throbbing simplicity that compels the reader to feverishly consume her story. This she does while masterfully forging a book that is not only a tale about manic depression but is also an extremely insightful parody of a world that still believes that there is a pill for every problem.

by Liam Yeo

WORK AND OTHER OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS

Bruce Lansky

Meadowbrook :: \$17.99

★ ★ ★

"A lot of fellows nowadays have a B.A., M.D., or Ph.D. Unfortunately, they don't have a J.O.B." - singer, Fats Domino.

A 30% PAY CUT ACROSS the board. Retrenchment. Bombarded daily with bad news about the current economic turmoil, the future, as Domino notes, looks grim even for graduates with a string of titles.

Work and Other Occupational Hazards, however, is not the panacea for the desperate job seeker. Instead of being another self-help manual to acquire, it is actually a collection of witty quotes, jokes, poems and cartoons about employment by American author, Bruce Lansky.

Personalities from a range of fields like singer Fats Domino, actor-director Woody Allen, ex-US President Ronald Reagan, author Mark Twain and ex-British Prime Minister Winston Churchill are among those whose ingenious comments about work are compiled in this quote book.

During this time of economic gloom, **Work and Other Occupational Hazards** provides a light-hearted yet realistic outlook on the job market. It is a book to cheer you up, and if you need advice on how to answer difficult interview questions, perhaps you might want to remember *not* to cite this classic example:

"Interviewer: This job requires someone who is very responsible.

Applicant: That's me. At my last seven jobs, whenever anything went wrong, I was responsible. - Anonymous"

by Lynn Lee

Tea, Coffee & Reflections

by Lee Amizadai and Nawaz Marican

Chinese theatre group Glass is set to shatter tradition with its first English doublebill.

From local writer David Lee's 1994 book *The Sins of the Fathers*, comes *In Search of a Mermaid* and *Woman Down Orchard Road*. Playwright and director William Wu says that both plays were chosen from the prize-winning collection of short English stories, because they deal with topics that lie close to the heart of modern society. The development of relationships in extraordinary circumstances is also explored in both performances.

In *Woman Down Orchard Road*, a prostitute with a burdened past and a troubled teen who has lost his friend to drugs discover that they have more in common with each other than they expect. Finding themselves in the curious situation where total strangers can become closer than friends or family, both of them confide in each other the weariness of their shady lives.

Delving into the psyche of older people who marry, *In Search of Mermaids* illustrates the power that societal prejudice wields over individuals' lives. A family's harmony is disrupted when a 60-year-old widower's decision to marry a younger woman meets objection from his daughter.

The first in the series of plays referred to as **Tea, Coffee and Reflections**, the event does not end after the performance. Audiences are invited for post-performance refreshments and discussion with the cast, director and writer to foster better understanding of what has recently transpired.

So mark your calendar for November for a chance to reflect on the intricacies of the human relations.

Glass will be performing the doublebill from November 12 to 15, at 8pm. Matinees will be held on November 14 and 15, at 3pm. Performances are at the Substation's Guinness Theatre, at 45 Armenian Street. Tickets, priced at \$10 (for matinees) and \$12 (evening shows), are available at all TicketCharge outlets or Hotline Booking at 2962929.

Chang & Eng

by Evalyn Mak

If you think having to share the same room as your brother is bad enough, imagine having your sibling attached to you 24 hours a day, for the rest of your lives.

That was the life of Chang and Eng, the "original" Siamese twins, who were joined together at the chest by a band of flesh. They lived their whole lives together, even marrying American sisters and having 21 children. Action Theatre's musical, **Chang & Eng** chronicles their entire lives, from their childhood in Siam, to their lives as farmers in the American state of North Carolina, up to their deaths in poverty.

Embarking on its third run, **Chang & Eng** is predicted to repeat the success of its past two seasons. The highly acclaimed production became the first English musical to be staged in China, at the invitation of the National Opera and Ballet of China in November 1997. Now there's even talk of bringing **Chang & Eng** to Hollywood, a first for a local musical.

Action Theatre gives you another chance to catch this highly recommended musical. Featuring a cast of stage veterans like Hossan Leong and Selena Tan, **Chang & Eng** will delight your senses with authentic early 19th century Thai and American costumes, tunes from local composer Ken Low, and elaborate stage sets.

Chang & Eng's third local run begins at Victoria Theatre on January 7, 1999. Performances will last for two weeks. Tickets priced at \$25, \$35, \$50, \$60 and \$70 are available at all TicketCharge outlets. Call TicketCharge at 296-2929, or pop by their website at www.ticketcharge.net. Book before October 20 to enjoy a 15% discount. Citibank cardholders get a 20% discount.

RETRO FEVER



RETRO FEVER NITE 17 DECEMBER

WIN PRIZES IN THE GRAND LUCKY DRAW!!!

The highlight of Retro Fever Nite 1998, however, has to be the Grand Lucky Draw, which dares a top prize of a three-day, two-night stay at an Orchard Park's Suite Prestige service apartment. Other prizes include Takashimaya shopping vouchers, food vouchers, Borders books and \$100 vouchers. Compact discs will also be given to winners of a spot dance contest.

Retro Fever Nite 1998 promises lots of fun and great prizes to be won. So why not dig out your father's old bell-bottom pants and squeeze into his outrageous polyester top, and let your hair down at this year's craziest NP bash?

Retro Fever Nite 1998 will be held at Holiday Inn Park View hotel from 7 pm to 1 am on December 17. Tickets cost \$55 each and those interested can contact the Building Department Society at Blk 73, 04-08.

by Tan Boon Leng

Nearly 1,000 people attended Jeeva Gaanam '97, the annual variety show presented by Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Indian Cultural Society (ICS).

This year's offering, a musical drama which fuses hip hop, folk and classical elements, is likely to attract no smaller an audience.

Built around the unique theme of "Jothi", meaning "a flame of hope", Jeeva Gaanam '99 hopes to light up the lives of the audience by entertaining them with a 2-hour drama incorporating familiar songs from famous Tamil movies and self-choreographed dances to highlight the goodness of the Indian community.

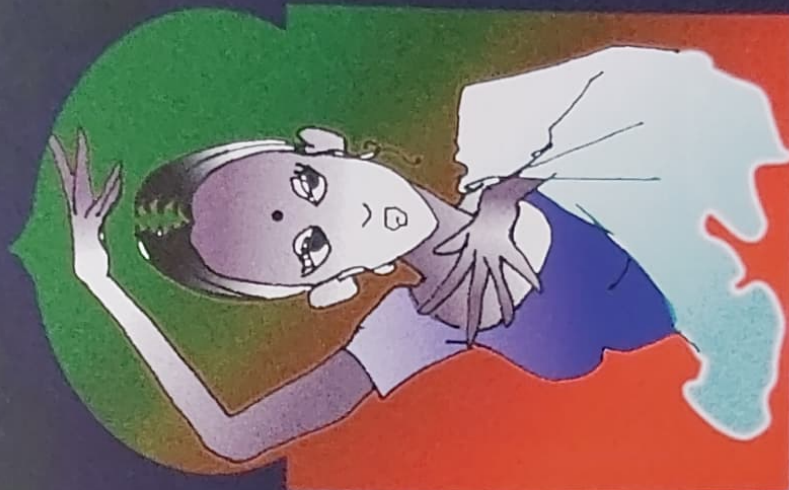
Their performance will appeal to audiences of different races and interests as dance items of differing styles are incorporated in the production. Expect witty Tamil dialogue, interspersed with English expressions, that will not only bring laughter but also tug on the heartstrings of viewers.

Audiences will also be treated to a feast of colourful costumes specially designed and tailored by ICS to best portray the character in each role. Nor was effort spared to make the props detailed and realistic to bring out the inherent drama in every scene.

For those looking forward to a new year of inspiration, Jeeva Gaanam '99 must not be missed!

Jeeva Gaanam '99 promises to bring its flame of hope to World Trade Centre Auditorium, January 2, 1999 at 7pm. Tickets at \$10 and \$12 are available at the Indian Cultural Society Clubhouse at Blk 73, #02-05.

by Kenny Wong



INDIAN CULTURAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MUSICAL

JEEVA GAANAM '99

Date: 2ND JAN 1999

what do you remember most about your childhood?

What's
With

watching the smurfs
my favourite was brainy smurf. i
loved to watch him get thrown out of the vil-
lage at the end of the episode and see his
spectacles get smashed up. **CAROLINE TAN**

MCM, 3RD YEAR

proudly posing as mr. yakki on a bad hair day.

BRANDON BEH ECE, 2ND YEAR

hulk hogan 'cos
he was my hero! **YEK QUNT** BS, 1ST YEAR

the song
"especially for you" by kylie minogue & jason
donovan reminds me of my first crush at the
age of 11.

GARICK KEA BEM, 3RD YEAR

slick
michael jackson. he was quite cool man...

BERTRAM ONG CCS, 3RD YEAR

sesame street. big
bird & oscar... and the 1-2-3-4-5 song!

LIM

FSV, 1ST YEAR

holding secret meetings
with my friends in an isolated part of the field.
we imagined ourselves to be characters from
the "famous five".

MARCUS GOH BEM, 1ST YEAR

guns 'n' roses. bon jovi & vanilla ice

IBRAHIM B JUASA SOE, 1ST YEAR

kachang putih
at bedok cinema. cinema tickets at \$3.50 too!

JOANNE HOO CEE, 2ND YEAR

samantha fox. you
should know the reason.

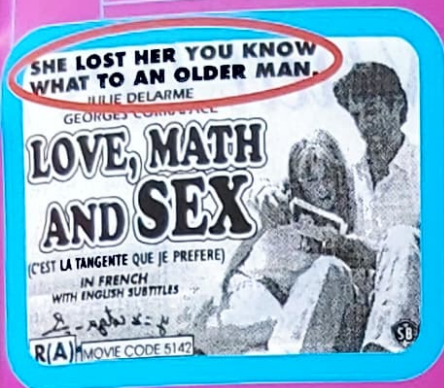
SIVA S/O GOPALA KRISHNAN

ME, 3RD YEAR

oh my

gawd!

The lucky older man got her abacus.



Hard act to swallow

Oh Beng goes to an interview. When asked to come up a story with 5 colours: Green, Pink, Yellow, Blue and purple, he thinks for a while and he goes...

Ok, ok... one day, the phone 'green' 'green', I 'pink' up the phone and say, "yellow? yellow?" Then, I hear no answer. So, I ask again, "Blue is it, huh?" Still, no answer. Then, I angry already, I say, "You don't 'purplely' call and keep quiet, ok?" - Ha! Get it?

Local joke brought to you exclusively by Postcard Ltd

White like that?

OVERhyped!

- 01 saving private ryan
- 02 local band gigs at substation
- 03 monica lewinsky's white house internship
- 04 teletubbies
- 05 neo prints
- 06 apocalyptic movies
- 07 lays potato chips
- 08 blood-sucking vampires
- 09 jack neo, lead actor and co-writer of money no enough
- 10 robin leong in triple nine



- 01 bmt at nee soon camp
- 02 seventh month "getais"
- 03 six month vacation training programmes
- 04 doraemon and doremi
- 05 polaroids
- 06 apocalypse now, the movie
- 07 kaka
- 08 blood donations
- 09 tay teck lock, director of money no enough
- 10 hossan leong in the donny lee show

underHYPED...

GROOVY!



GET
DOWN!



GEEZ!

