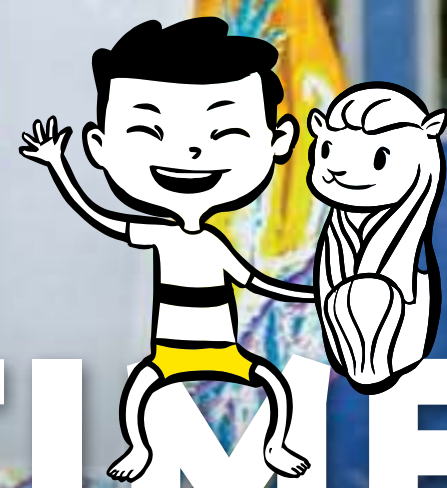




IT'S SHOWTIME!



Chinese street opera actor Nick Shen Weijun keeps Singapore's most ancient theatre form alive – one performance at a time

03
COVER STORY:
DAY IN THE LIFE

Going backstage with a Chinese street opera performer in Singapore

06
RED DOT REPORT:
THE LATEST SCOOP

Beat the heat with ice cream from these four local brands

JUNE 2020

OUR STORIES

Insightful narratives on people, places, and cultures from our network

03

COVER STORY

DAY IN THE LIFE

Going backstage with a Chinese street opera performer in Singapore

RED DOT REPORT

Your first taste of what's hip and happening in Singapore this month

06

THE LATEST SCOOP

Beat the heat at these four ice cream joints in Singapore

07

SHOP WITH A CONSCIENCE

Homegrown fashion labels that are kind to both people and planet

08

FEELING MOONSTRUCK

Local indie bookstore The Moon is leaving quite the impression

COVER STORY

DAY IN THE LIFE:
GOING
BACKSTAGE
WITH

A WAYANG PERFORMER

Chinese street opera is slowly disappearing in Singapore. Lester V. Ledesma spends an evening with a wayang performer, and discovers his tireless dedication to keeping this ancient artform alive

DAY IN THE LIFE:

GOING BACKSTAGE WITH A WAYANG PERFORMER



In *Scout's* "Day in the Life", we ask a writer to spend a day with a local whose job plays a significant role in the city's cultural identity.

"Sorry I can't talk right now, I have to concentrate on what I am doing," says Nick Shen Weijun. The 43-year-old Singaporean sits on a makeshift desk as he covers his hair with a net. Before him, a jumble of brushes, tissues, eyebrow pencils, and tubes of face paint await his attention.

He coats his entire face with a layer of white, next the shades of bright red on the cheeks, a layer of black on the eyes, and thick extensions for the hairline.

There is still the ornate headpiece and an elaborate costume to put on before he completes his transformation into The Teochew Warrior, one of the main characters in the classic Chinese play *The Six Kingdoms Appoint a Prime Minister*.

A veteran TV personality, Weijun is a fixture in local small-screen dramas like *Titoudao*, an English series about Singapore's most famous Hokkien opera troupe.

However, in the evenings, actor Nick Shen Weijun is a wayang (Chinese street opera) performer.

THE KING OF PERFORMING ARTS

Tonight, he is performing at the Loyang Tua Pek Kong Temple in Singapore's Changi neighbourhood. Backstage, Weijun and his cast-

mates at Lao Sai Tao Yuan Teochew Opera Troupe are busy preparing for their performance.

Established in 1864, this is Singapore's oldest living opera troupe.

Chinese street opera is one of the most ancient forms of theatre in the world. Sadly, this time-honoured art form did not fare well in post-1970s Singapore due to gradual Westernisation and a decline in the popularity of dialects in favour of Standard Chinese.



Bottom: Chinese opera performer Nick Shen Weijun spends at least an hour backstage just applying his elaborate face paint.



TOP: Dressed as an ancient scholar from imperial China, Shen delivers his lines onstage.
CIRCLE: Cast members line up behind the curtains, moments before the first act starts.

BLOOD CONNECTIONS

Born to a family with links to the Lao Sai Tao Yuan, Weijun remembers watching his first opera show when he was little.

“I was so fascinated by the makeup and the costumes that I painted myself with poster colours to pretend I was a wayang star,” he recalls. “My parents didn’t encourage my interest in Chinese opera, though. At that time, Singapore was a place where kids were raised to be doctors or lawyers.”

Despite his parents’ disapproval, by the time he was 13, he was performing bit roles in various plays. Perhaps it was this early exposure to theatre that made him pursue a career in acting. While he was getting noticed for his roles in Singaporean TV dramas, Weijun kept earning his chops on the wayang stage.

In 2018, with the Lao Sai Tao Yuan in dire financial straits, Shen used his savings to buy the entire troupe – actors, crew, props, and all.

These days, he takes care of Lao Sai Tao Yuan’s operations. He is also tireless in promoting Chinese opera to a younger audience, organising Chinese opera workshops in schools, museums, and community centres.

THE SHOW GOES ON

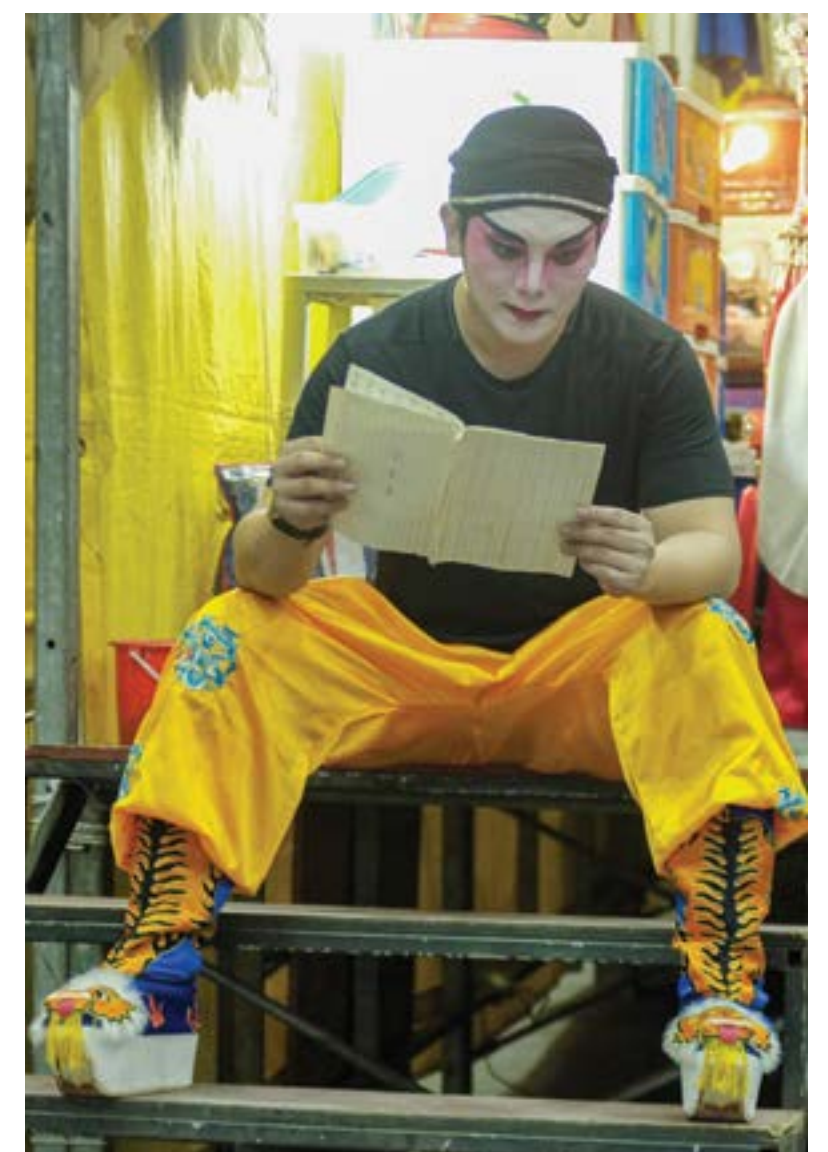
At the temple fair, the play begins with an ear-splitting rash of cymbals, pipes, and strings. I go out front to see the spectacle unfold.

One by one, the characters appear, bellowing their dialogues in loud, stylised voices. While my ears are ringing from the auditory pounding, my eyes are feasting on the gorgeous tableau of colours and costumes. I am drawn to the subtlety of the actors’ movements; how their eyes roll with their facial expressions, and at the way their bodies flow with studied elegance.

Afterwards, the cast and crew still have work to do – there are costumes and props to be packed away, backgrounds to fold, and tons of make-up to remove.

Weijun sorts out a few logistics issues before he retreats to a corner to quietly rehearse his lines for tomorrow’s show. He looks at his troupe-mates and thinks aloud. “It would be great to someday produce a movie or TV show featuring these wayang veterans,” he says. “This isn’t just a company of actors, you know. Almost everyone you see here has been a Chinese opera performer since childhood. There are several lifetimes’ worth of artistic experience in this troupe.”

“We are all family here. Chinese street opera is our passion, and the stage is our home. To give up on this would be to let a piece of Singapore disappear.”



RIGHT: With tonight’s play just ended, Nick studies the script for tomorrow’s performance.



LEFT: Veteran actors brush up on their lines.



THE LATEST SCOOP

Sweltering in Singapore's eternal summer? Beat the heat with ice cream from these four local brands



For healthy scoops **KIND KONES**

Its vegan handmade ice cream are free from refined sugar, soy, preservatives, and additives. Aside from flavours such as almond brittle fudge, oat milk and cookies, and peanut butter and raspberry jam; there are other healthy treats on offer, including doughnuts and cakes.

📄 kindkones.com

For delicate soft serve **SUNDAY FOLKS**

Everything here is freshly made from scratch, using premium ingredients such as hand-drawn sea salt from England. Popular ice-cream flavours include earl grey lavender and sea salt gula melaka – all best paired with “Chuffles”, their churros and waffle hybrid snack.

📄 sundayfolks.com



For creative flavours **BIRDS OF PARADISE**

Their egg-free gelato, come in unique botanical flavours such as strawberry basil, white chrysanthemum, lychee raspberry and spiced pear – all of which are made using real fruits and flowers.

📄 birdsofparadise.sg



For eye-catching waffles **FATCAT ICE CREAM BAR**

They are best known for their charcoal waffles, and colourful ice cream – signature flavours include butterbeer, hay and honey, watermelon soju, and more. Each waffle comes drizzled with homemade salted egg yolk sauce, which adds a savoury undertone.



📄 fatcat.sg



SHOPPING WITH A CONSCIENCE

These four homegrown fashion labels are kind to both people and planet



For swimwear

HAIKINI

Fair-trade swimwear label Haikini offers sustainable bikinis handmade by Balinese artisans, who are paid fair wages. Each comes in a pouch crafted from leftover fabric too. As a bonus, they are easy on the wallet, with nothing over SGD 100.

haikini.co

For basics

SOURCE COLLECTIONS

Source Collections makes T-shirts and underwear using sustainable materials like Tencel (a cellulose fibre) and organic cotton. All shirts are made in a factory that has been certified by international non-profit Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production for its ethical standards.



sourcecollections.com

For prints

MATTER

MATTER celebrates ancient textile traditions such as ikat and block-printing, and uses organic and biodegradable fabrics made by artisans in rural Asian communities, with production taking up to six months – inspiring consumers to value the provenance of the clothes they wear.



mattersprint.com

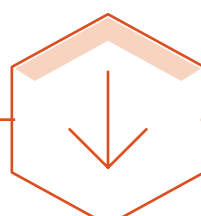
For jewellery

EDEN + ELIE

Dainty, intricate pieces – from necklaces and bracelets to earrings and cufflinks – are hand-woven using materials from reputable ethical producers such as Miyuki, the oldest seed bead manufacturer in Japan. To champion diversity, they also hire artisans from Singapore’s Autism Resource Centre.



edenandelie.com



GLOSSARY

A brief description of some of the popular terms used to describe sustainable fashion.

Ethical

Refers to fashion that is designed and manufactured in a way that respects the rights of workers, taking into account factors such as wages and working conditions.

Organic

Refers to natural materials that are produced without the use of pesticides, herbicides or other chemicals.

Cruelty-free

Refers to fashion that does not contain animal by-products, or that is not tested on animals.

Fair-trade:

Refers to an institutional arrangement that helps producers in developing countries receive a fair wage for their work.



FEELING MOONSTRUCK

Local indie bookstore The Moon certainly leaves quite the impression

The Moon is a bookstore, café, and events venue all rolled into one. It's the brainchild of Pakistani native Sarah Naeem.

“When designing the interior, I wanted to make people feel as if they were in my living room,” explains Naeem. “It’s a place where you can sink into and feel at home.”

The Moon champions works by women and writers of colour, from *Ponti* by homegrown author Sharlene Teo to *The Artist of Disappearance* by renowned Indian novelist Anita Desai.

“The Anglophone world has always leaned in favour of male and white writers. But this isn’t how the world looks anymore,” says The Moon’s managing director Marissa Chen.

“Today, it’s more important than ever that we recognise, not criminalise, the value of diversity. We love global voices that encourage people to think beyond a local context.”

Events here – which range from group meditations to panel discussions – are equally unorthodox.

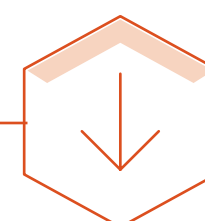
The bookstore recently partnered with local book swap group Books & Beer to host a panel aimed at raising awareness about the rights of sex workers. “Ultimately, we want to be a space that welcomes everyone, and where people feel like they can be themselves,” adds Chen.

📄 themoon.com.sg



HOW NOVEL

Three bookstores in Singapore to order your latest reads from.



BOOKSACTUALLY

This long-standing bookstore offers both fiction and non-fiction titles. If you are feeling adventurous, let their book elves surprise you with new reads with their Stay Home Brain Food option!

📄 booksactuallyshop.com

LITTERED WITH BOOKS

This independent bookseller’s offerings range from bestsellers and travel narratives to children’s literature.

📘 [lwbsg](https://www.facebook.com/lwbsg)

WOODS IN THE BOOKS

This children’s bookstore specialises in picture books and comics. They also offer specially curated care packages as well as gift vouchers if you have trouble choosing a book on your own.

📄 woodsinthebooks.sg

16 Personality Types.



16 Gift Collections.

The KrisShop Personality Store.

From the contemplative INTP to the sociable ESFJ, discover gift ideas thoughtfully curated for every personality type. Now you can gift your loved ones what they actually want, without asking.

Shop now on [KrisShop.com](https://www.krisshop.com)

KRISSHOP 

Inflight delivery

/

Earn & redeem KrisFlyer miles

/

Worldwide shipping