

Audiences can watch two free shows under the Raw platform.

One is You Are Here, a one-woman show reflecting on Nansi's past and her experiences. Another is Jemima Yong's All About My Mother, which gets under the skin of the archetype of the matriarch.

Ms Fezhah says The Studios will continue to be a source of support for independent artists and companies that may need a boost.

"What we are doing here, especially for our independent artists, is giving them that space to experiment, to explore, to take risks and maybe not worry so much about, 'Will all this come together? Who will help me market this?' – all of those concerns.

"I think if we're able to get people to start thinking about what each piece has to offer – what do they feel coming out of Dark Room or reflect on their own lives after watching Recalling Mother – I think we've done enough."

asyiqins@sph.com.sg

#### BOOK IT / THE STUDIOS

WHERE: Esplanade Theatre Studio

WHEN: Thursday to May 1

ADMISSION: \$30 (Intrusions and Dark Room); \$35 (Ophelia and Recalling Mother); Season pass of \$122 for four standard tickets.

Raw productions are free, pre-register at

www.esplanade.com/thestudios



PHOTO: COURTESY OF JEMIMA YONG

My room is filled with hundreds of his journals. And he's still very much here with me. So, in a way, he's still there on stage, even though he won't really be there with me anymore.



JEMIMA YONG (left), with her grandfather Joseph Yong, who died in 2014, aged 84

The mother I have in my head has become more complex, more contradictory, more fascinating. And it's really because I have changed and because I'm interested in knowing her as a person in her own right.



CLAIRE WONG (left, with Noorlinah Mohamed) on how she felt each time she had worked on the play

## Performing without grandpa

Multi-disciplinary artist Jemima Yong's upcoming show under The Studios' Raw platform is titled All About Your Mother, but it is her grandfather Joseph Yong, a former civil servant, who is the true heart of the show.

Four years ago, she and her grandfather brought Stella Kon's Emily Of Emerald Hill to life in their living room. She read it aloud in a chorus of different voices and he directed her performance.

For five hours, they picked through the play and discussed the women in their lives, trying to find shades of them in Emily Gan, the iron-fisted matriarch who loses it all.

The idea for All About My Mother came then, in those long, happy hours.

In 2014, Yong started working on it proper. It would be a two-man show – she and her grandfather in a conversation about the archetype of the matriarch, a character she was terrified that she would find

herself turning into one day.

But when the show debuts at the Esplanade next month, the 25-year-old will take the stage alone. Her grandfather died in September 2014 at the age of 84. He had been diagnosed with prostate cancer.

"I was just overcome with grief, with sadness, with all these existential thoughts. When he died, for the very first time, I wanted to believe in ghosts," she says.

After his death, she stopped working on the show for a year.

But in September last year, she gathered herself and decided to pick it up once more in his honour.

For her, the biggest challenge was making a show that had been shaped from the start with two people in mind, but which now had to work as a solo affair.

"I would never have done this as a solo show and somehow it ended up that way. The only reason I'm on stage alone is that the person who is supposed to be next to me has died," she says. "I think that's very

important to the work. It has impacted the work a lot, in terms of experiments to conjure my granddad's presence in a theatrical space."

Yong decided not to take on another performer.

She describes her grandfather fondly as being "charismatic". Despite his lack of stage training, she says he left a void that could not be filled.

Instead, traces of him will thrum through the show as she tries to preserve his presence on stage. Talking to him or about him, and playing with objects that belonged to him, are some ideas she has.

"There's still some notion of him. My room is filled with hundreds of his journals. And he's still very much here with me," she says.

"So, in a way, he's still there on stage, even though he won't really be there with me anymore."

Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh

#### BOOK IT / RAW: ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER

WHERE: Esplanade Theatre Studio

WHEN: April 22 and 23, 8pm

ADMISSION: Free, pre-register at www.esplanade.com/thestudios

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