

WILD
RICE



STRAIGHT ACTING

14 – 24 OCT 2021

THE NGEEN KONGSI THEATRE @ WILD RICE

SYNOPSIS

From award-winning playwright Thomas Lim (*Grandmother Tongue*, *Supervision*) comes *Straight Acting*, a hopeful, heartfelt comedy about the drama of trying to keep things straight... when you're anything but.

All Olivia and Jaime want to do is start a family and make a life together – something they can't easily do in straight-laced Singapore. To make the system work for them, Olivia and Jaime get their gay best friends, Russell and Jia Ming, in on the act. Together, they pretend to be two happy, heteronormative couples living in wedded bliss.

At first, blending a little fiction into the facts of their lives seems to go well. But things start to fall apart when Jia Ming's mother visits unexpectedly. Suddenly, the four friends find themselves wondering: is living a lie really living at all?

Bitingly funny, moving and thought-provoking, *Straight Acting* boldly examines – and redefines – what home truths and family values mean in Singapore.

IMDA Advisory: R18 (Homosexual Theme)

MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

At one point in *Straight Acting*, Thomas Lim's new play, a character asks, "What is the life that we want? Is it just us spending the rest of our lives together? Or is there something else? Something beyond the two of us?"

That's a question all couples ask when they start thinking about and planning their futures together. The answer isn't always clear – having children and creating a new family unit is a weighty decision with life-changing financial and emotional consequences.

But this same decision is fraught with so many more challenges for LGBTQ+ people who want to become parents, to have families. Section 377A remains law, discrimination is institutionalised and the system in Singapore is unforgiving, to say the least.

It's worth pointing out, too, that the term "pro family" is often used against the LGBTQ+ community – with the insidious implication that granting LGBTQ+ individuals the same rights to live, love and have children as their heteronormative counterparts will lead to the collapse of society as we know it.

By presenting us with these vividly fleshed-out characters, their relationships and their dilemmas, Thomas' insightful play asks us to reconsider the notion of 'family'. Is it a strictly biological concept, limited only to people who share blood and DNA? Or can you choose your own logical family, comprising the people you love?

In *Straight Acting*, Olivia, Jaime, Russell and Jia Ming are all deeply invested in forming their own familial units of mutual care and love. At the same time, Mei Lian's journey – as a mother and soon-to-be grandmother – invites us all to embrace new and different possibilities when it comes to making and loving a family.

Thank you so much for joining us in the theatre for the premiere of *Straight Acting*. With your presence today, you are investing in and supporting new Singaporean writing. Through the feedback you will be providing us as an audience member – your laughter, your tears, your silences – we will be able to keep developing and improving this very special play.



With the ever-changing COVID-19 situation and restrictions, we continue to live through anxious, uncertain times. But Wild Rice presses on, knowing that we all need the comfort and communion we get at the theatre more than ever. We need to share our stories, to make a human connection, to encounter and experience new ideas together.

In the weeks to come, we look forward to welcoming you to our theatre for more original, home-grown shows that will be bringing our 2021 season to a rousing finale – *Don't Call Him Mr. Mari Kita* (a special fundraising musical tribute to the late, great Zubir Said), *Faghag* (Pam Oei's riotous, rainbow-coloured cabaret) and, last but not least, *Momotaro and The Magnificent Peach* (a brand-new musical for the entire family).

Making theatre at this time has been especially challenging, but we are only able to do so with the kindness and generosity of our Wild Rice Angels, Rice Ball donors and supporters who have helped us get through our most challenging year yet.

Thank you, once again. We hope you enjoy the show!

IVAN HENG

MESSAGE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT / DIRECTOR

This was hard.

Hard because the pandemic tried to keep us from opening the show. Hard because it has been challenging to find space in our daily lives to be creative. Hard because we have all become so separate and disconnected – a condition that is diametrically opposed to what theatre demands of us: to come together and share a connection.

Straight Acting has been quite the journey. It started with an idea, then a serendipitous connection made during a ride-share, which led me into the home and lives of people who have found a way for their families to come together in spite of the staggering obstacles they face. Their spirit and courage have been the driving force behind this play.



My heartfelt gratitude goes out to the family that I have found in the team behind this production – to the dramaturg, Alfian, who saw me through the entire development of the play right from its very conception;

to the actors – Darren, Deonn, Eve, Guat Kian and Shou Chen – for being incredibly generous and sensitive collaborators to both the playwright and the director;

to the designers – Ashley, Bobbie, Chee Wai, James, Jing, Rachel and Theresa – for pushing the limits of my imagination and creating the world of the play;

to the Stage Management, Production and Technical teams, for undertaking this massive and complex operation;

to the Wild Rice management and staff, for all the trust, opportunities and support they have given me in the birthing of this new play;

to my families, chosen and biological, for putting up with my extended disappearance;

and of course, to you, in the audience, for all the pains and troubles you took to make your way here to share this with us.

This was really, really hard, but I'd do it all over again.

THOMAS LIM

A LOOK AT STRAIGHT ACTING

What is 'straight acting'? And how does it manifest within Thomas Lim's new play – as well as the wider world in which we live? Read on to find out!

By Shawne Wang



Olivia (Deonn Yang) and Jia Ming (Darren Guo) pretend to be who they're not in Thomas Lim's *Straight Acting*

Straight Acting [noun / adjective]

Referring to a queer person who presents themselves in speech, mannerisms, behaviour etc. in a heteronormative manner.

In *Straight Acting*, we meet a lesbian couple (Olivia and Jaime) and a gay couple (Russell and Jia Ming) who just want to settle down and start lives and families together. However, there are far more challenges standing in their way than for any heterosexual couple.

With Section 377A of the Penal Code still on the books, homosexuality is criminalised in Singapore. Marriage between two people of the same gender is not legally recognised. As a result, queer couples cannot enjoy the benefits

of marriage available to their heterosexual counterparts – ranging from subsidised government housing to baby bonuses.

At the same time, queer couples continue to face onerous challenges when it comes to having children in Singapore. Playwright Thomas Lim was inspired to write *Straight Acting* by the landmark case of a gay man who was finally allowed by Singapore's high court to adopt his own biological child in 2018, four years after he first began legal proceedings. In 2020, his appeal for his long-term partner to be granted guardianship and joint custody of their children was rejected.

In this play, the two couples put on an act – pretending to be straight – to make an unforgiving system work for them.

Landmark High Court case allows Singaporean gay dad to adopt surrogate son

UPDATED DEC 17, 2018, 9:37 PM

Court rejects bid by gay man to make partner guardian of his two surrogate children

PUBLISHED FEB 17, 2020, 9:32 PM SGT

Headlines from The Straits Times in 2018 and 2020

FOR SURVIVAL AND SAFETY

Outside of the fictional world of *Straight Acting*, there are many other reasons for queer people to maintain an outward appearance of heteronormativity.

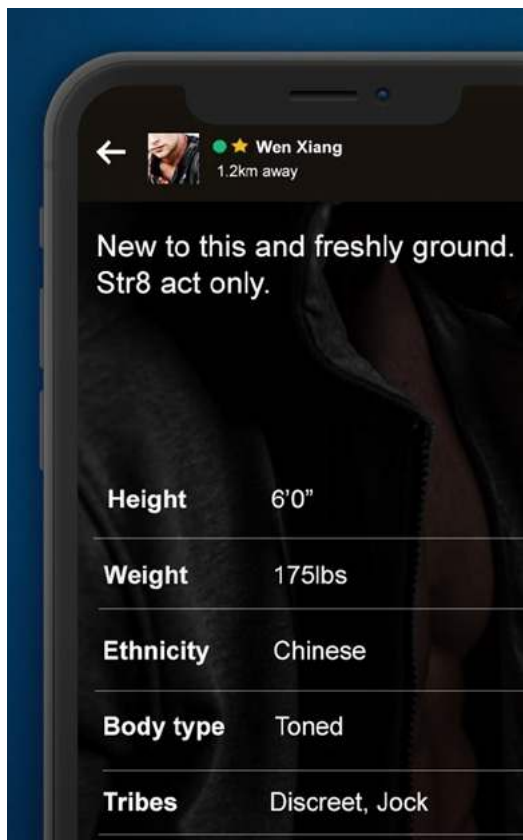
In conservative societies like Singapore, many LGBTQ+ individuals cannot be out and proud – they must hide their sexualities and gender identities from their own friends and families to avoid awkward situations and uncomfortable conversations. Similarly, they might ‘act straight’ in order to avoid being discriminated against in the workplace, at home or in public.

Occasionally, queer individuals might find themselves having to ‘act straight’ out of necessity. This is especially so in environments that are perceived to be hostile to them, where they might suffer violent attacks for being who they are.

THE EVEN DARKER SIDE OF ‘STRAIGHT ACTING’

The term ‘straight acting’ is still fairly commonly used today by gay men on dating apps. In Singapore, Grindr profiles frequently include the words ‘str8 act only’ – both to describe oneself, and to signal the kinds of qualities sought in potential partners.

This chimes with the findings of clinical psychologist Kittiwut Jod Taywaditep in a 2001 study titled ‘Marginalisation Among the Marginalised: Gay Men’s Anti-Effeminacy Attitudes’. Taywaditep observed that many gay men express a sexual or romantic preference for ‘straight-acting’ partners, possibly in reaction to societal stigmatisation and expectations for gender conformity.



An example of a person's profile on a dating app

In this context, some gay men will only date other men who do not present as effeminate or camp. The preference is for men who appear heteronormatively masculine in the way they walk, talk and look – those who are “gym fit” and buff, rather than slender or slight and thus, overly effeminate.

This, of course, plays into both homophobic and misogynistic stereotypes, because it insidiously implies that (1) gay men should ideally present themselves in a certain way, and (2) that certain way is to avoid behaving, saying or doing anything in a ‘feminine’ manner – which, naturally, suggests that ‘masculinity’ is to be prized over ‘femininity’.

Ultimately, gay men specifically seeking out ‘straight-acting’ romantic or sexual partners is a form of internalised homophobia.

Homophobia [noun]

A fear of anything that is not heteronormative – including people, behaviour and ideas that do not fit easily into strictly binary definitions of gender.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

We hope this piece gives you some food for thought on the concept of ‘straight acting’, both within the context of Thomas’ play, and how it manifests in wider society.

If you’re interested to find out more, here are some suggestions for further reading!

[‘Op-Ed: What Straight Acting Really Means’](#) by Dave Stalling

[‘10-Year Challenge Reveals Femmephobia in Gay Communities’](#) by Adam Davies & Rhea Ashley Hoskin

[‘The Internalised Homophobia of Straight-Acting Gay Men’](#) by Darren Stehle

JUST FOR FUN:

[‘5-Step Guide to Being Truly Straight-Acting’](#) from Dear Straight People





OUR CAST



GOH GUAT KIAN

Mei Lian

Guat Kian is a full-time theatre practitioner and teacher, and has appeared in more than 100 plays since 1982. She has originated roles in plays by Kuo Pao Kun, the pioneer of Singapore theatre, including *Mama Looking for Her Cat*, *Lao Jiu*, *My Mother's Wooden Chest*, *The Spirits Play* and *Sunset Rise*. She won Best Actress at the Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards for her performances in *Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea* (2006) by The Finger Players and *Underclass* (2019) by The Necessary Stage.



DARREN GUO

Jia Ming

Darren is a bilingual theatre practitioner who graduated with a BA in Theatre Arts from the University of Essex. He was last seen in *Café by Wild Rice*. Other notable credits include *Art Studio* by Nine Years Theatre, *Citizen Dog* by The Finger Players and *The Rat Trap* by Gateway Arts. Aside from working as an actor in both theatre and film, Darren has in recent years started to teach and do more creative work, including playmaking and directing.



TAN SHOU CHEN

Russell

Shou Chen is a recognised theatre-maker. Selected stage acting credits: *Grandmother Tongue*, *Asian Boys Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2* (Wild Rice); *The Hypochondriac* (Young & Wild); *Forbidden City: Portrait of an Empress*, *Twelfth Night* (Singapore Repertory Theatre); *Liao Zhai Rocks!* (The Theatre Practice, 2019, Shanghai); *The Reunification of the Two Koreas* (T:>Works and Centre Dramatique National de Tours); *Eugène Ionesco's Rhinoceros* (The Esplanade Studios); *Charged* (Teater Ekamatra); *Framed by Hitler* (The Finger Players); *The Last Bull* (Checkpoint Theatre). Shou Chen is also a director, voice-over artist and educator.

www.shouchen.net

IG: @shouchentan



EVE VOIGTLÄNDER

Jaime

Eve has performed for the local stage as an actress and a dancer. A graduate of Young & Wild's acting programme, her stage credits include *Anything Can Happen/Something Must Happen* (Wild Rice) and *The Naughty List* (Ugly On Paper). A television producer by day, Eve endeavours to integrate and expand her creative capacities to further her work as an artist.



DEONN YANG

Olivia

Deonn is a freelance theatre-maker. As an actor, she has been a part of Esplanade's PLAYtime! and Huayi Chinese Festival of Arts, the M1 Fringe Festival, and Singapore International Festival of Arts. Deonn is a core member of Playwrights Commune. She is interested in people and their stories, and always enjoys having a good laugh.

CREATIVE TEAM



THOMAS LIM

Playwright / Director

Thomas made his professional debut as a playwright and director with *Grandmother Tongue*, which is performed in Teochew, English and Mandarin. His sophomore work, *Supervision*, won Best Original Script at the 2019 Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards. He has worked as a drama educator in secondary schools and junior colleges across Singapore, and is currently the Associate Artistic Director for Youth and Education at Wild Rice.



ALFIAN SA'AT

Dramaturg

Alfian is the Resident Playwright of Wild Rice. He has been nominated at the Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards for Best Original Script 11 times, and has received the award four times. His plays with Wild Rice include *HOTEL* (with Marcia Vanderstraaten), *The Asian Boys Trilogy*, *Cooling-Off Day*, *The Optic Trilogy* and *Homesick*. He was the winner of the Golden Point Award for Poetry and the National Arts Council Young Artist Award for Literature in 2001. His publications include *Collected Plays One, Two and Three*; poetry collections *One Fierce Hour*, *A History of Amnesia* and *The Invisible Manuscript*; and short story collections *Corridor* and *Malay Sketches*.



WONG CHEE WAI

Set Designer

Chee Wai is a full-time freelance set designer. He has designed for and worked with various performing arts companies in Singapore. Some of his recent works with Wild Rice include *The Amazing Celestial Race*, *Mine*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Merdeka / 獨立 / தந்திரம்*, *Emily of Emerald Hill*, *Supervision*, *Mama White Snake*, *HOTEL* and *Monkey Goes West*.

JAMES TAN

Lighting Designer

James was conferred the Young Artist Award and awarded the Arts Professional Scholarship by the National Arts Council of Singapore. Theatre: *Merdeka / 獨立 / தந்திரம்* (Wild Rice), *Dragonflies* (Pangdemonium), *God of Carnage* (Singapore Repertory Theatre). Events: *From Singapore to Singaporean: The Bicentennial Experience*, *The Art of the Brick®* Exhibition @ ArtScience Museum. Public Artwork: *Yellow* @ Lorong Halus Bridge.



JING NG

Sound Designer

A recipient of the National Arts Council Scholarship, Jing graduated with first-class honours from Rose Bruford College (UK), specialising in Performance Sound. Having designed for various productions over 10 years of practice, he aspires to provide audiences with a wholesome sonic experience – what, why and how you listen through a live performance. He was nominated for Best Sound Design at the 2014 Off West End Theatre Awards, as well as the 2018 Straits Times Life! Theatre Awards.

www.jingngsound.com

www.soundcloud.com/jingsound



RACHEL NG

Multimedia Designer

Rachel is a digital content producer who is passionate about telling Singapore stories. She is currently the Social Media Executive at Wild Rice, where she has worked on marketing campaigns for recent productions such as *The Amazing Celestial Race*, *Faghag* and *You Are Here*.



ASHLEY LIM

Hair Designer

Ashley started his hairstyling career in 1986. In 1999, he set up Ashley Salon to further pursue his dedication towards the art of hairdressing, especially for the theatre. He has worked on over 300 productions locally and abroad, and recently took home the Lifetime Achievement Award for Theatre, presented by Mediacorp.



BOBBIE NG

Make-Up Designer

Bobbie is the co-founder of The Make Up Room, and has been passionately involved in designing make-up for local theatre productions for the past 20 years. She first collaborated with Wild Rice on *Blithe Spirit* in 2001. Since then, she has fostered great friendships with many of Singapore's best theatre-makers.



JEANNETTE CHONG

Stage Manager

Jeannette is a freelance theatre production and stage manager. She loves working on projects that challenge her to better her craft. Making processes enjoyable and excitable through paperwork is her obsession. She is affiliated with SAtheCollective, Five Stones Theatre and the Asian Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) Network.

CREDITS

CAST

Goh Guat Kian

Darren Guo

Tan Shou Chen

Eve Voigtlander

Deonn Yang

CREATIVE TEAM

Playwright / Director **Thomas Lim**

Dramaturg **Alfian Sa'at**

Set Designer **Wong Chee Wai**

Lighting Designer **James Tan**

Sound Designer **Jing Ng**

Multimedia Designer **Rachel Ng**

Hair Designer **Ashley Lim**

Make-Up Designer **Bobbie Ng**

PRODUCTION TEAM

Producer **Koh Bee Bee**

Production Manager **Melissa Teoh**

Technical Manager **David Sagaya**

Production Assistants **Angela Ee & Victoria Anna Wong**

Stage Manager **Jeannette Chong**

Assistant Stage Manager **Cindy Sng**

Technicians **Ahmad Hafriz Bin Berkath,**

Muhammad Azhar Bin Azman & Sim Khet Kheng

Technical Interns **Amirul Nabil Bin Mohd Ambran, Muhammad Syahin Bin Abdul Samad,**

James Tay & Wong Jinhui

Hair Assistant **Michelle Wai**

Stage Assistant **Rashid Shiddiq**

Costume Consultant **Theresa Chan**

Wardrobe Manager **Lim Zhiying**

Dresser **Tan Yun Yu**

Surtitle Operator **Wang Shao Kai**

Make-Up Artist **Esther Goh**

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THANK YOU!

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ABOUT WILD RICE

Wild Rice was founded in 2000 by Ivan Heng, an internationally acclaimed and award-winning theatre practitioner, and is recognised today as one of Singapore's leading professional theatre companies.

Its mission is to provide an open forum for the shared experience of theatre: celebrating our diversity; reflecting on the problems and possibilities of our times; and presenting productions that inspire, challenge and entertain.

A commitment to the highest standards informs every aspect of Wild Rice's creative work, which is first and foremost a celebration of Singapore's theatrical talent. By producing and touring productions that are distinctively local in flavour and yet universal in vision and concerns, the company creates memorable experiences for audiences in Singapore and across the world.

The company's exciting and varied programming for the main stage includes:

- + New and original works
- + New productions of the Singapore repertoire
- + New interpretations of world classics

The company's mission to build a theatre culture also extends to the wider community through the following divisions:

- + Wild Rice Academy and First Stage, which offer drama and training programmes to nurture young talents from the ages of 5 to 12
- + Singapore Youth Theatre, which develops and empowers young people aged 13 to 17 through theatre
- + Young & Wild, which identifies and develops Singapore's young theatre professionals from the ages of 18 to 30

Wild Rice is committed to touring its shows internationally to raise the profile of Singapore theatre, to create an international awareness of its unique productions, and to engage its artists and collaborators in creative dialogues with the international arts community. Its distinctively Singaporean productions have won great acclaim in major international arts festivals in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, New Zealand and Russia.

Wild Rice @ Funan is the company's new home in the heart of Singapore's civic and cultural district. This groundbreaking performing arts complex promises to be an iconic destination theatre for Singapore, one dedicated to creating and presenting the best of Singapore theatre, while nurturing the artists and audiences of tomorrow.

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We also wish to thank our new Angels whom, due to printing deadlines, we have not been able to include.

HELP US SECURE THE FUTURE OF SINGAPORE THEATRE

Please kindly consider being an Angel.

Wild Rice believes in making theatre that is inclusive, diverse and empowering. We believe that shows like *Straight Acting* can open hearts and minds to new perspectives and possibilities. Our mission, as always, is to tell the stories that might otherwise go untold, as well as highlight issues that should be part of our national conversation.

If you are in a position to do so, we would greatly appreciate your support. You can help us survive the COVID-19 crisis and enable us to keep doing the work we do. Despite being able to operate at less than 40% of our capacity due to safe distancing measures, we remain committed to creating world-class Singaporean theatre that everyone can enjoy.

As a leading Singapore theatre company, Wild Rice has blazed the trail for over two decades in the relentless pursuit of excellence. Our Angels' support has helped us to create and present the best of Singapore theatre; reach out to more than a million audience members here and around the world; and nurture and develop the artists and audiences of tomorrow. As one of the largest employers in Singapore's arts industry, we provide gainful employment to hundreds of artists and theatre professionals every year.

If you share our belief in the power of theatre as a force for good and for change, please consider coming on board as a Wild Rice Angel. Your vital contribution will enable us to look to the future with courage and confidence, and achieve all that we set out to do.



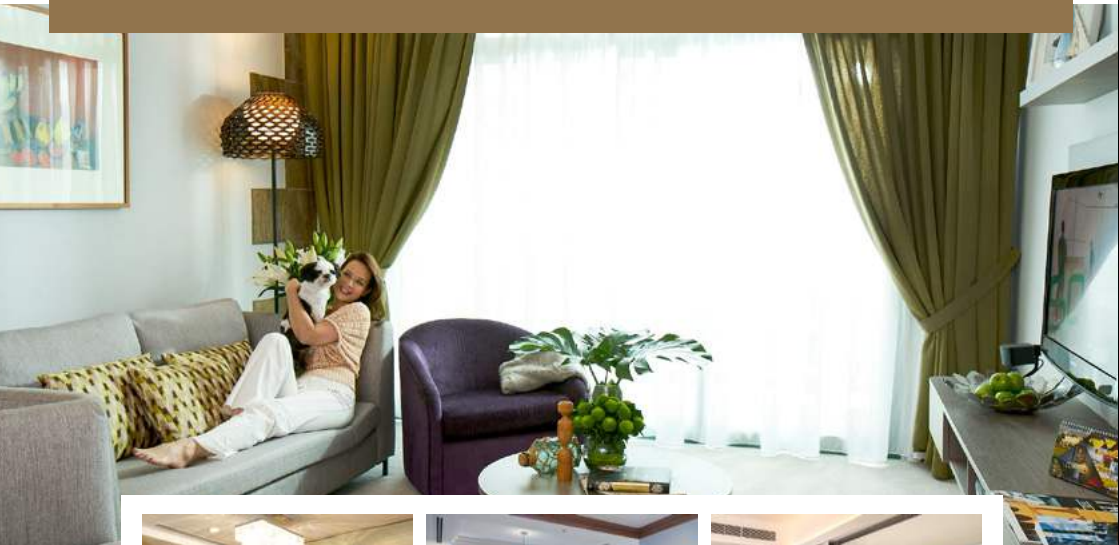
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WILD RICE ACADEMY

WEEKLY DRAMA CLASSES FOR KIDS AGED 5 TO 12

LEARNING COMES ALIVE THROUGH DRAMA AND STORYTELLING!

At the Wild Rice Academy, we believe that the theatre is a wonderful place where children can play, grow and learn more about themselves and the world around them. Our mission is to help empower children for the next stages in their lives by developing their confidence, creativity and social-emotional intelligence.

WHAT WE OFFER

In our highly experiential classes, children can partake in a host of fun, stimulating and engaging activities – from drama games and role-playing to performance opportunities.

By sharing the transformative magic of theatre and the arts with participants, we encourage them to experiment and make creative decisions in the ways they express themselves and tell stories. Our programmes are also designed to help children pick up foundational language and literacy skills.

We have programmes running throughout the year – from 10-week terms to school holiday workshops in June and December. Classes are split by age groups (5-8 years and 9-12 years) to cater to children at different stages of their lives.

FIND OUT MORE HERE



"Through the Wild Rice Academy, I learnt to express my feelings. The class made me become a better actor, and be more hilarious!"

Haley (age 8)



"I really liked being given the opportunity to create, write and perform our own performance. I think that our teacher was really amazing. She was so imaginative, fun and patient."

Mila (age 12)



"Thank you for making this possible and such an amazing experience! All the kids did really well. So glad to see Anna's enthusiasm at her classes and to see her play her role with such delight!"

Jez, mother of Annamaria (age 5)

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