

Theatre is more than just the show on stage

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SMU and ITE students put up a production titled *Mama, Big Bird And The Cat* last November. PHOTO: RYAN LIM

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It may be difficult for the man in the street to draw links between theatre and business management.

But Singapore Management University (SMU) professor Margaret Chan showed how theatre-making itself was a business that demanded professionalism and management skills over a 13-week Post-modern Theatre Studies course.

She worked with 16 students from the course, and nine from the Institute of Technical Education's (ITE) School of Design and Media, to put up a production titled *Mama, Big Bird And The Cat* – an adaption of excerpts from plays by the late theatre doyen Kuo Pao Kun last November.

"I wanted them to know that theatre is not just about the product of

the show itself, but that there is also management involved: marketing and advertising collateral, and having budgets," said Prof Chan, who is known for playing the title character in Stella Kon's play *Emily Of Emerald Hill*.

This involved putting students in charge of the production and direction of the play – and demanding that they maintain professional standards.

"I told the students that I don't act in a student production, and I don't work in a mediocre production," she said.

Mr Johannes Julian Tjendro, 22, one of the students who took up the SMU-X course – which emphasises experiential learning – said he learnt a lot about managing

tasks well and dealing with people.

As the executive producer, he realised that his efficiency was compromised as he was worried about "pushing others too hard". Sorting out paperwork for matters like insurance also required much effort.

"That was something that I don't usually encounter in my school projects. I've applied a lot of the lessons I learnt from this production to other projects that I'm involved in at school," said Mr Tjendro, who is majoring in political science and arts and cultural management.

Mr Daniel Lee, 25, a business management student who was co-director, said he had to tap a broad base of knowledge.

"It forces you to think of solutions that no one has thought about. We also learnt a lot from the ITE students who helped us out with technical management and design. They came up with very practical solutions for things that don't come to us so easily," he said.

Yuen Sin