



ST PHOTO: TIFFANY GONH

## Attraction on stilts

**Who:** Mr Royston Yap (above), 32, God of Fortune stiltswalker and events organiser with events and entertainment company Joan Walker

This God of Fortune literally stands out from the crowd. Decked out in a flowing red robe that conceals a fake tummy, Mr Yap's act involves him walking around on 1.2m-high stilts and distributing hongbao to onlookers. He says people will crowd around him whenever he makes public appearances.

Not even Santa Clause has this draw, says Mr Yap with a grin. The seasoned stiltswalker of seven years has appeared at events such as carnivals and music festival ZoukOut.

"When you appear on stilts, you make an impactful entrance. People will start coming towards you. The crowd can be a problem, but it's a happy problem," he says. While giving out hongbao for good luck, he also shouts the word "huat" (Hokkien for prosper) repeatedly.

"That's the most important word. People feel happy hearing it. When people feel happy, you feel happy, you don't feel tired," he says.

He will be working on all 15 days of Chinese New Year. He is scheduled to perform at the Beach Plaza and Merlion Plaza on Sentosa and at shopping malls.

His wife, Ms Pristine Lim, 25, is also an events organiser and stiltswalker with the same company. They have appeared as a couple on stilts at past events, but not this festive season.

Mr Yap says: "My family understands the nature of the job means I will be working during the holidays. Sometimes, my wife takes my children to watch my performance." His daughter is six years old and his son is three.

He says that being a stiltswalker is not as dangerous as it appears: "We do learn how to fall properly. If one is careful, it's safe."

## Fun to be silly as a mascot

**Who:** Ngee Ann Polytechnic student Chiew Jia Yi, 19. She is making her debut as a God of Fortune mascot this year.

She has played a cow touting milk at a supermarket and cartoon characters Dora The Explorer and Ben 10 at children's parties.

Now Miss Chiew has added roleplaying the God of Fortune to her resume. The 19-year-old She dressed up as the popular Chinese deity and handed out chocolate gold coins to office staff at a government agency on Tuesday.

"It was exciting because it was my first time doing it. The staff's response was not bad. Many people came up to me to pose for photographs,"

says the final year business studies student.

She says playing the God of Fortune is not very different from playing other mascot characters. "It involves a lot of waving and doing cute actions. Afterall, it is still a mascot," says Miss Chiew. She is the older of two children. Her 48-year-old mother works as a quality assurance officer. Her father died when she was 16 years old.

The toughest part about being a mascot is wearing the heavy costume in sweltering heat.

Miss Chiew started perspiring within 20 minutes of putting on the God of Fortune suit when she was being photographed in an air-conditioned studio for this feature.

"I can wear the costume for only a maximum of

15 to 20 minutes at one go. It's really very hot. Every time I remove the costume, it's as if I've just taken a shower. I would be dripping with sweat."

She is paid an hourly rate, but declines to reveal how much it is.

Miss Chiew, who has been free-lancing as a mascot since she was 17, says she enjoys the job. "No one knows who you are when you are wearing a mascot suit. You can do lots of silly antics. It's fun. When I was dressed as a cow, I took photos of myself with a packet of beef and also pretended to drink milk," she says.

# PLAYING GOD OF FORTUNE

Under their outfits, Chinese Gods of Fortune come in all shapes and sizes. Life! speaks to five people who are spreading festive joy dressed as the character this year



Gwendolyn Ng

## Changing face of tradition

**Who:** Opera troupe founder Choy Yien Chow, 69. His trademark is a combination act where he plays the God of Fortune while performing the traditional art form of face-changing.

The traditional God of Fortune characters have been facing keen competition from their cuter, cartoonish mascot counterparts in recent years.

Mr Choy laments that mascots are in demand these days, especially at shopping malls.

"People find these mascots interesting, especially children. The mascots mingle with the crowd and give out sweets. On the other hand, children tend to be afraid of traditional face-painted God of Fortune characters."

"Still, I prefer the customary God of Fortune characters. After all, it's a form of respect to the deity and it's a tradition," says Mr Choy, who has more than 20 years of experience dressing up as the God of Fortune.

He was speaking in Mandarin to Life! in his four-room HDB flat in Tiong Bahru, which houses his vast collection of opera costumes and props for his 26-year-old Choy's Brothers Opera Troupe.

"The mascots will lose their novelty one day. I believe tradition will prevail. People are still requesting my performance," he says.

While he has succumbed to market demand and bought one mascot costume, he does not wear it - it is for his disciples.

Mr Choy, who picked up Chinese opera at the age of eight and martial arts at age 11, runs the troupe with the help of his 65-year-old wife. His 40-year-old son is an actor and a dance and martial arts choreographer in the theatre scene.

Since 2007, Mr Choy has incorporated the Chinese dramatic art form of face-changing into his God of Fortune act and has performed his "signature" routine atop a float at the Chingay parade and at a MediaCorp Chinese New Year countdown programme.

Playing the God of Fortune is what brings in the cash for his struggling troupe. The Chinese New Year festive period is the peak season for him and the troupe.

From January till the end of this month, Mr Choy has about 20 engagements at restaurants, company dinners, malls and schools.

He charges about \$200 for the first hour to mingle with shoppers at malls and patrons at dinners. He can earn up to \$500 for a 10-minute segment for his face-changing routine.

"It's tough playing the God of Fortune because you have to spend at least an hour mingling with the crowd. But it's the way to fund the operations of my troupe," says Mr Choy, whose troupe has been unable to stage its own performance for the past two years because of insufficient funds.

Practical reasons aside, he clearly treasures his experiences as God of Fortune, such as the time he played the part in the transit area of Changi Airport four years ago.

"I was there for two weeks, six hours a day. I had to rush from one terminal to another. Tourists waiting for their flights took photos with me. I have an entire album full of photos from that job alone. Tourists really love the God of Fortune."

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ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

**"I can wear the costume for only a maximum of 15 to 20 minutes at one go. Every time I remove the costume, it's as if I've just taken a shower. I would be dripping with sweat."**

Miss Chiew Jia Yi (left), who enjoys being a mascot despite the discomfort of wearing the costume

## Like this 'deity' on Facebook

**Who:** Print consultant Edward Lean, 49, a volunteer God of Fortune who is a regular face at Chingay parades.

To connect with this God of Fortune, go to his Facebook page. His social media profile is filled with photos of the mythological deity posing with happy crowds. There is even a shot of the "celestial being" presenting a pair of Mandarin oranges to Singapore President Tony Tan Keng Yam.

Mr Lean is the man behind the Facebook page and a seasoned God of Fortune role-player.

Describing himself as "the official God of Fortune for the Chingay parade since 2011" on his page, he has taken on the roles of pre-parade entertainer and performer on the float.

He was roped in for the annual parade by a friend working at the People's Association, the parade organiser, in 2011.

This year is no exception for him. He will be standing on top of a float for the street procession. He will also be appearing at the Istana open house during the festive period.

Speaking to Life!, the print consultant says: "I look forward to playing the God of Fortune every year. I love the interaction with the audience at the Chingay parade. Be they Chinese, Indian or Malay, everyone wants a red packet. Even though I'm not a real God of Fortune, I feel a sense of satisfaction that I can bring happiness to people."

The generous bachelor dips into his own pocket to buy 4-D and Toto tickets to distribute to the public in red packets. The most he has forked out was \$600 for lottery tickets and sweets - six times more than the \$100 transport allowance given to him for his volunteer stint.

He seems to have a knack for giving out winning digits.

The first time he gave out four digits to a group of bikers who were part of the Chingay parade in 2011, they won a starter prize.

Another time at an Istana open house, he asked a fellow God of Fortune for his birth date and randomly came up with a winning combination for a member of the public.

It could be a case of the lucky dude passing on his good fortune. Mr Lean says he often strikes the lottery - this happened even before he started playing the God of Fortune.

He says: "Sometimes, when I'm driving and I see a car plate number that I get a good feeling about, I will buy 4-D and I end up winning.



Mr Edward Lean gives out hongbao with lottery tickets in them when he dresses up as the God of Fortune. ST PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

Whenever I treat my colleagues to snacks, they know I've won 4-D or Toto."

Referring to a dialect saying to explain his winning streak, he says: "Maybe it's because heaven blesses the foolish."

## Thumbs up for Oscar de la Renta successor

New York - Oscar de la Renta on Tuesday unveiled its first collection since the death of its founder, with a beautiful debut of Latin-inspired elegance made fresh by British creative director Peter Copping (right).

The de la Renta show was one of the most hotly anticipated of New York Fashion Week, with fashionistas intrigued to see how he would fare only four months since the death of the legendary Dominican-born designer.

"In this, my first collection, I hope to honour Oscar's legacy and also to start a new chapter for the house," Copping wrote in a brief note.

He was appointed just weeks before de la Renta's death from cancer cut short their hopes of collaborating on the 2015 fall/winter collection. Copping said never having the chance to work with de la Renta was "something I deeply regret", but added he was "immensely proud" to have been appointed.

Pop star Taylor Swift sat in the front row with supermodel Karlie Kloss to watch the catwalk show starring model Kendall Jenner, half-sister of reality star Kim Kardashian.

Hair was swept back in elegant chignons. There were beautiful skirt suits for the lady who lunches, high necklines and delicate bows at the throat, stylish fur coats in monochrome or brown with a hint of orange.

Lines were clean and elegant, full skirts were cut just above the knee. There were creamy, blue flower prints, checks and tweed in white, black, red, burgundy, purple, orange and brown. Sequins, beads and fur-trim gave a refined, lady-like elegance. For evening, there were figure-hugging sheath dresses, sweetheart cocktail dresses with bubble skirts, or black lace halternecks.

New York Fashion Week on Tuesday got a slice of pre-Oscars, red-carpet glamour with minimal chic from Vera Wang and Jenner, 19, strutting her stuff for the American designer.

Wang showcased a modern twist on Savile Row tailoring for next winter, offering daywear alongside the sophisticated evening dresses for which she is perhaps most famous. Jenner is ruling the runway at New York Fashion Week, having modelled at the Donna Karan, Diane von Furstenberg and Alexander Wang shows.

Kardashian was at the Wang show last Saturday to support her, seated in front with husband Kanye West and their toddler daughter North.

West, in fact, debuted his collaboration with Adidas Originals on Day One of the fashion week last Friday.

Over at the Zac Posen event on Monday, it was supermodel Naomi Campbell and singer Rihanna who stole the show. Campbell closed the show to cheers, dressed spectacularly in a pink glitter ball gown. Sitting in front were Rihanna and Mary J. Blige, and guests also included Uzo Aduba, Christina Hendricks, Kesha and Abigail Breslin.

Meanwhile, Taiwanese-Australian model Hannah Quinnivan was reported to have fainted backstage at the Lacoste show on Sunday, spurring talk that she might already be pregnant.

She was back at work in New York following her two wedding celebrations with singer Jay Chou in Taipei and England, reported Apple Daily. She said on Weibo later that she was okay and friends told Apple that baby news was unlikely.

Agence France-Presse



The Oscar de la Renta show featured beautiful lace halternecks gowns (above), stylish skirt suits (below left) as well as model Kendall Jenner, who was also on the runway at the Vera Wang show (below right) at New York Fashion Week. PHOTOS: AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE



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## Touch for good luck

**Who:** Republic Polytechnic student Qamarul Fahmy (right), 24. He is part of a contingent of dancing God of Fortune mascots.

Mr Qamarul, 24, never expected to be touched by strangers when he first donned the God of Fortune costume at a shopping mall three years ago.

Recalling his bewilderment, he says: "They kept touching the mascot's head and rubbing the ingot that I was carrying. I didn't understand why until a Chinese colleague explained to me that people do it for good luck."

The final year student, who is studying renewable energy engineering, has played the God of Fortune every year since then and he is now prepared for the warm reception.

It is no wonder that the crowd gets all pumped up. He makes a grand entrance as part of a flash mob of God of Fortune mascots from entertainment company Joan Walker.

The group of six to eight mascots will bust out dance moves to a mash-up of songs, from Chinese New Year melodies to pop tunes such as K-pop monster hit Gangnam Style.

To perfect the dance moves, the group rehearses twice a week for a month. The contingent will be performing at malls every weekend this month.



ST PHOTO: TIFFANY GONH

Despite the hours spent training, things do not always go as planned during shows. He has tripped over his fellow performers and has learnt a trick to fool the audience into thinking that falling is part of the act. "When we fall, we act cute and pose for the camera."

Mr Qamarul is paid by the hour and declines to reveal the rate. He is the eldest of three children. His father, 55, is a taxi driver and his mother, 43, a

banquet supervisor.

Over the years, he has become close to his fellow performers. A colleague invited him and another Malay colleague to a steamboat reunion dinner last year.

He says: "It was my first time at a Chinese reunion dinner. It was nice to experience another culture. Their family members told us, you guys are the God of Fortune, you'll bring us good luck."

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