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Actors Gavin Yap (left) and Douglas Lim in 'Thicker Than Water', a theatre work that is set to play in New York next

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TerryandTheCuz's new theatre work searches for the 'real' America

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BY ROUWEN LIN

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Two Malaysian screenwriters are out to take the world by storm with the perfect American film – even if by the world, they mean the United States. Having spent decades being bombarded by American pop culture, they know exactly what the perfect American film entails. Total cultural immersion must surely count for something, right?

But wait, should this perfect American film be the contemplative and thoughtful that America needs, or the high-octane, action-packed and gun-bloated blockbuster that it wants?

Heck, these two guys pride themselves on knowing America as well as the back of their hands, but perhaps things are not as straightforward as they seem.

TerryandTheCuz's newest theatre production *Thicker Than Water* goes to the deep end with its dissection on how we, as outsiders, gleefully consume American culture in all its shapes and forms, and how this informs what the "true" America is.

Starring actor/comedian Douglas Lim and filmmaker/writer/director Yap as these screenwriters, it is slated to run at Joe's Pub at The Public Theater in New York in May next year, the first fully-produced Malaysian production to premiere off-Broadway.

"No company in Malaysia has been given this opportunity to stage something at The Public and we are really excited about it and we are determined to knock people off their feet," says co-writer and director Terence Conrad, one half of TerryandTheCuz.

He muses that even though The Public had expressed interest in having them perform there, the paths crossed back in 2015 at the International Society of Performing Arts in New York, it felt like something too good to be true.

"We thought it was one of those things, where you shake hands, part ways, and never hear from each other again. But then earlier this year they got back to us, saying that they have a slot for us in May!"

The team behind productions like *Klue*, *Doh!*, *The Bee Project* and *SK!N*, was ecstatic to say the

They have been toying with the show's concept for the last five years or so, but work only start about six months ago when they got the confirmation from The Public Theater.



TerryandTheCuz's main men Terence Conrad (left) and The Cuz, as he wants to be known, will be looking to a big Am adventure ahead with *Thicker Than Water*. Photo: TerryandTheCuz

Along with a resolution to present the best possible version of *Thicker Than Water* comes an op to tweaks and amendments. So as part of the creative development, the show will be presenter turf ahead of its New York premiere next year, at Publika in Kuala Lumpur, starting Nov 28, with feedback playing a critical part in the further refinement of the production.

It sounds like a bit of a daunting task, this project that not only hinges on our perspective of Ar on how America enthusiastically extols itself to the outside world, but also taking this outsider perspective and showing it to America.

"We don't often realise just how much exposure to American culture we get here. We know their celebrities ... they can't believe we know *Knight Rider* or *Baywatch*, but we do. Their export is their culture, it is just insane how well they do it. The show comes from a place of truth, the more you watch it, the more you are going to laugh," says Conrad.

Thicker Than Water is created and designed by TerryandTheCuz, co-directed with Martin Blum, written with Blum, Mark Leonard Winter and Chris Ryan. All these collaborators are Australian and initially the work was developed at the Abbotsford Convent in Melbourne.

Thicker Than Water, says Conrad, is not afraid to tackle hard-hitting topics. But it strives to do so with wit, humour and impeccable comedic timing.

There will be a supporting cast representing different facets of American society, but they are keen to know exactly how they fit in or where they come in.

"It is an interesting approach in that unlike other shows, the less you know about what is in store, the better it is. The one thing you can expect though is that you will be thoroughly entertained and have a really good time," says Yap, who plays the quintessential tortured artist who is willing to go to the ends of the earth for his art.

In contrast, Lim takes on the smooth-talking, business-minded guy with one eye on Hollywood and the other on the fame and fortune he is adamant will come with it.

"I do things in this show that I would never even dream of doing as Douglas Lim. I think it will be a nice, really fun, watch for audiences both in Malaysia and in the United States. I am excited, yet also feeling the pressure knowing that I will be acting alongside trained actors in New York. But people keep telling me I am good, I think I will be ok," he deadpans.

This will be Lim's first foray into the US arts scene. *Thicker Than Water* will play in New York from 2018 to 2020 next year.

'Thicker Than Water' is on at The Bee, Solaris Dutamas, Publika in Kuala Lumpur till Dec 3 at 8.30pm and additional 3pm shows on Dec 2-3. Tickets are RM125 (food and a drink included) and RM105 (a drink included). Call: 017-228 9849. For more information, visit tix.my (<http://www.tix.my>) or terryandthe (<http://www.terryandthecuz.com>).

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