

New World

by **Goh, Peck Keong**, written in August 2010
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The "Worlds", as they came to be known, were popular amusement parks cum performance venues that ruled Singapore's entertainment scene from the 1920s until the 1960s ... the first of the three "worlds" that came into being.

Sited at Kitchener Road, the New World amusement park was the first of the three 'worlds' that came into being. Alongside Great World and Gay World, these three parks were to rule Singapore's night-time entertainment scene from the 1920s to the 1960s.

Past and Present

New World opened in 1923 and was one of the many business interests of Straits Chinese merchants, Ong Boon Tat and Ong Peck Hock. It was bought over by the Shaw family in the 30s, who continued operating the park until it closed in 1987. The site was then sold to City Developments Limited, who have since completed the development of an integrated urban hub on the site. Standing in place of New World now is a shopping mall (City Square), a condominium (City Square Residences) and an urban park (City Green) for the public. The New World amusement park gates now sit within City Green, a vestige to the site's colourful past.

Where Stars Debuted

New World was (in)famous for its raucous revues; lesser-known perhaps, is the fact that it was the venue where musical luminaries like Sakura Ting* and Alex Abisheganaden made their debuts.

On a night out at New World, the then 17-year-old Ms. Ting was urged upon stage by her friends to sing a song. The plucky girl did so, performing Chubby Checker's 'Let's Twist Again' in the New Life Review music and dance hall. The hall manager was so impressed by her spontaneous performance that he promptly offered her a job. Ms. Ting would go on to forge a glittering career as one of Asia's brightest stars.

If Ms. Ting was the young ingénue, Mr. Abisheganaden would be the child star. Talent-spotted at a tender age, Mr. Abisheganaden would make his public debut at age 6 in a variety show at New World's Moonlight Hall.

As Mr. Abisheganaden himself recounts in an interview with The Straits Times, "I was asked to sing as, apparently, I had a very good singing voice and I became the pride of my family."

While he cannot remember the song he sang, he is sure it was "something better than Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" (Lum).

*While better known as Sakura ‘Teng’, Ms. Ting revealed in a 2007 interview with *The Straits Times* that she had changed her surname to “her adoptive father's Ting when she became an American citizen in 1995” (Mak).

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