

65 is the new 35

Actress Jane Seymour does not hide her age but plays a woman holding on to her youth in Noel Coward's *The Vortex*

Akshita Nanda
Arts Correspondent

Ageless Hollywood actress Jane Seymour says she would rather take advantage of the light than submit to Botox.

"As an actress, I feel it's valuable to have a face that moves," the 65-year-old says over the telephone from Los Angeles.

Two dozen years ago, she had her breasts reshaped, and years before that she had her eyelids "fixed" so photographers would not have to touch up pictures. But nothing since then.

"I'm one of the very few actresses in my age group who hasn't had a facelift or gone to a dermatologist or had Botox," she says. "I'm the last of a dying species."

She does feel for her character in the stage play *The Vortex*, which runs at the Raffles Hotel Jubilee Hall from April 28 to May 14. Florence Lancaster is a vain socialite eager to hold on to her youth, literally, though in another sense — she is dating a man young enough to be her son.

"The appeal of the play is the concept of this woman who has always been the star of her world and does not want to stop. She refuses to grow old," the actress says. "I'm 65, I know some vibrant 70-year-olds. Sixty-five to 70 is now what used to be 35 to 40."

Britain-born Seymour is returning to the stage after decades.

In the 1970s and 1980s, she played Lady Macbeth, Nora in Ibsen's *Doll House* and, notably, was Constanza, the wife of Mozart, in the 1980 Broadway version of *Amadeus*, British writer Peter Shaffer's iconic play about the composer. The Broadway version cast Ian McKellen as Mozart's antagonist Salieri and won multiple Tony Awards.

But most of her career has been onscreen, starting with a Bond girl role opposite Roger Moore in the 1973 film *Live And Let Die*.

In the 1980s, she was a romantic lead to the likes of Christopher Reeve (*Somebody In Time*, 1980) and Tom Selleck (*Lassiter*, 1984), even penning a sappy how-to book, *Jane Seymour's Guide To Romantic Living*, in 1986.

When reminded of that book, she says: "It was a very long time ago. Please forgive me and let's leave it at that."

On television, she won an Emmy for playing soprano Maria Callas in the 1988 TV movie *Onassis: The Richest Man In The World*. She won a Golden Globe for playing antagonist Kate Ames in a 1981 mini-series adaptation of John Sturges' *East Of Eden*, and another for perhaps her most popular role — the titular



Actress Jane Seymour had her breasts reshaped and eyelids fixed 24 years ago, and has done nothing else since then. PHOTO: BRITISH THEATRE PLAYHOUSE

character of the 1990s TV drama *Dr Quinn, Medicine Woman*.

Today, however, while the paparazzi might delight in sneaking photos of her body in a bikini, she gets mainly bit parts in mainstream movies such as screwball comedy *Wedding Crashers* (2005) and this year's *Fifty Shades Of Black*, a sequel-up of *Fifty Shades Of Grey*.

Meaty movie roles for her come from independent production houses

such as Vago Productions. In last year's marital drama *Bereave*, it cast her opposite another ageing actor, 73-year-old Malcolm McDowell, who delighted critics in 1971 as the lead in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*.

"Big movies are not where they want people of our age group," Seymour says. "In theatre, you can get away with different ages. You can get older and play younger, you can

be younger and play older."

The Vortex is presented here by production house British Theatre Playhouse, known for bringing in farces such as last year's *No Sex Please*. It is directed by Bob Tomson, known for TV dramas (BBC's *Hero To Zero* in 2000) and West End theatre productions such as *skating comedy On The Piste*.

The Vortex is not light fare even though its creator, the late Noel

BOOK IT / THE VORTEX BY NOEL COWARD

WHERE: Jubilee Hall Raffles Hotel, Beach Road

WHEN: April 28 to May 14, 8pm Tuesdays to Fridays, 4pm and 8pm Saturday and Sunday

ADMISSION: \$115 to \$155 from Sistic (call 6348-5555 or go to www.sistic.com.sg)

INFO: The play is rated as having some mature content

Coward — Seymour's first husband's godfather and apparently fond of the Raffles Hotel — was known for frothy relationship comedies such as *Billie the Spirit* and *Private Lives*.

In *The Vortex*, a woman's flamboyant extramarital affairs estrange her from her son, especially when he learns that his mother's lover was formerly engaged to his fiancée.

"She's this glorious woman who just says: 'Why should I stay at home because I'm a certain age and my husband's boring? Why shouldn't I have fun?' That is not to say that she's right, not at all, she abandons her son," Seymour says. "But her spirit is young and why should she give up on joie de vivre (enjoying life)?"

Seymour is certainly game for anything. She paints, designs furniture and also creates jewellery under her own Open Hearts label.

She is a celebrity ambassador for charity Childhelp and acts in spoof videos for comedy website *Funny Or Die*. Dr Quinn, Morphine Woman imagines the character as a drug lord, while James Bond Sensitivity Training is a parody of the recent Bond movie *Spectre*.

"I'm probably busier now than when I was younger," she says.

Will she ever slow down? Probably not, she says. Her three near-death experiences make her greedy to enjoy life.

She nearly died of eclampsia when pregnant with her twins. She has six grown children and was married four times, first to Michael Attenborough (son of director Richard Attenborough), then to artist Geoffrey Planer, to businessman David Flynn and to actor James Keach.

The second time, she almost succumbed to a viral infection while filming in Puerto Rico, and the third time, she went into anaphylactic shock when an injection meant to save her hit an artery.

"I think when you have a near miss, you just experience life more," she says. "I want to live as much as I can, have great experiences, grow as a human being and, in my so-called retirement age, be even better at what I do."

akshitan@sph.com.sg

Art Basel Hong Kong opens to less frenzy

HONG KONG • The first floor of the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre was already bustling when Mr Lin Han arrived at the opening of Art Basel Hong Kong, Asia's most important art fair.

In the three years since they began buying art, Mr Lin, a Beijing-based collector, and his wife, Ms Lei Wanwan, both 28, have built up a collection at lightning speed, acquiring more than 300 works. But at the VIP preview of the Hong Kong art fair last Tuesday, neither was in the mood to make any quick decisions.

Indeed, some dealers noted that the overall atmosphere seemed more muted than last year's, with fewer collectors in attendance, especially from Europe and North America, and less frenzied first-day buying — not entirely unexpected, given the recent economic slowdown in China.

"We just bought a few works at Tefaf, so we are not rushed to buy anything here," Mr Lin said, referring to the European Fine Art Fair this month in the Dutch town Maastrecht. Instead, he and Ms Lei were more interested in browsing booths and promoting M Woods, their contemporary art museum in the 798

Art District of Beijing.

By the end of last Friday though, some dealers were reporting strong sales. Mr David Zwirner, who is planning to open a gallery in Asia, presented a booth of mostly figurative paintings, including five works by Michael Borremans made especially for the fair. All five were bought by Asian collectors, including the Long Museum in Shanghai, at prices ranging from US\$250,000 (S\$343,075) to US\$1.6 million.

Leo Xu Projects, a Shanghai gallery, reported that it had sold eight works by Chinese artist Cui Jie for between US\$7,700 and US\$28,000 in the first 30 minutes of the VIP preview.

Mr Lin is one of a number of rising young collectors from mainland China, a group that dealers describe as motivated, well informed and more adventurous in taste than the older generation of Chinese collectors.

"The younger mainland Chinese collectors may have a reverence for the blue-chip, heavyweight Western contemporary artists," said Mr Nick Siminovic, managing director of Gagosian Gallery Hong Kong. "But they are also actively seeking out work which you might not have imagined mainland Chinese collectors



At the opening of Art Basel Hong Kong, dealers noticed fewer collectors in attendance and less frenzied first-day buying. PHOTO: NEW YORK TIMES

pursuing five years ago."

Some dealers note that younger Chinese collectors lack the buying power of their elders. But although they may not be setting auction records with their purchases, many are exploring and collecting lesser-known artists. And unlike their older counterparts, they are more likely to have spent time abroad. As a result, dealers say, many are less concerned with nationality and feel more comfortable buying works by non-Chinese artists.

Mr Lin's personal collection, for example, includes works by Tracey

Emin and John Currin, but also less established artists such as Richard Lin, Ouyang Chun, Firenze Lai and Charles Harlan. Recently, Mr Lin and Ms Lei, who earned a graduate degree in arts administration at Columbia University, have taken a keen interest in old masters.

"That eclecticism was on display last Tuesday when Mr Lin homed in on several works by architect and artist Bijoy Jain at the booth of the gallery Chemould Prescott Road, of Mumbai, India.

"This feels fresh to me," he said as he leaned in to inspect one work, a

pigment trace on cement of a ceremonial building in India.

It was the closest he came to buying anything on Tuesday. For the next four hours, he, Ms Lei and Ms Presca Ahn, the American director of their museum, merely took in the show.

The recent slowdown of the Chinese economy appears to have put a damper on art buying by all mainland collectors, regardless of their age. Total sales in the Chinese market dropped 23 per cent, to US\$11.8 billion last year, according to the Tefaf report. And Britain supported China as the second-largest

market for art sales last year, after the United States.

While dealers say the economic slowdown has been most acutely felt by the auction houses, the final results from Art Basel Hong Kong are still being looked to as an important measure of the state of the art market in Asia.

On the whole, there was a sense among dealers and collectors that the quality of the works at the Hong Kong fair, which this year included 239 galleries, was stronger than in previous years.

Highlights among Western galleries included Hauser & Wirth, which brought *Spider Couple*, a mammoth bronze Louise Bourgeois sculpture from 2003, and Alexander Calder's 1967 mobile *Morning Cowbuck*. Marianne Boesky Gallery presented a solo exhibition of Frank Stella, including a 4m-tall wooden star.

Hauser & Wirth said it was in talks with an Asian museum about the Bourgeois sculpture. The gallery sold a number of works, including a Mark Bradford painting for US\$1.5 million, as well as an Alexander Calder painting for an undisclosed amount.

"We decided to bring a different kind of booth this year, big pieces centred around the theme 'spider', so we were expecting this year to be more about education than sales," said Mr Neil Wenman, senior director at Hauser & Wirth in London. "But we are very happy about the sales too. We were able to connect with a different level of collector in Asia." NEWYORKTIMES