

INHERITANCE by The Finger Players

Theatre Reviews

“Ties That Did Not Quite Bind”

Reviewer: Jeremiah Choy
Performance: 14 April 2016

Inheritance is touted as an exploration of the tender ties between two sisters and their mother, written by Ellison Yuyang Tan a graduate of NUS's TS programme.

Entering the black box, I am immediately confronted by the dimly-lit stark set consisting of a dramatic staircase framing a few platforms and an entrance. Designed by Wong Chee Wai, the set is breathtakingly haunting. Lim Woan Wen's sparse lighting continues into the performance and creates a mindscape of possibilities. Darren Ng's masterful sound design transports me into another world. The trio's minimalistic designs suit the play well and help suspend disbelief.

I applaud and enjoy director Zelda Tatiana Ng's bold, courageous and highly stylistic take on a paper-thin plot of two sisters arguing, bickering and bonding over a domineering mother. Zelda's gamble of using a male actor to play a mental mother is both clever and strategic.

Actor Yeo Kok Siew plays Mother in a black suit with great restraint and understatement and equally sustained competence and commitment.

His artful and emotional voice transcends the histrionic overtones written. He does not give in to a highly-strung overly imaginative mental patient but gives a complex multi-layered mother that is at once cruel, yet pitiful (all this with a straight face and no movement). His presence also highlights the absence of the father figure who had abandoned the three women sometime ago. His clarity in other roles does not detract from his the ever-menacing presence as mother.

However, the same cannot be said of both daughters played by Lina Yu and Jo Kwek. Although both young performers give credible performances, the refreshing directorial concept of having both actresses play out their characters and scenes in marionette-like gestures is not matched by the actresses' commitment to direction. The actresses do not inhabit the strange and estranged world created by the three designers as envisioned by the director.

The bizarreness of this world is one of wonderment and bewilderment suspended in time and almost “Murakmi” in nature. The shadows speak louder than the light. The dream-like soundscape heightens the real and the unreal.

I am puzzled by why in certain scenes, the mother is using a handphone (prop) and two daughters are miming the handphones.

Why are the sisters not talking to each other directly in some scenes and why they do in another?

What is real and what is not?

Perhaps the director Zelda is manipulating us like mother, like she is manipulating the daughters in the production?

Throughout the performance, I am trying to make sense of this world, waiting for the final piece of puzzle that will make sense.

And then the final piece comes in the penultimate scene.

Still, the sense of disentanglement did not come for me (as an audience) at the end. It is definitely not the fault of the director, designers nor the performers.

Perhaps the ties came undone by the very cleverness in its writing?