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Mother-daughter drama pulls the strings



Jo Kwek (far left) and Lina Yu play sisters in a dysfunctional family in *Inheritance*. PHOTO: TUCKYS PHOTOGRAPHY



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REVIEW / THEATRE

INHERITANCE

The Finger Players

Drama Centre Black Box/Thursday

Inheritance takes the gloomy view of the nature-versus-nurture debate. Genetics and upbringing trap two sisters in a dysfunctional family setting which is displayed in blackly comic glory the night before the older sibling (played by Jo Kwek) is to be married.

Zelda Tatiana Ng directs Inheritance as part of The Finger Players' Guest Directors series and the script by actress-turned-writer Ellison Yuyang Tan was also developed under the guidance of company director Chong Tze Chien. Both text and direction are confident and mostly deliver on that assurance.

Kwek's character is brash and outgoing, replaying the philandering ways of an estranged father. Lina Yu plays the stuttering good girl of the family, cowed into obedience by a mentally unstable mother but rebelling through smoking the occasional cigarette.

The stand-out performance comes from Yeo Kok Siew, an androgynous, menacing presence overseeing the sisters' interaction. When he speaks, it is the mother's lines in a deadpan tone that ratchets up the tension. He does this wearing a suit, representing the influence of the absent father.

Yu and Kwek wear similar clothing, doll-like make-up and hair, and move like jointed puppets. It could be a nod to The Finger Players' origins in puppet theatre, but also underscores the characters' helplessness and the disjointed relationship between them.

The layout of the Drama Centre Black Box unfortunately means that viewers often have to choose between surtitles and appreciating the set design by Wong Chee Wai. It includes origami animals - a cat and a bird - brought to life by sound artist Darren Ng.

BOOK IT / INHERITANCE

WHERE: Drama Centre Black Box, 100 Victoria Street, National Library Building, Level 5

WHEN: Tomorrow, 3 and 8pm; Sunday, 3pm

ADMISSION: \$35 from Sistic (call 6348-5555 or go to sistic.com.sg)

INFO: Performed in English, Mandarin and dialect with English surtitles

The director lets the sound artist fill in for other props on stage, a good way to underscore the dangerous dynamics in the family. The sound of a knife being used as a can opener grows fearfully loud as Yu's character cringes from her mother. A scene where Yu's character fails to rescue a bird from a cat is similarly brought to gory life through squeals and, to be consistent, should have stopped there. The feathers scattered simultaneously are over the top.

At just over an hour, *Inheritance* is a short play which could have been even tighter by replacing some of the flashback monologues. As everything possible goes wrong the night before the wedding, the family drama escalates and one learns enough about the sisters and mother and how they have trapped themselves in the current situation.

In the end, only the older sister breaks free, thanks to the younger sister's good nature. A similar resolution granted to the other characters would have been satisfying for the audience, but sadly not in keeping with the spirit of the play.