

ITSY THE MUSICAL by The Finger Players

Theatre Reviews

“Do. Or do not. There is no try.”

Reviewer: Christian W. Huber

Performance: 31 March 2017

After three years of workshopping, the ‘wunderkinds’ of The Finger Players (TFP) – company director/playwright Chong Tze Chien and associate sound artist/composer Darren Ng – venture into virgin territory with *Itsy The Musical*. Their 2017 season opener is their first ever musical.

It has a strong and intelligent story; dark, discordant, yet, lyrical music (the song “Once Upon A Time” is especially catchy and memorable); visually impressive sets; and stylistic choreography. With all these elements combined, *Itsy* succeeds in weaving the story of the bond between a grandparent who’s suffering from dementia and his sick grandchild.

The versatile TFP resident director Oliver Chong is utterly convincing in his role as Xavier – a young, sick boy who revels in the world of fairy tales to escape the pain, but gets manipulated by Itsy the spider. Chong’s physicality and moving performance complements well with Lim Kay Siu, who delivers a moving and sensitive portrayal of Gong Gong – the grandfather – who tries to bring his grandson back into the light before his dementia gets the better of him.

These two get strong support from the Three Blind Mice (Audrey Luo, Ann Lek, and Zee Wong) – reminiscent at times of the three witches of Shakespeare’s Scottish play – as well as Humpty Dumpty (Ebi Shankara), and an ensemble of puppeteers who handle various parts. They commit great effort and discipline into their roles, and make the experience all the more magical.

Sebastian Tan as Itsy-the-not-so-bitsy spider is good. His physicality and movements seem far less disciplined than the others, relying more on his props and costume, but his Broadway-style voice more than makes up for it.

Improvements could still be made – its length could have been trimmed by at least 15 minutes, and brighter sequences within the dark world may have refreshed. But for a group that’s known for staging evocative works with simpler aesthetics and puppets outnumbering actors, they have created a triumph of sorts in their boldness to forge creative works outside of their comfort zone.

TFP have come a long way since their *Furthest North and Deepest South* days in the early part of the millennium, and they have raised the bar. One looks forward to their continued future, delivered with the same confidence, humility, and right dose of aplomb!