



lines the characters speak throughout the play are picked from the actual quotes in the theater review section from The Straits Times Newspaper. The play focuses on the role of the critics as a driving force behind the rise of Singaporean stage performances.

You may think that this would be a long tedious lecture, where the critics are overly and superficially praised, like many narrative biopics you have seen. No, don't get it wrong and don't be fooled by the word 'documentary'.

Despite the substance is documentary the form is exhilarating, jazzy and witty. Amazingly, the long history is succinctly and excitingly explained by the performance using only two actresses. I am not playing around, there are only two women on the stage and the setting is minimal enough to have nothing more than four chairs, a handful of shirts, an eyeglass and a cane.

The duo, Janice Koh and Karen Tan act in multiple roles, portraying dozens of real people behind the dramatic history, from a play critic to a journalist, a drama instructor, an actress, an actor, an even a politician. From the beginning to the end, Janice and Karen have marvelously changed their vocal tones, their accents, the way they walk and use given props on the stage to do impressions of each person. Impersonating one person is hard enough, not to mention doing many, but they nail it triumphantly.

I am not Singaporean, however, I am sufficiently lucky to watch the play with a large group of Singaporean drama students, which is more than three-quarter of the whole seats. The laughter they have burst out all along the show proved how "just right" the impressions are.

Still, the acting is not my most favorite. My mind is blown away after learning how the critics have been the wind beneath the wings of the national dramatic arts.

The story begins in 1965, the birth of the nation. Right from the start, the critics, as the naysayer, look down their noses and harshly diss the theater troupes, saying their plays are "too westernized" and "We are Singaporean, our works need to capture our own cultural identity." There are a couple of thought popping up in my

mind during this scene. They are “How could a one-year-old nation build its own cultural identity? and “Don’t be too pushy, please.”

Time goes by, the critics have become an arch-nemesis to the drama companies. And the turning point is, when it reaches the 90s, the critics becomes a friend. They stand up for the theater people and against the government to stop the attempt of censorship, and they win. Apart from protecting the creative freedom, the critics encourage the government to fund the theater work, making it professional. So to say, as a drama student myself, I envy the Singaporean tremendously.

To sum up, no matter how painfully mighty their pens are, criticism always nurture arts. A profound lesson indeed.

The play ends beautifully, showing the promising future of the Singaporean performing arts ahead. The applause is long and loud as the actresses bows to the audience.

It is a five-star masterpiece. The must for everyone. I undoubtedly give it 10 out of 10.

Come to The Esplanade, a theater by the famous Marina Bay, near the Merlion and see it with your own eyes. It is only a few minutes walking from the underground station, Esplanade.