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## Review: Poop! by The Finger Players



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COMMENT 1



Every so often, a theatrical production that gets just about everything right comes along, enchanting audiences from the opening lines and holding them spellbound till the very end. One of these plays happens to be *Poop!*, one of The Finger Players' best, and most alluring plays. As they condensed a deceptively simple plot, captivating puppetry, blacklight theatre and musings on grief and death into an hour, there were few dry eyes left in the theatre by the time it was over, and a collective sniffle could even be heard before the cast took their final bows.



Last staged at the Esplanade Theatre Studio in 2010 to sold out runs, *Poop!*'s new staging now takes place in the much bigger Victoria Theatre, welcoming a much larger crowd to experience the theatrical magic it cast in its first two stagings. As much as the new venue helps to increase capacity, there are certain key theatrical elements lost in the transfer: the bigger stage makes what was once an intensely intimate play slightly less so. At times, the Victoria Theatre's tech is also unable to fully obscure actors' bodies and movements, affecting the effectiveness of the black light style employed, which hinges on using darkness as a means to allow objects and actors the element of surprise when they are illuminated.



Nonetheless, *Poop!* still remains one of lighting designer Lim Woan Wen's best projects to date, and in spite of the aforementioned problems, still enchants as it did back in 2010. The bigger stage also allows for Lim to play more with levels to fill the space, with clever use of doubling to present characters in two places at once,

or to create a much larger sense of scale as ghosts taking the form of spectral clothing materialize above characters, giving a much greater sense of foreboding. *Poop!* showcases mastery over lighting, and cements Lim's position as one of the very best lighting designers working in the arts scene today.



Chong Tze Chien's well-paced script hits hard and fast, playing out like a whirlwind of emotions as it delivers one devastating line after another, while interspersed with offbeat humour (including talking toilets). In the opening scene, we already start off with the death of a major character (happily misappropriating and singing 'Let It Go' as he falls through the sky), which acts as the trigger for the rest of the play as his family deals with the loss in various ways. Chong's script is so powerful because he manages to draw out the poetry inherent in simple truths and poignant imagery, striking close to the heart. Daughter Emily (Jean Ng) is the epitome of innocence, and it was easy to understand her confusion and actions in the ensuing years following her father's death. Moving across the stage with a light skip and a keen sense of playfulness, it is this foil that helps aggravate the second tragedy that befalls the family later on.



Meanwhile, Janice Koh and Neo Swee Lin, playing the deceased's wife and mother respectively, play off well against each other in their conflicting methods of dealing with grief: the former fast sinking into a bog of depression while the latter keeps smiling, partially in denial as she tells Emily that her father continues to live on all around her. Janice Koh's raw description of being unable to move on marks the first major emotional

high point in the play, and from there, *Poop!* goes on a roll of one tearjerking scene to another, helped by Darren Ng's evocative sound design that samples only the most affecting of Sigur Ros tracks. Whether it's Janice Koh crying out in pain and anger, or Neo Swee Lin's eventual reveal of her darkest fears and true emotions, both veteran actresses brought across intense grief and successfully portrayed the remains of a family in pieces after the loss of a loved one.



Finally, despite his early onstage death, Julius Foo still plays a huge role in the plot of *Poop!*, appearing as a disembodied head from time to time as he floats around and offers conversations from beyond the grave with all three women left behind. Foo's initial fun and light hearted interactions with his daughter as a literal talking head gives way to far darker moments as his motivation for suicide becomes clear midway through the play. Chong's script expresses the inherent fear in many of us that perhaps, we are simply not good enough for this world, and Foo's ineffable expression serves to underscore the immensely heavy scene in its depiction of one man who feels intensely, incredibly alone and misunderstood.



Considering the large stage, puppeteers Ang Hui Bin, Darren Guo and Zee Wong have done a remarkable job of navigating the space to set up props and puppets, and it is these puppets (designed by Ang Hui Bin, Oliver Chong and Steffi Tan) that make *Poop!* a thoroughly Finger Players production and unique in portrayal of death. In the immortal words of pop star Katy Perry, 'Do you ever feel like a plastic bag?' is a phrase

that *Poop!* takes on quite literally, but in their capable hands, the simple image of a plastic bag floating in the wind becomes an undeniable sign of life after death, a symbol of desperate hope and the difficulty of letting go.



*Poop!* is a play that perfectly epitomizes The Finger Players' aesthetic and vision completely: utilizing a simple storyline to bring out some of the most universal themes while harnessing the power of theatrical magic from puppetry and almost supernaturally clever lighting design. *Poop!* swells with raw emotion while evoking the heartbreak of everyday tragedies, cleverly weaving in whimsical humour amidst its pitch black plot to deliver a powerful portrayal of death and its effects. Be sure to prepare plenty of tissues if you're coming to watch this play, either for yourself or the person seated beside you; *Poop!* puts audiences through an intensive and thorough emotional purge, and once you leave the theatre, there's an immense sense of satisfaction and relief brought on by its cathartic effects, and *Poop!* is certain to stay at the forefront of your heart and mind long after leaving the theatre.