

POOP! by The Finger Players

Theatre Reviews

“Poop!”

Reviewer: Myle Yan Tay

Performance: 22 October 2017

Jean Ng, playing a young girl, sits centre-stage upon a toilet bowl and strains through her constipation. The floating head of her father, as played by Julius Foo, looms above her. As she grunts and heaves, her father, promises to bring her on a journey unlike any other. In a different play, this would be absurdly comedic. But Chong Tze Chien and his team make it one of the most emotionally charged and moving moments of theatre this reviewer has seen this year.

Though grief is an oft-explored topic in theatre, The Finger Players' re-staging of Chong Tze Chien's *Poop!* manages to feel novel in its exploration and honest in its story. Each element of the production is focused and purposeful, exploring themes of mortality and mourning.

Lim Woan Wen, the lighting designer, deliberately obscures the stage throughout the play, giving the production an overall feeling of melancholy. And by revealing so little with each lighting plot, Lim guides the audience's eye, propelling the production forward. Darren Ng, the sound designer, backs the production with haunting tracks, reminiscent of children's music-boxes, and delicate piano melodies. His sound design brings emotional weight to each scene, without ever being overbearing or seeming like a cheap crutch. And as is the Finger Players' trademark, the puppetry (performed by Ang Hui Bin, Darren Guo & Zee Wong) is top-notch, elegant and evocative, flowing in and out of scenes without ever distracting.

After Julius Foo tumbles to his death, he haunts the stage. His head is suspended several meters above the actors, while puppeteers control his disembodied limbs. In one scene, Julius Foo's detached head tries to soothe his daughter, while his "arm" peeks out of the darkness, caressing her face. It is an incredible picture, and only one example of how Chong maintains the surreal visuals of this production.

It is one thing to that each individual production element is this effective. It is on a different level when each of them combine to become more than the sum of its parts. Thanks to Chong's direction, each component melds together masterfully, creating a cohesive and resonant piece of theatre.

It must be noted that characters in *Poop!* do not sound like normal people. Chong's language is distinct, sentences always feeling slightly off. But it is thanks to this unique sound that Chong is able to cut to the heart of the piece. Though it may initially be off-putting, the consistency of its sound eventually makes the dialogue rhythmic, direct without being overtly blunt.

Jean Ng's character promises at the beginning of *Poop!* that it only gets happier after her father's suicide. As the production progresses, this feels less and less true. But her promise is eventually fulfilled, as even after its tragic ending, this reviewer finds the play uplifting and inspirational, not just through its theme but in its artistic ambition.