

***The Spirits Play* by Kuo Pao Kun**

A terrifying tale of paralysis, horror, and trauma, *The Spirits Play* tells the stories of five spirits stuck in spiritual limbo in the aftermath of war: specifically, World War 2.

This iteration of Kuo Pao Kun's play has gone through a restructuring of the spirits' individual monologues, which were originally split into five separate portions. Instead, director Oliver Chong interweaves the monologues of the Man, Woman, Girl, Poet, and General, as they take turns to deliver parts of their stories, effectively accentuating the blend of their personal narratives. This eventually culminates in the realisation of the one thing that binds them together despite having experienced different facets of the war: the excruciating pain of lost loves, hopes, and lives.

Opening to disconcerting sounds of gasping followed by scattered, piercing silences, *The Spirits Play* is a tale of enslavement to the horror and trauma specifically in contexts of war, made manifest in physical expressions of absolute terror, raspy gasps, monotonous chanting, and haunting laughter throughout the play that enveloped a very quiet audience.



Audience members grew restless due to the play's slightly draggy trajectory, but all was objectively well until the rather shocking and obvious script prompts that had to be shouted across the stage to the General from a prompter stationed backstage. Almost like a reversed echo that could have been taken for a stylistic choice, the very inconsistency of these backstage prompts was what gave it away as the audience could clearly hear which parts of the script was memorised and which were not, with chunks of monologue or dialogue delivered only after prompting and some delivered without.

Resurrecting the very real paralysing terror that comes with the aftermath of war, *The Spirits Play* was an excellent achievement on the part of theatrical lighting (by Lim Woan Wen) in vibrant shades of blue, green, and purple, as well as set design that was defined by fluttery white pieces of paper that covered the ground resembling ashes, and commendable use of shadow puppetry. Ending at the height of terror by use of very disturbing sound design (by Darren Ng) inducing a suffocating atmosphere enclosing in on a full red moon that hung above upstage centre, the play's brilliant conclusion unfortunately felt largely unearned by its overall progression.