

DEAR MISS YE by NUS Chinese Drama

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“Using the Sandpit as an Agora“

Reviewer: Isaac Tan

Performance: 17 March 2017

If social dramas tend to be heavy-handed, Lyudmila Razumovskaya’s *Dear Elena Sergeevna* – of which *Dear Miss Ye* is a modern Mandarin reinterpretation – certainly takes the cake. Four high school students visit their teacher on the pretext of paying her a social visit. However, it soon becomes apparent that they want access to their examination papers in order to ensure they score well enough to enter university. A huge ethical debate ensues as these precocious teenagers take turns to persuade, threaten, and cajole their teacher into handing over the key card.

Apart from the improbable situation in which it was impossible for the teacher to seek help, the pseudo-philosophical arguments by the students are naïve rants, rather than a reaction to the societal expectations, and pressures of modern life. This supposedly hard-hitting and provocative piece of theatre is no more than a farce on self-importance.

The decision by NUS Chinese Drama to set this play in the present day makes the situation even more improbable, given the availability of various communication devices. None of the threats from the students raise the stakes high enough for Miss Ye to be caught between a rock and a hard place. One wonders why Miss Ye didn’t chase her students out of the house with a broom.

The only way for this show to have any impact is through the sheer force of the students’ personality. Despite the weak plot, the actors playing the students (Wang Jixi, Lai Bao Cai, Guo Xinyu, Zhao Chenxu) must drive up the tension and somehow make Miss Ye (Camille Zhaoyi) feel emotionally threatened. Unfortunately, they generally exist in their respective bubbles and reanimate when it is time to deliver a line. Furthermore, every time their characters face an emotional conflict, the actors look down and away, thus causing the energy of the scene to plummet.

Camille’s performance as Miss Ye is as appetising as soggy bread. Her performance is thoroughly tentative, and one never knows how Miss Ye feels about the situation. Even towards the end when a violent act takes place, one is unsure if she made her decision out of concern for her students; fear for her own safety; or desperation for everything to end.

In a couple of moments when she is clearly angry, Miss Ye raises her voice which contains a tinge of exasperation.

Ironically, that is an apt response in reaction to the subpar performances and the attempt to force young feet into the sandals of Greek philosophers.

Do you have an opinion or comment about this post? Email us at info@centre42.sg.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

DEAR MISS YE by NUS Chinese Drama

17 – 18 March 2017

University Cultural Centre, National University of Singapore

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Isaac started reviewing plays for the student publication, Kent Ridge Common, and later developed a serious interest in theatre criticism after taking a module at university. He is also an aspiring poet, and has a passion for acting and flamenco dancing.