

DIM SUM DOLLIES: THE HISTORY OF SINGAPORE PART 2 by Dream Academy

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“Lively Romp Through Local History“

Reviewer: Isaac Tan

Performance: 12 December 2014

The Dim Sum Dollies complain that our history textbooks are white-washed and they want to present their version of Singapore’s history. Boy did they keep their promise. *The History of Singapore Part II* is a history lesson that went Broadway by way of Singapore (and vice versa).

I am amazed at how they managed to pack every major event in Singapore from 1965 to the early 2000s in 80 minutes. Despite the dash through the decades, the Dollies certainly had amusing things to say for each event; and they got the audience howling incessantly.

The greatest strength of the production is the writing. While the main jibes are not new, Selena Tan (writer, one-third of Dim Sum Dollies) must be commended for re-contextualising them in new and creative ways that gave way to many possibilities for comedy. There were plenty of witty quips and jibes that invite the audience to revel in the cleverness of it all.

The clever writing is complemented by the energetic performances of the cast. Despite the unending series of costume changes and choreography, The Dim Sum Dollies (Selena Tan, Pam Oei, and Denise Tan), Chopstick (Hossan Leong), and Loh Mai Guys (backup dancers) performed the show to great aplomb. There was great chemistry amongst them. The choreography was tight and well-executed, especially the rapid transition to *dikir barat* in one of the scenes. Special mention must go to Hossan Leong for portraying all the major ethnicities in Singapore history—including a British colonial master and a Japanese soldier— within the span of the opening scene.

A show by the Dim Sum Dollies is never without high production values. Elaine Chan must be commended for her wonderful compositions which encapsulated the musical style of the various eras presented on stage. Her adaptation of hits to new lyrics definitely brought the audience down memory lane. While I enjoyed the re-arrangements of various hits, I wished there were more original tunes included in the show.

CK Chia (set designer) and Frederick Lee (costume designer) must be praised for adding a Broadway pizzazz to the show in full flashy and sequined glory. Chia showcases his versatility in designing a variety of scenery from Gopal’s laundry to the wild jungle that was wheeled off and on stage. Lee does not pale in comparison with his giant flower costumes and familiar mascots of yesteryear.

While *The History of Singapore Part II* is mainly about fun and laughter, its educational value must not be brushed off. Even though I am generally familiar with most of the events mentioned, I did learn about a couple of lesser known campaigns that were introduced before I was born.

Regardless of historical accuracy, I definitely welcome the literal and figurative ruffling of feathers—Dim Sum Dollies style.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

DIM SUM DOLLIES: THE HISTORY OF SINGAPORE PART 2 by Dream Academy

11 – 23 December 2014
Esplanade Theatre

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Isaac Tan is a current contributor to *The Kent Ridge Common*, an NUS publication, and an aspiring poet whose poems have appeared in *Symbal*, *Eunoia Review*, *Eastlit*, and *Malaise Journal*.