

# Review: Fat Pig a Mid-Sized Success

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Fat Pig

Pangdemonium!

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DBS Arts Centre

So this play is about a regular bloke, Tom, who falls in love with some gi-normous woman, Helen. His dick of a colleague, Carter, finds out and spreads the news. This leaves Tom having to deal with office talk and the ire of his ex-girlfriend, Jeannie, a naggy bitch with a smoking hot body.

Feeling uncomfortable with that kind of talk? That is Pangdemonium's *Fat Pig* for you – proudly provocative but a joy to watch despite some flaws. Neil LaBute's script unabashedly fleshes out society's perceptions of obesity and voices every unspoken thought that hides behind awkward silences. This puts us in an uncomfortable situation of laughing out loud while realising that we are guilty of such jokes at the same time.

The success of executing this tightly paced script, which has an element of pathos amidst its ostensible comic lines, rests squarely on the actors' shoulders. Not only did they bore its weight, they performed it with aplomb.

Frances Lee (Helen) sparkles as the jolly librarian who followed her heart despite the pressures and possible humiliation that comes with starting a relationship. While it is unfortunate that Lee is no stranger to some of Helen's experiences, she must be commended for being able to translate it into a sterling performance that is subtle and sensitive. Her chemistry with co-star Gavin Yap (Tom) is palpable as they had impeccable timing with the lines. Additionally, two actors were clearly comfortable with each other as their lovey-dovey scenes put a smile on my face.

Aside from his chemistry with Lee, Yap was right at home with comedy. His repertoire of antics such as film impressions and slapstick physicality certainly added to his boyish charms and elicited hearty laughter all night long. At certain points of the performance, I could even hear the female audience members cooing and calling him adorable.

Unfortunately, his final scene marred his overall performance drastically. His energy on stage plunged and Lee was left cold as she tried to keep it afloat. It was difficult for me to stay engaged which is a shame because it is an important scene.

While LaBute aimed to create characters that are "as complex as people are in real life," he did not succeed with Carter and Jeannie. Both of them felt thin as characters with the former being perpetually obnoxious and the latter, over-domineering. Although the characters revealed details which explain their behaviour, it is a tokenistic attempt as the

rest of their lines pigeon-holed them into established stereotypes. Despite these limitations, Zachary Ibrahim (Carter) and Elizabeth Lazan (Jeannie) did the best they could with their roles.

Ibrahim brought a great deal of energy to his role as Carter. This created an interesting tension whenever he butts into the affairs of Tom. His strong physicality and expressive features contributed a great deal to the comedy.

Larzan had her work cut out for her as she had lesser stage time. Despite the odds, she pulled off a decent performance as the shrill Jeannie. Having to go from being calm and collected to a full-blown shouting match is no mean feat.

In terms of direction, Tracie Pang certainly made a couple of interesting choices which enhanced the show. The first one is the decision to have Helen eat for 15 minutes in full view of the audience before the show starts. This reflects Carter's comments that fat people can remedy their situation by not putting so much food in their mouths. Such counterpoints raise important questions about whether there is an underlying problem with Helen that made her eat so much. If that is so, does this mean all obese people have problems? That said, it must be noted that the artificial bread on the table and the artificial apple that Tom brings in were really distracting and should be removed.

The second point of note would be Pang's decision to update the comedy by including Carter and Tom watching a YouTube video of someone having an elastic mouth (The video does exist!) The fact that this inclusion did not seem out of place suggests how the scenarios depicted in the play could very well happen in homes and offices right now.

Finally, credit must be given Eucien Chia for his set design. His ability to house an office, a home and a beach in a relatively small stage space is astounding. Seeing how parts of the set swivel and move with such efficiency made me feel like a child gawking at a complex exhibit in the Science Centre.

While this production has its share of unforgettable moments and flaws, one has to look at the big picture – *Fat Pig* promises an entertaining yet thought-provoking experience for everyone.

I recommend that you go in with a big heart and not let the flaws ruin the enjoyable experience that *Fat Pig* rewards its audience with.