

MAIN2 by Teater Ekamatra

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“A Playful Take on Uncomfortable Issues“

Reviewer: Isaac Tan

Performance: 23 July 2017

Unless you've been living under a rock, being told that one's society is plagued by drug abuse, domestic abuse, incest, and extra-marital affairs should not come as a surprise. Yet, knowing these facts and its relevant statistics does not prepare you to confront the individual stories.

And that's what we are faced with, as we enter Teater Ekamatra's playground in *Main-Main*. Six characters find themselves in a liminal space, which happens to be a whimsical playground, and by interacting with each other through games, they reveal how their lives played out.

Playwright and director Aidli Mosbit's riffing on the theme of play is no literary exercise. The lightness of touch in the treatment of these heavy themes engages the audience in two ways.

First, the playful atmosphere throws the dark themes into sharper relief.

In a scene where the characters list various things with which one can play, an unguarded Suhaila Safari blurts out paedophilia and playing with children. The scene immediately takes a very dark turn. The same applies to seeing the characters play a game in one scene, and violently confront each other in the next.

This contrast draws one's attention to issues to which one may have been inured to due to countless incidents of the same kind being played out in the media.

Second, the use of camp and make-believe gently guides the audience to encounter topics that are very taboo, such as paedophilia. Topics that will otherwise make the audience flinch and tune out, which can elude any meaningful discussion.

The mythical story of a sultan being cursed as he cannot be aroused by grown women may appear to be a cheap joke, but we are unwittingly being guided into observing an uncomfortable act once we collectively realise the disturbing implications of such a curse.

Aidli Mosbit strikes the right balance in playing with both dynamics, and this results in an engaging, and provocative show.

This is complemented by stellar performances from the ensemble (Al-Matin Yatim, Farez Najid, Farhana M Noor, Hatta bin Said, Munah Bagharib, and Suhaili Safari). There isn't a single moment in which any of the actors drop the ball as they juggle both playful and

serious scenes with complete ease. Their keen sense of timing for comedy as well as in the transitions makes the show thoroughly entertaining and well-paced.

The best testament to the efficacy of what Teater Ekamatra aims to achieve is a fellow audience member wondering aloud whether these stories are true. Even if the specifics are made up, it is sobering to realise that similar incidents occur every day, and not all of them make it into the news.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

MAIN2 by Teater Ekamatra

20 – 23 July 2017

Esplanade Theatre Studios

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.