

PARADISE by Teater Ekamatra

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“Paradise Unfound“

Reviewer: Isaac Tan

Performance: 7 December 2014

In the post-apocalyptic world of Kesamet, Orgone is the raw element which fuels life and its very existence. Dan, an orgone producer, does not see the point of endlessly producing Orgone. Talulah, a fellow producer, advises him to keep to his station and carry out his duties diligently. This falls on deaf ears and Dan wants to leave.

What happens? A long drawn play that spends most of the time convincing the audience to believe in this dystopia, that's what.

While I appreciate playwright Zizi Azah's efforts in meticulously unveiling how Kesamet came to be, but all that work is woefully misplaced. The audience would have understood what Kesamet represents after understanding that its leader rebuilt it from the ashes and is zealously trying to make it self-sufficient. Also, the clash between ideals and brute reality is a well-worn theme which makes it even more crucial that it be well-fleshed out in this imaginary context. Unfortunately, the treatment is inadequate as there is hardly any conflict apart from Dan questioning out loud.

The resolution is consequently a non-starter.

Despite this, the actors did achieve the 'Kesametian' ideal of performing their roles well. Crispian Chan (Dan) and Maimunah Bagharib (Meg) did have chemistry as a couple which makes it poignant when the latter was reduced to a beast-like creature. Bagharib displayed such agility in her physicality as the creature so much so that I thought she was playing two different characters.

Becca D'Bus (Talulah) plays the unlikely friend of Dan and entertains the audience with a chirpy and flirty persona. D'Bus and Chan must be commended for portraying a believable friendship. They started out as colleagues but they soon became friends who are invested in each other's welfare. In fact, Talulah grew to be so likeable that I wish I knew her backstory. I didn't care as much for the other characters though.

Ang Hui Bin excelled as the sinister and unpredictable leader of Kesamet. She managed to incorporate all the quirks of a despot and switches from being cruel to kind effortlessly. There were a couple of times she veered into being a caricature but managed to pull back in time. Jean Toh (Kat) played the loyal but maligned subject. While she started off without leaving much of an impression, I was soon sympathetic to her especially towards the end.

If Teater Ekamatra's *Paradise* was designed to provoke and provide some form of pleasure, this paradise was almost found, but ultimately missed.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

PARADISE by Teater Ekamatra

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Drama Center Black Box

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.