

POULTRY TALES by I Theatre

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“I Theatre’s Metatheatrical Gamble Shows Promise“

Reviewer: Isaac Tan

Performance: 5 May 2017

One often expects children’s theatre to be vivid in order to spark the imagination of children, as they are taken into a whole different world. Imagine my surprise when I walk into the theatre with boxes across the stage, the curtain legs still up, and the lighting rig still down.

Can this be? A metatheatrical framing in a children’s show?

One soon finds out that the main impetus of the show is to educate children on the mechanics of the theatre. This is done through the premise of a stage manager and her assistant introducing the two playful interns to what it takes to put up a show.

As for the tales featuring poultry (*The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs*, *The Little Red Hen*, and *Chicken-Licken*), they are relegated to three skits in which the characters decide to do a little play-acting given that they have time to spare before the director comes.

Aside from the minor quibble that one may get the impression that stage crew members have an innate desire to perform, the morals of those stories do not really sink in due to the brevity of those skits.

That said, the metatheatrical gambit on the whole does pay off. While the stories chosen for the show are based on the types of characters they have, such a framing makes one think about other possible connections across various popular children’s stories. How do we retell famous stories for the children of today?

Speaking of children, one may question the extent to which they would appreciate such a method of storytelling. I will not be surprised if they take to it, given that they are constantly bombarded with different media and their respective modes of presentation.

In the age of CGI, pixels, and bytes, perhaps the most magical thing is to see how a show is being put on stage with actual people, materials, and a whole lot of teamwork. There is no better way to introduce children to theatre than to have them witness the actual mechanics of theatre-making.

To that end, I Theatre must be applauded for their willingness to experiment, and not dumb down the shows just because they are meant for children.

Yet, the stark image of the boxes across the stage is not without dramatic irony. In writing the first scene, playwright and artistic director Brian Seward cannot have foreseen that his company will have its funding completely removed.

While economic restructuring is necessary to ensure that the arts scene remains a broad church, it is downright preposterous to build a new chapel by removing the cornerstone of the cathedral.

With its consistent and excellent output, despite the fact that children's theatre is often overlooked (Best Production for the Young was only initiated at the Life! Theatre Awards last year), I Theatre is definitely a cornerstone.

Let us hope that we will not see them put their things in boxes anytime soon.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

POULTRY TALES by I Theatre

27 April – 14 May 2017

Drama Centre Theatre

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.