

# QUARTERS குவாட்ரஸ் by Avant Theatre

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## “Sepia-Soaked Banality”

**Reviewer: Isaac Tan**

**Performance: 19 June 2015**

How does one relive one’s childhood? Look at old photographs? Meet a childhood friend?

For director G Selva and playwright Arivazhagan Thirugnanam, one throws one’s childhood on stage, pack every single comic cliché devised by man, and flood it with sepia sentimentality.

This experiment in nostalgia is set in a staff living quarters of the Public Utilities Board in 1975 and it revolves around the lives of the residents as they prepare for national day. It is meant to address the loss of the old ways of life as the people transition to living in housing apartments.

It is amazing that this Tamil production boasts thirty or so actors but no memorable characters. To milk cheap laughter, the female characters are either quarrelsome or prone to histrionics while the male characters are mostly lazy, silly, or uncouth. It is almost impossible to differentiate the female characters while it is slightly easier for the male characters as they have a specific character tick.

That said, some kudos must go to the actors for memorising huge chunks of lines and various routines. The non-Tamil actors have the added difficulty of knowing when to interject. As far as this reviewer could tell, there was no obvious slip-up.

To espouse the values of community, the eight families supposedly go through trial and tribulations for them to learn the importance of unity in diversity. However, these trials are so banal—misplaced jewellery, fighting after losing a football match etc.—that they are better off moving away or living alone if they cannot resolve such matters.

The play would have benefited if it placed the only interesting plot point of a daughter having to rush back to India to attend her mother’s funeral at the fore rather than trying to give every story equal airing.

Additionally, the production is afraid that the audience would not understand the significance of these ‘trials’ hence the moral of the story is explicitly declared by the characters. This makes *Aesop’s Fables* a masterpiece of subtlety.

As if things could not get any worse, the English surtitles are often four lines late and this reviewer faces the odd situation of having most of the audience laugh before getting the punch line.

The only novel thing about this production is that the excellent skill of the set designer is actually a disservice to the play. Lim Eng Siang's realistic rendering of a two-storey quarters may compel those hungry for nostalgia to suspend all manner of discernment and revel in the 'good old days.'

Ultimately, *Quarters* is nothing but a racial harmony, heritage, and national day skit rolled into one.

Unlike school skits which only last for thirty minutes, this reviewer had to sit through this three-hour monstrosity and was bored to the point of paralysis.

Do you have an opinion or comment about this post? Email us at [info@centre42.sg](mailto:info@centre42.sg).

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

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**QUARTERS குவாட்ரஸ் by Avant Theatre**

19- 20 June 2015,

Victoria Theatre

## **ABOUT THE REVIEWER**

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**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.