

THE WEE QUESTION MARK AND THE MOUNTAIN MOVERS by The Theatre Practice

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“Curiosity Cultivators”

Reviewer: Isaac Tan

Performance: 4 August 2019

We all expect stories meant for children to have a simple plot and clear ending, so that the little ones will be able to understand the moral of the story. But what if we have a little faith in children’s intelligence and make the ending indeterminate?

That is what The Theatre Practice did with the well-known tale of *Mr. Fool Moves the Mountain*. The original tale, briefly put, is about Mr. Fool, who wanted to move two mountains that are in front of his house so that his family will have an easier access to the outer world. While he was derided for his seemingly futile efforts, he persisted, and a deity was impressed by his resilience and helped him move the mountains.

The Theatre Practice turns the tale into a fun musical in which wee Question Mark (Ang Xiao Ting), wee Comma (Ng Mun Poh), and Exclamation Mark (Windson Liong), retells the tale with a few crucial changes. Several generations of the Yu (a homonym for foolish and fish in Mandarin) family has been digging for two hundred years, and the family of fishermen is now known as the mountain movers. They are later joined by the rest of the village to speed up the process, but as soon as some members of the younger generation realise that there is wildlife on the mountain, they are reluctant to continue digging.

A fable that seems trite now becomes a moral dilemma: to dig or not to dig?

The story is complemented by catchy tunes by Julian Wong, witty lyrics by Xiaohan, and an engaging cast that is adept at facilitating discussions with children. Director Kuo Jian Hong leads the way in showing how children can learn through play.

While the children may not realise it, they are grappling with a perennial problem in our country: do we conserve nature or destroy it in the name of “progress” and convenience? Is there a middle way?

Expectedly, the children are stumped, and so are the adults. But the most refreshing thing about the show is how they encourage children to ask questions with no clear answer.

Perhaps, being fine with uncertainty while not dimming one’s sense of curiosity might just be an antidote to a society that tends to determine certain fixed pathways for a child the moment he or she is born.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

THE WEE QUESTION MARK AND THE MOUNTAIN MOVERS by The Theatre Practice

31 July – 11 August 2019

Practice Space

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Isaac graduated from the National University of Singapore with a BA (Hons) in Philosophy, and he took Theatre Studies as a second major. He 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 his poems have appeared in Symbal, Eunoia Review, Eastlit, and Malaise Journal.