

# THREE FAT VIRGINS UNASSEMBLED by TheatreWorks

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## “Awkward Assembly”

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**Reviewer: Isaac Tan**

**Performance: 14 July 2019**

The biggest conundrum facing any director restaging a play that was written several decades ago is balancing between “making it relevant” and letting the piece speak for itself.

In dealing with Ovidia Yu’s *Three Fat Virgins Unassembled*, director Grace Kalaiselvi does a little bit of both. The result? A slightly awkward assembly.

Yu’s play is a blistering satire about how women are often placed in impossible situations, and judged by equally impossible standards in the various roles they play in society. It also reasserts a sense of self-worth by reclaiming the derogatory labels of “fat” and “virgin”, and declaring that women should be comfortable with being who they are.

Kalaiselvi’s interventions manifests in several ways. The first is to push the play to say more than it originally did. In his review, writer and critic Ng Yi-Sheng expressed mixed feelings about the suggestion of a possible suicide, which was not in the original script. This reviewer agrees with Ng that it is unwarranted, and it also feels like a strident push to amplify the pitifulness of an unfulfilled wife and mother.

Furthermore, the pace of the show is slightly slower than what is demanded by the script. With three actors role-playing different sorts of “fat virgins” and a fourth doubling as a commentator or “the man” in various situations, we are supposed to see an accelerating parade of silliness, which highlights the ridiculous standards being imposed on women. Yet the gentle pace of this staging does little to emphasise these caricatured vignettes, thus dulling the play’s bite.

Yet another one of Kalaiselvi’s directorial decisions is to update the play’s references. The clearest example is to change Agony Aunt columns in magazines (which offer nonsensical advice to teenage girls) to that of forums on Reddit and Quora. It is interesting to note that due to the fleeting nature of modern technology, the substitution does not seem to hold as much cultural sway as magazine advice columns did in the 1990s.

That said, the performance is buoyed by a sense of playfulness in the cast (Chanel Chan, Munah Bagharib, Zelda Tatiana Ng, and Rebekah Sangeetha Dorai) as they don and doff their various characters with ease. Their sense of derring-do as they play certain stereotypes to the hilt also adds to the overall enjoyment of the show.

It is always a boon to restage older local plays due to our shallow cultural memory, but it requires a really deft hand to maintain a classic's integrity while ensuring that it is still impactful on the modern audience.

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## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

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### **THREE FAT VIRGINS UNASSEMBLED by TheatreWorks**

10 – 14 July 2019

72-13

## **ABOUT THE REVIEWER**

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**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.