

# UGLY DUCKLING by Arts Theatre of Singapore

---

 [centre42.sg/ugly-duckling-by-arts-theatre-of-singapore](http://centre42.sg/ugly-duckling-by-arts-theatre-of-singapore)

## “Ennobled Duckling”

---

**Reviewer: Isaac Tan**

**Performance: 5 August 2018**

If you really think about it, the ugly duckling in Hans Christian Anderson’s original tale isn’t admirable. It endured taunts about its looks initially, but everything went well when it struck the genetic lottery and became a beautiful swan.

Not so in the latest production by Chinese children’s theatre company, Arts Theatre of Singapore.

Director and writer Ai Jia Qi ennobles the duckling by expanding the storyline and requiring it to display courage and intelligence to help save his new friends – Little Dog, Little Rabbit, and Field Mouse – from a wolf.

Furthermore, the duckling doesn’t just become a swan. It works hard to be able to dance like one, too, which makes the show a theatrical bildungsroman of the ugly duckling.

On top of this being a tale with better morals for children, it also boasts catchy song and dance routines. These elements are all original creations, and that has been a standard practice for Arts Theatre of Singapore’s productions – no mean feat for a small company that puts up a show every other month.

Jane Mok Kee Ann, in the titular role, establishes the character arc of the duckling very well, transforming it from a timid duckling to a courageous and quick-witted one, while being sympathetic and kind at the same time. By the end of the show, Mok’s character has truly earned its feathers.

Meanwhile, the rest of cast (Yao Jia Wei, Sun Mei Ling, Ye Bing, Zhang Tao, Tong Ling Yun, Jin Yan, Li Jing, Liao Yan Ran, Ge Ge Ri Le) is very versatile in playing multiple roles, while handling the quick scene transitions in a rather tight space.

The only distracting thing about the show is that the various set pieces cannot be placed side by side completely, leaving gaps in between them. Hence, one can see the characters hiding behind the pieces before they are due to appear.

However, the children does not seem bothered by that which, I concede, is more important in this case.

For those who check the listings of Singapore Repertory Theatre, Paper Monkey Theatre, and The Theatre Practice when it comes to Chinese children’s theatre, do add Arts Theatre of Singapore to your list.

Sure, it may be a small company and its shows have simpler production values. But as the tale of *Ugly Duckling* rightly teaches us, one should never judge something by its appearance alone.

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

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

---

### **Ugly Duckling by Arts Theatre of Singapore**

1 – 5 Aug 2018

Gateway Theatre Black Box

## **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.