

# VERSUS by Cake Theatrical Productions

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## “What is the Point of Confrontation?”

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**Reviewer: Isaac Tan**

**Performance: 21 August 2015**

What goes into a Cake production?

An episodic structure, edgy music, video projections, big masks or headgear, and jarring dances. In the context of *Versus*, these elements are employed to explore various facets of personal and national struggles against the backdrop of the rise and fall of empires.

In the midst of it all, various characters ask various existential questions. Two women named Mary (Edith Podesta and Andrea Ang) — one of them possibly imaginary — struggle with identity and perception. A soldier (Thomas Pang) questions the point of fighting and war; a dictator (Julius Foo) questions any challenge to his power, and pseudo-mythical beings of creation and destruction (Goh Guat Kian and Julius Foo) perform their respective acts of creation and destruction responsible for all the questions in the first place.

Throw in a parodic interlude of *Land Before Time* meets *Wizard of Oz* where pre-historic animals are in search of the truth from a “surrealistic artist” and you get an acid trip sans damage to your physical health.

Amidst the torrent of questions, I have one of my own: what is the point of *Versus*’ confrontation?

The dense text, written by Michelle Tan, contains catchy existential phrases (“Some days are harder than others. All days come to an end”). The text is, however, complicated by the flurry of contradictory hand gestures by the actors as they deliver their lines. To top it all off, the audience is bludgeoned with video sequences, sound effects, and trippy songs sung by angels perched on ladder-like structures. All this appears to be different layers of meanings to be decoded, but the audience has no starting point or a chance to find their bearings.

The play is not interested in intellectualization or drawing its audience in emotionally. It conflates the personal and universal but hovers above dualisms. Questions are asked but it seems uninterested in getting an answer.

Such all-out confrontations may well reflect the complex post-modern condition. But do it repeatedly and it only becomes an on-stage kaleidoscope; an intriguing toy in which the audience marvel at stage pictures and continuously return merely to see how off-kilter the dramaturgy can get.

Director Natalie Hennedige mentions in the show notes that Cake’s productions are “defined by [their] own rules of play.” This reviewer is all for pushing the envelope. But to devise a game without telling the audience the rules is another thing altogether.

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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### **VERSUS by Cake Theatrical Productions**

20 – 22 August 2015

SOTA Drama 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.