

WITH/OUT by Loo Zihan

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“Paddy’s Struggle Lives On”

Reviewer: Isaac Tan

Performance: 14 January 2015

In 1999, Paddy Chew spoke about living with aids through his one-man show, *Completely With/Out Character*.

Back then, a pervasive silence clouded over the subject.

Sixteen years later, silence also greeted the end of a re-creation of Chew’s performance.

But this time, it is broken by the buzz of conversations and discussions when the audience left the black box.

Loo Zihan’s re-creation is hard to pin down as the set-up would not look out of place as an art installation. The original production was projected on three screens in the black box while Haresh Sharma, playwright of the original script, did a voice-over from the rehearsal room flushed with clinical fluorescent lights.

The audience is thus challenged to decide if what they are watching can still be considered theatre and also; who exactly are the players in the performance? While there are no easy answers, one thing is certain; Loo’s ambitious endeavour to recapture Chew’s presence—however mediated and fragmentary—is anything but an elaborate film screening.

The whole production is meticulously thought through. The free standing event prevents the audience from being too transfixed by what they are watching as they have to negotiate the space between each other and the two rooms. The audience are also empowered to choose how they wish to engage the production.

This is complemented by the placing of similar/replica props that were used in the original production within the space. These ‘relics’ reminded us that what was presented was not just a flat celluloid projection but that *Completely With/Out Character* actually happened; Chew did perform the show.

Loo’s decision to invite Sharma to read is a significant one. It is fitting that Sharma gives voice to the words that was collectively generated by him and Chew. The conscious effort by Sharma to replicate the cadences and inflections of Chew’s voice presented a chilling illusion as if it was Chew who was speaking. At the same time, the audience are confronted with Chew’s absence whenever the voice-over was not in sync as his voice trails off as an echo.

As there will be a different reader every night, it would be interesting to see the different effect each reader brings to the show.

Some may find this production overwhelming as it makes so many demands: but life, sickness, death, and loss are never comfortable subjects.

With/Out is a fitting and wonderful tribute to the memory of Paddy Chew and I cannot help but wonder:

What would Paddy do if he were still alive?

Can we, as a society, truly love Paddy?

What can *we* do now?

Do you have an opinion or comment about this post? Email us at info@centre42.sg.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

WITH/OUT by Loo Zihan

14 – 18 January 2015

Centre 42 Black Box and Rehearsal Studio

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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.