

Review: *Without Reason*
By Festival Youth Reporter, Ang Kia Yee

A growing consciousness of race has been creeping upon the Singaporean public, particularly amongst the younger audiences. Critique and debate have taken on a soft, humorous form, through presences such as Preetips, as well as through more blatantly critical articles. It comes as no surprise that responses have come also in the form of art, such as Sim Yan Ying's *Without Reason*, an *MI Peer Pleasure Youth Theatre Festival* commission directed by Adib Kosnan.

Without Reason is a no-holds-barred play about an interracial relationship between Wei Yi and Hazmy. As their relationship progresses, the young couple come up against the prejudices and ire of their two families, as well as those of their friends. Yet the opposition they meet with is varied. Some, such as Wei Yi's mother and Hazmy's father, are enraged and treat the relationship as a transgression; others, such as Wei Yi's friend Vanessa, are vehemently racist, even verbally abusive, but do not dissuade the couple from pursuing their relationship; there are also Wei Yi's father and Hazmy's mother, who are not entirely supportive, but recognize, with tenderness and respect, that Wei Yi and Hazmy are old enough to make their own choices.

The relationship proves to be a space in which Wei Yi and Hazmy grow as individuals. They learn to communicate honestly, without expecting the other person to guess their thoughts and desires. They teach each other to empathize more deeply with the other people in their life. They come to understand and embrace each others' flaws and dreams. Their relationship falls apart, but not without love, not without kindness.

Can a relationship truly just be something shared just by the people in it? How much courage, strength, and persistent grit does a person need to endure a judgmental, even cruel, social circle? We may be living in a rather aggressively 'successful' nation, but how narrow-minded, and how prejudiced can we be towards others in our society? *Without Reason* pushes these questions to their limits, bringing to stage a mixed bag of characters, some of whom make extremely racist remarks. The shock value lies, I think, not in these being unfamiliar and surprising statements, but rather in the fact that they are publicly aired. The conservative citizen is shaken: Is this what we sound like? I never thought we'd be heard by so many people.

Central to the strength of the play is its commitment to very human characters who are complex, distinct, flawed, and relatable. Sim and Kosnan have together fleshed out a world in

which most characters are both relatable and foreign, likeable and detestable, and that has made all the difference. Though it roots for the two protagonists, it also gives audience members the space to evaluate and interpret for themselves.

Perhaps the play would have benefited from greater subtlety; some of the key debates were presented rather blatantly, to the point of spoon-feeding the audience. I feel, though, that the directness of the script might have been necessary for a public that has been rather lulled into a state of ignorance, even indifference. It was a play that shook the audience firmly, and pointed to a place we need to look at. We need to wake. We need to grow conscious and then live with awareness, with active kindness and advocacy.