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LATE COMPANY by Pangdemonium

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"Late Company is just in time"

Reviewer: Lee Shu Yu

Performance: 24 February 2019

How do you come to terms with your child's suicide?

This is the big question that looms over Victoria Theatre on a sunny Sunday afternoon. While happy families take playful photos on Empress Lawn, I find myself choked up with nervous laughter and holding back tears watching Pandemonium's first production of the season, *Late Company*.

We, the audience, know what we have gotten ourselves into based on the play's synopsis, but still, how do you break the ice with the family who bullied your son into killing himself?

Written by Canadian playwright Jordan Tannahill when he was just 23, *Late Company* is an impassioned play about the devastating consequences of bullying. Debora and Michael (Janice Koh and Edward Choy) seek closure over their son Joel's suicide. They invite Tamara and Bill (Karen Tan and Adrian Pang), whose son Curtis (Xander Pang) was a bully to Joel, over to clear the air.

First comes dinner, then confrontation. Cordial greetings turn into painful revelations as each family fights to preserve their own. Tannahill's script is sublime; easy to follow and yet packed full of sadness, anger and awkward humour. Every sentence exudes delectable subtext and the mounting tension makes for compelling drama. It meanders through polarising issues surrounding Joel's death – including mental health, victim-blaming, anti-LGBT views and toxic masculinity – remaining ever-relevant but never once didactic.

Director Tracie Pang and the team of actors are stellar, delivering Tannahill's fervent text with precision and charm. It is a combination of ruthlessness and vulnerability that the characters and actors display that makes this play a real masterpiece to watch. Koh in particular stands out as Michael's artist wife and grieving mother, Debora, capturing the complexity of the character well. Her range shines through Debora's emotional highs and lows, from smearing guacamole on the pristine walls in rage to holding her own against the brash, entitled accusations of Adrian Pang's character, Bill.

Speaking of walls, Petrina Dawn Tan's gorgeous set design frames the action. Conceptualised and built with excruciating detail, the interior of the landed home features huge art pieces, Debora's sculptures and even a water feature in the garden. But it is this perfect facade that hides the unimaginable pain of losing one's own child. As the play progresses, the beauty becomes excess, and the walls start to close in and suffocate the cast and audience alike. The discomfort is palpable and the silence is thick with regret. Like the guacamole that slops to the floor helplessly, the words, too, have fallen, pointed, yet pointless.

Late Company is a must-watch play that checks all the right boxes. The text and visuals are in perfect harmony, and yet they leave a mark much deeper than can be articulated. There is no sweet treat to end this review with. It is a play that is crucial to stage in Singapore, where teen suicide and bullying has reached [alarming rates](#). But it is more than just a public service announcement about one bully's actions. Instead, it picks at bullying as an institution, rooted in toxic masculinity, stigma, and power to hurt and segregate those different from us – be they of a different class, sexuality or race. It is an institution that we all knowingly or unknowingly partake in. *That*, perhaps, is the guilt that is the hardest to stomach.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

LATE COMPANY by Pangdemonium

22 February – 10 March 2019

Victoria Theatre

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Shu Yu is a currently pursuing a degree in Theatre Studies at the National University of Singapore and loves exploring all that has to do with the arts. Her latest foray into reviewing stems from a desire to support the vibrant ecology of the arts in Singapore.

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