

FOR SUBSCRIBERS

Theatre review: SRT's Por Por's Big Fat Surprise Wedding a triumph in moving theatre from the stage



Koh Chieng Mun stars in Por Por's Big Fat Surprise Wedding. PHOTO: SRT



Clement Yong

UPDATED 36 MIN AGO ▾

Por Por's Big Fat Surprise Wedding

Singapore Repertory Theatre

One Farrer Hotel

Saturday

It is a shame that, after so long, the mention of theatre still primarily conjures up actors on a stage in a dark auditorium, the audience passively watching on.

Though theatre-makers have more recently tinkered with the way scripts are written – for instance, verbatim theatre where the words are drawn from real-life interviews – other formats of presentation are still rare, mostly considered lightweight novelties that detract from the “art”.

Por Por’s Big Fat Surprise Wedding, Singapore Repertory Theatre’s latest lunch/dinner theatre, makes a strong case that more performances should look to these other modes.

Taking place in a red and white marquee on the sixth floor of One Farrer Hotel, it is directed by songwriter Dick Lee and packs both fun and meaning. The action unfolds around wedding guests as they dig into a four-course fusion culinary experience curated by Michelin-starred chef Manjunath Mural.

But as satisfying as the food is, the real strength here is in the script’s able flitting between different characters so that each has his or her time in the sun.

The interactive elements come together stirringly in the finale as it delivers a timely message about the infantilising of seniors that this country’s patriarchal rhetoric can sometimes take for granted.

Guests to Por Por’s wedding are led across a red carpet and seated at the round tables typical of Chinese weddings, the experience injected with the usual dash of awkward conversation among people who have never met and the asking after of memories of a bride nobody knows very well.

Even the delay in official proceedings is on point, but this is time for Por Por’s family members to make the rounds.

Jo Tan, who wrote the script, is Rainy, the hapless and spasmodic daughter-in-law, who for some reason is teaching every table “the silent clap”.



Por Por's Big Fat Surprise Wedding by Singapore Repertory Theatre. PHOTO: SRT

Gen Z teenager Prudentia (Tiara Yap) insists on shoving her youth in everyone's face by peppering her speech with phrases such as "slay" and "no cap".

Restaurateur and emcee Ajeet (Chacko Vadaketh) and KTV king Adam (Ric Liu) fuss over the entertainment system, and even impatient Por Por (Koh Chieng Mun) pops in to take the guests' temperature.

But it is in the face of Por Por's son Francis (Edward Choy) that the audience gleans this is no ordinary wedding, for no one in the family has met the groom.

Francis' suspicion that this could all be a love scam gradually turns on the audience as he chides that "moral support can become immoral support".

But the other hosts keep up appearances, Rainy getting ever that bit more jerky while Adam invites more intrepid guests to go on stage for an open mic.



Actor Edward Choy in Por Por's Big Fat Surprise Wedding. PHOTO: SRT

This premise is, of course, all a bit nonsensical, but there is some tension as Francis slips further from civility. And just as there is a sag in the pace, it is to Tan's credit that all the pieces laid in the first half can be so quickly amped up, with time leftover for quite a few dramatic twists.

In a few rapid-fire scenes exploding across the marquee, she packs an evaluation of marital dynamics; questions the difference between taking care of and caring for someone; the place of domestic helpers in the family; and the delusional narcissism of an impotent man.

The campiness of the finale at times recalls Tan's doubled duet in her one woman-play *King*, except this time, it is a truly romantic, multilingual rendition of Teresa Teng's *The Moon Represents My Heart* by a mystery character.

The many distractions necessitate that this is theatre with a lighter-than-usual touch, but it is impossible not to be charmed by this production.

And when the Village People's YMCA starts playing and there is a lychee and longan kulfi on the table for dessert, one begins to wish that all the weddings in the world are at least half as fun.



Jo Tan in Por Por's Big Fat Surprise Wedding. PHOTO: SRT

Book It/Por Por's Big Fat Surprise Wedding

Where: Level 6, One Farrer Hotel, 1 Farrer Park Station Road

When: Till Dec 3, various times

Admission: \$158, \$188

Info: www.srt.com.sg/show/porhors-wedding