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## Theatre review: No dry facts but much humour and debate in The Lifespan Of A Fact



Ghafir Akbar (left) plays the author John D'Agata in The Lifespan Of A Fact, while Jamil Schulze plays the eagle-eyed fact-checker Jim Fingal. PHOTO: SINGAPORE REPERTORY THEATRE

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SINGAPORE - Fact-checking sounds like a dry task but there is much humour in this play, which has relevance not just for journalists and editorial professionals but for society at large.

It brings to the fore the need for greater discussion about "fake news", which has been in the news with increasing frequency.

Based on true events, the play centres on the debate between American author John D'Agata (Ghafir Akbar) and eagle-eyed New York magazine intern fact-checker Jim Fingal (Jamil Schulze) who finds numerous inaccuracies in the former's essay on suicide rates in Las Vegas.

Veteran actress Janice Koh is the keeper of the peace here as Jim's editor, Emily Penrose.

Written by playwrights Jeremy Kareken, David Murrell and Gordon Farrell for its 2018 Broadway debut, the play was inspired by a book of the same name.

All three main cast members put in persuasive performances.

Schulze's intern character is portrayed as an endearingly meticulous, albeit overzealous, fact-checker who just wants to do his best by journalistic standards.

This was in stark contrast to John, a gruff, talented writer who could not care less about adhering to such standards and does not like his work to be called an "article". The "wrong facts" detract from the portrayal of larger truths, he argues.

Their clashing perspectives come to a head when they meet in real life and spar over details in almost every line of the essay.



(From left) Actors Jamil Schulze, Janice Koh and Ghafir Akbar in *The Lifespan Of A Fact*. PHOTO: SINGAPORE REPERTORY THEATRE

Ghafir's nuanced portrayal of John lent a relatable quality to the initially brash character. John's rough persona is gradually chipped away to reveal a compassionate author with a genuine desire to convey larger truths - regard for concrete facts be damned.

Koh is an anchoring presence and a maternal figure as Emily, moderating with finesse the two men's frenzied debate over the essay.



Jamil Schulze (left) plays Jim Fingal, an intern at a New York magazine, while Janice Koh plays his editor Emily Penrose.  
PHOTO: SINGAPORE REPERTORY THEATRE

In her presence, the two men are like boys - Jim even remarked at one point that "Mom's pi\*\*ed", triggering a burst of laughter from the audience.

While not elaborate, the set by production designer Sam Wilde was effective in depicting a snazzy magazine office and creating an intimate atmosphere in John's house for the discussion that arises.

Much of the men's debate focuses on the suicide of teenager Levi Presley (Kaelen Ong), which John uses in his essay to highlight Las Vegas' culture of suicide. In what was likely meant to be a poetic touch, Levi made brief appearances between scene changes. If I had to nitpick, the spotlighting of Presley was somewhat distracting and too fleeting to be an impactful visual motif, and could have been done without.

Still, *The Lifespan Of A Fact* is a punchy comedy that drives home the importance of asking probing questions.

## **THEATRE REVIEW**

### **THE LIFESPAN OF A FACT**

Singapore Repertory Theatre

Thursday (Feb 27)

## **BOOK IT/THE LIFESPAN OF A FACT**

WHERE: KC Arts Centre - Home of SRT, 20 Merbau Road

WHEN: Feb 25 to March 14, Mondays to Fridays (8pm), Saturdays (4pm and 8pm)

ADMISSION: \$35 to \$65 from SRT ([srt.com.sg](http://srt.com.sg)) and Sistic (call 6348-5555 or go to [sistic.com.sg](http://sistic.com.sg))

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