

# The Days In Between: Life in Limbo

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As its title suggests, *The Days In Between* is a work that exists in the grey values. Morality, sanity and reality are never clear-cut in playwright Sara Laurena's surreal nightmare, following drifting student Ira's (Eunice Chuang) experiences with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The unease flows thick and fast right from the start, as a certain 'happy song' jars against a stage rife with haze, masked figures and ominous tupperware. As we're propelled further and faster into a spiraling cacophony of Ira's subconscious, flung from tangible uni student naturalism to choreographed sequences of expressionist horror, we barely have enough time to register our whiplash.

All of this cacophony is held firmly together by Director Karla Livingstone-Pardy's top-notch cast. The ensemble is impressively unified, in a work where this unity is absolutely crucial. Together as the slippery and lurking presence that is Hexate, they truly become an extension of Ira's mind and body, aided by Chuang's smartly reserved lead performance. The rest of the cast show their deftness by slipping in and out of supporting characters throughout the piece, with particular note to Julia Frecker's exuberant Tess, and Evangeline Stoios and Arthur Knight's frustratingly authentic medical figures. There is a certain cramped rigidity to the group's performances, which have room to be pushed, pulled and amplified beyond their technical mastery to give more life to the mind demons. An injection of some loose, viscous energy would only heighten the sensory decadence on display.

A high level of technical achievement breathes depth into the work. Melanie Huang's pioneering projection work turns accessible captions into an organic element of the show's design, the words swirling menacingly around Ira's head in cahoots with Hexate's multi-faceted voice. This inventive use of captioned dialogue still suffers from the effects of missed or fluffed lines, but is a strong indication that accessibility in theatre is becoming a creative tool in its own right. I can't wait to see where Huang

and FLW go with this concept in the future. Kiera Yanhong Shi's set is economically sparse and adaptable, though the pace of the show was hindered by sluggishly slow transitions as elements were dismantled and reconstructed between scenes. However, Joy Heng Yiting's excellently eerie score and Dane Lucas' confidently colourful lighting design helped to squeeze some mood and tension out of these lagging moments, and they were thankfully speedier towards the end of the show.

Laurena's script shines in its most natural moments of banality, and its most expressive moments of insanity. Ira's fourth wall-breaking moments in the show's final act somewhat undermine the impressive metaphysical framework that came before, the closing direct address monologues leaving a craving to return to Ira's body and soul, to feel rather than be told. As it stands, it is a defiant and empowering ending, but strays slightly too far from the excellent non-verbal and ensemble storytelling to live up to the gut-wrenching heights of the opening sequences. But bringing mental illness to the stage in a piece this raw and honest is an astonishingly brave and awe-inspiring act. Laurena, Livingstone-Pardy and all their collaborators should be commended for crafting this work with a highly sensitive and thoughtful method. The depths of human psychology are a unique theatrical realm, and a show this personal and experiential is bound to elicit a vast array of impassioned responses from audiences.

FLW's continued commitment to producing bold and provocative new work is one of our saving graces in university theatre. *The Days In Between* demonstrates the vitality and necessity of fresh theatrical voices, to keep us guessing, questioning, and bringing the grey areas into focus.

## **Dylan Harris**

*FLW Theatre's production of The Days In Between runs from April 26th – 29th at the Guild Theatre.*