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[When North Meets South – The Reunification of the Two Koreas](#)

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November 8, 2018 <https://popspoken.com/2018/11/08>

By Cheryl Tan

Wrapping up their 2018 season, 'BECAUSE I LOVE YOU', **Theatreworks** presents an internationally staged and highly-acclaimed take on **Joël Pommerat's The Reunification of the Two Koreas**, directed by **Jacques Vinczey** and translated by **Marc Goldberg**.

Despite its title, expect nothing about the military feud between North and South Korea. Rather, expect a more humanised and familiar concept of 'reunification' – the kind that we experience in the relationships that define our lives and personal histories. Theatreworks' Reunification, consisting of twenty short scenes varying in length, is centred primarily around important but often unuttered questions in the relationships we deal with daily: what are human relationships made of, how far can they be challenged, and just how far would we go to protect and hold on to the ones we love?



The Reunification of the Two Koreas features a stellar cast comprising faces familiar to regular theatre-goers as well as local TV series enthusiasts, namely the likes of **Karen Tan**, **Janice Koh**, **Timothy Nga**, **Pavan J Singh**, **Zelda Tatiana Ng**, **Tan Shou Chen**, **Umi Kalthum Ismail**, **Ebi Shankara**, and **Cynthia Lee Macquarrie**. They all play a stunning variety of roles alongside one another in the twenty scenes over the duration of two-and-a-half hours.

The transition between scenes give us a glimpse into quick costume changes happening onstage and a full view of beautiful colour choices and coordination of each scene's costumes by **Afton Chen**. The set designed by **Dennis Cheok** features a large structure made of mainly horizontal and vertical metal rods extend to the ceiling lines the back and some of the left and right sides of the theatre space, with a set of stairs at the back leading to a very elevated area in which sits local musician **Bani Haykal**, who towers above the actors as they perform their scenes like a god.

So it goes that if music be the food of love, play on – Bani's enchanting sounds give us excess of it so that in Reunification our appetites may quicken and not die.



Despite the lengthy duration of this production, each actor portrayed convincing characters who either fall in love or out of love with their scene's character counterpart. This may sound simple enough, but not quite. Relationships rarely ever are.

But the occasional humour really pulled through to balance the equation.

As such, my personal highlights of Reunification were scenes steeped in nuance and which fleshed out the complexities of relationships.

On her wedding day, a bride discovers her fiancé had an affair with each of her four sisters, almost as if the groom, played by Timothy Nga, had ticked each sister off an evaluation list and then decided to marry one. Karen Tan and Janice Koh share a hilarious yet desperate moment in a ferocious sisterly row over the man, making that particular scene irresistibly memorable.

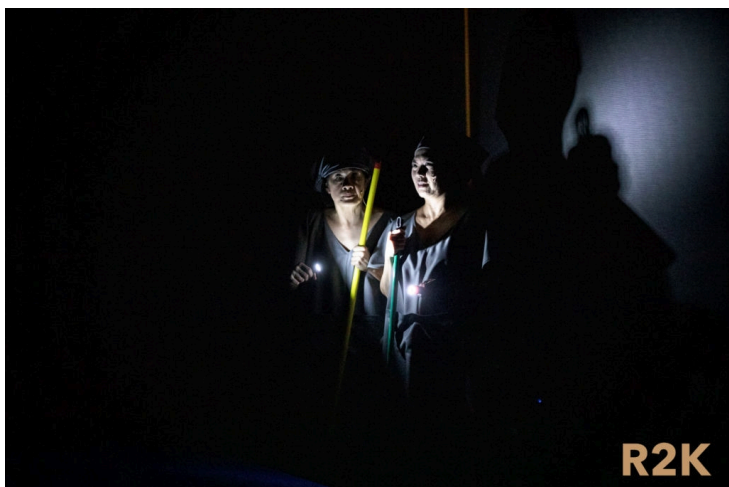
In another scene, a teacher played by Tan Shou Chen is accused of wrongfully touching a child by the child's parents after claiming to have taken care of him in the aftermath of a bullying incident at school. Claiming to have grown to love the child, but without clear definition, Tan's character begs the question whether the accusations held against him is just, when his intentions were only to offer the child the love and time his parents could not afford him themselves.

Particularly heart wrenching was the scene in which a man, played by Pavan J Singh, visits his wife in a care unit who suffers from dementia, played by the wonderfully talented Karen Tan. As they walk in the imagined garden carved out of Theatreworks' 72-13 blackbox space, husband and wife resist conversations they have occurred over and over again, the husband patiently explaining their memories to his wife, and the wife marvelling at her own forgotten marriage and children – the life she has lived and, within the workings of her own mind, lost.



Among the twenty wonderfully intricate scenes this scene struck me as the most powerful: As human beings navigating our way in this world, we inevitably and, more often than not, constantly lose what is precious to us — memories, things, people, sometimes even ourselves. When all seems lost, we find ourselves grasping for the reassurance that never lose it all as long as love remains. Sometimes love does remain, though not all the time, . These characters go about their lives like us, yearning for more, reaching for higher ground. In relationships involving two people as disparate as North and South Korea, reconciliation seems a long shot.

But that never stopped the world from hoping, from trying. Perhaps we may find hope in the narrative of Vietnam, which like Korea, was parted, but eventually unified, but the question remains: at the end of the day when vows have been exchanged, promises made and broken, faith tried and fidelity tested, when all is said and done, will that love be enough? Reunification reminds us that as human beings in a society groomed to always reach for more, it is worth wondering what measure of love will save us. Because what if this is all the love we ever get?



The Reunification of the Two Koreas

Date: 1st — 11th November 2018

Venue: 72–13, TheatreWorks
Time: Wednesday – Saturday, 8pm / Saturday & Sunday, 3pm
Admission: \$48(Concessions available. Get your tickets [here](#) < [< https://www.sistic.com.sg/events/ckoreas1118>](https://www.sistic.com.sg/events/ckoreas1118) .)

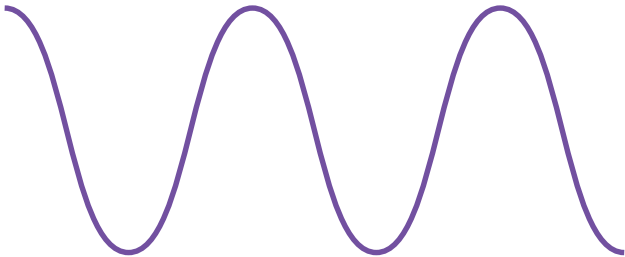
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