

M1 Fringe Festival 2017: Fight! Palast #MembersOnly by Peng! Palast

[bakchormeeboy](#) / [January 9, 2017](#)



If I had to categorize or label *Fight! Palast*, I would consider it to be less of a performance and more of an experience. Minutes into the show, I found myself moulting out of my role as an audience and engaging with the Peng! Palast trio as just another participant in a communal activity with three hosts. One likes cooking, another likes exercising, the last prefers to work on plaster art, and all of them bond over the universal artist's struggle: to live for their work while working for their lives. Furthermore, in the post-show workshop (that lasted longer than the show itself), it was clear that this group was entirely committed to combating the conventions of actor and audience.



The performance itself is loosely based on the premise of Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club*, where a man who suffers from insomnia hops between various support groups for depression and finds himself in the titular club after a fist fight with a 'cool' soap salesman. This narrative is deconstructed into themes that are relevant to today's Generation Y, and presented in an intimate and personal way. The 'depression' stems from their dissatisfaction with a life of earning money for its own sake, and yet finding it hard to seek purpose for the jobs they have to settle with. The

'insomnia' presents itself in the vices they indulge in, such as sleeping pill dependence, and the unhealthy side effects that result from the vicious cycle of depression and addiction. The 'support groups' surface in the false sense of community created in the blue-collar jobs of today, such as the competitive wage system in call centres, that make workers lose their humanity while trying to find purpose in their meaningless occupation. Each performer gave a visceral, in-your-face confession of their experience with these issues, oftentimes even climbing up the rows of seats to sit with the audience during most of their monologue, which really immersed us in the performance.



Fight! Palast also hypothesises that part of the reason why our society has developed so strangely has to do with 'the temptation of an ultra modern world', in their own words. With the ability to access anything and everything in the world via one's smartphone screen, our generation struggles with the desire for instant gratification, an endless thirst for social validation and a need to feel constantly connected. Being unable to fulfill these bottomless wants results in the angst that defines our society, and much of this angst is aptly conveyed in *Fight! Palast's* mise-en-scene.

The performers did a warm-up before the boxing matches, and this was particularly powerful – while they ranted about their lives to each other, they began to use a boxing cushion to physically vent their separate frustrations. The rhythmic pounding sound of the cushion on the floor reverberated through the studio, making their violent tantrums impossible to dismiss. Even the audience got a chance to cause some damage, when two audience members were nominated to assemble an Ikea cabinet only to hammer it to splinters at the end of the show.



For a show that focused on the anxieties of a modernized society, I expected more technology present in the show than just a laser-lit boxing ring. Instead, this show presented an experience quite the opposite – so many experiences in the show were tactile, raw and live, particularly the post-show activities that were meticulously prepared. I myself made a plaster cast of my fist, and had a casual chat with one of the cast members about the demanding schedules and other challenges of touring as an international actor. While patiently fixing my plaster, he mentioned how they prepared for the show with thorough fieldwork – actually working in call centres and enrolling in kickboxing clubs to the point where all three of

them ended up picking the sport up as a hobby.



Of course, the cast of my fist is a meaningful reminder of the unmistakable highlight of the night – the live kickboxing duels between the actors. A flurry of hits, blocks and parries kept the audience at the edge of their seats – sometimes laughing at an actor’s receiving repeated blows to the stomach, other times cheering at the ‘girl power’ of the female lead as she landed a torrent of punches upon her opponent. As they shared their emotions and insecurities to the audience after each spar, I could feel how much they appreciated this newfound universe of kickboxing where those within it can let go of harsh realities and expectations, connect with their opponents and pursue camaraderie in a common interest.



Fight Palast's unconventional performance structure works to its advantage – I believe that this bold denial of performance convention hints at the true point of the performance. Seeing performances as commodities to be graded positively or negatively on a rubric is precisely why we remain blinded from appreciating the perspectives and processes of an artist. As the artists themselves are aware, “In our line of work, earning money and efficiency are not one and the same.” After such a fulfilling experience with *Fight! Palast*, I am hopeful that those that catch this show can start to see performers not just as professional actors, but as people with a passion for creating.

By Michael Ng for Bakchormeeboy.com