

BWW Review: HIMALA Makes the Audience Witnesses to Cupang's Events

by [Carla Delgado](#) Sep. 29, 2019

Himala: Isang Musikal may be one of the best original Filipino musicals there is. It doesn't rely on the grand, lavish, and elite packaging of theater and simply delivers vulnerability and emotional storytelling.

Manila, Philippines - It's not every day that you step inside a theatre and find yourself somewhere else. As soon as you walk inside, you are immediately transported to the quiet, barren town of Cupang. With *Himala: Isang Musikal*, every aspect of the stage design works so perfectly that it becomes a completely immersive experience for the audience, something you can't quite feel with a proscenium stage.

An in-the-round staging isn't one that any production can just pull off. Others fail miserably, some stage it in a way that would have also worked had it been done on a proscenium stage, and some pull it off so well that you can't imagine it working any other way, which is where *Himala* falls under.

The intimate setting makes it possible to hear murmurs, whispers, and bits of conversation from the people of Cupang. The audience becomes witnesses as the happenings of the town unfold. Being so close to the cast allows us to observe the nuances, reactions, and emotions of the people coming in and out of the space. It is a real and very raw staging of a piece, one that flows so naturally that none of it feels forced.

Ed Lacson Jr.'s direction is so impeccable that you can't not notice how good it is. Every detail is charged with meaning, even the smallest of sighs or brief eye contact between two actors. In terms of the storytelling and the atmosphere of the musical, it does stay truthful to the original film, but it doesn't just bank on people's nostalgia - it holds merit on its own. Even if one had never seen the film before and had no idea about it, they'll still be able to enjoy the musical, perhaps even more because the twists and turns will be just as shocking to them as they were to the Filipino audiences in 1982 when the film was first released.

Aicelle Santos as Elsa is nothing less of brilliant, giving the audience a quality and striking performance. Elsa may be the protagonist but she's definitely no hero, and Aicelle's portrayal conveys that very sharply. She maintains her charm over everyone in the town, including the audience, but her facial expressions and mannerisms just add to how mysterious she is. She lets on the tiniest bit just to keep you guessing what her true intentions are, which keeps you on the edge of your seat.

Kakki Teodoro as Nimia and Neomi Gonzales as Chayong deliver very memorable performances as well, along with David Ezra as Orly. The strong ensemble is also a force to be reckoned with. There really isn't a small role in theater, and while some scripts or directions make it feel otherwise, *Himala* makes every member of the cast valuable.

The silence is loud. Empty spaces and moments of quiet are screaming with meaning. *Himala* makes you feel uncomfortable, and rightfully so. It is unapologetic as it tells the tale of how a barrio gets crazed over a faith healer and how quickly they are to blur the lines of their morals by the slightest hint of alleged divinity in a person. It goes to show how personal beliefs can make you blind, a reality that's applicable until now.

The entirety of the musical is truly a marvel, from the sound effects of dogs barking in the distance or the howling wind to the beautiful lighting design (Barbie Tan-Tiongo) that complements everything so well. *Himala: Isang Musikal* may be one of the best original Filipino musicals there is. It doesn't rely on the grand, lavish, and elite packaging of theater and simply delivers vulnerability and emotional storytelling, and it is a magnificent piece of work that deserves to be watched by as many people as possible.

BUY TICKETS: Produced by The Sandbox Collective and 9 Works Theatrical, Himala: Isang Musikal plays the Power Mac Center Spotlight, Circuit Makati now through 20 October 2019.

You can also buy tickets via our ticketing partner, Ticket2Me.

Check out production photos of *Himala: Isang Musikal*.

Watch Cast perform the epilogue to Himala: Isang Musikal.

Photos: **Oliver Oliveros**

<https://www.broadwayworld.com/philippines/article/BWW-Review-HIMALA-Makes-the-Audience-Witnesses-to-Cupangs-Events-20190929>