

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2016 REVIEW – Taiwan Season: Solo Date

☒ Solo Date is Tsai Pao-Chang's first solo performance, utilising new media

which centres on Ho-Nien and his quest to be reunited with the love of

his life. After a failed attempt to visit Hell through an ancient Taoist ritual, Guan-Luo-Yin, Ho endeavors to reconstruct his deceased lover via artificial intelligence.

In the process of reconstruction, Ho discovers unspoken secrets from the past that tarnish their reunion.

Is this quest for love a surreal duet or a solitary monologue?

Tsai Pao-Chang has created a wonderful piece in [Solo Date](#), which is at the Fringe as part of a [Taiwan Season](#).

The play is about where our love of technology and willingness to interact with it instead of people in a face-to-face scenario will lead. There's a wonderful line that sums up where the play is set in the first scene where Ho, the main character, asks his digital assistant why people still travel. "It's so 2020s, don't you think?" We know exactly where we are here, not so much our tomorrow but more our children's, the day after tomorrow.

I'm finding it hard to talk about this show without giving too much away.

Tsai Pao-Chang works hard to bring the show to life and he deserves you

going to see this show without me telling you too much about it. Spoilers, sweetie! The director, playwright and performer strides around the cube this multi-media play uses

as a set, interacting with his digital personal assistant and the AI version of his dead partner. The adjusting of the PA's settings is very funny, as are all her appearances. Tsai Pao-Chang has included a dating website section in the play that rings painfully true; he's obviously registered for one at some point and I found it hilarious.

The play isn't so much asking whether Androids Dream of Electric Sheep, although there are echoes of Dick's most famous work. This is more asking whether the ghost in the machine has a heart and can love if it achieves true sentience. To paraphrase Stanisław Lem, this is a human encounter with something that certainly will exist, but not one you can reduce easily. I reference Lem deliberately because there is something Solaris-like about it, and not just because the play deals with grief and longing. There is an ocean of emotion and alienness and a degree of physical phenomena underlying this piece.

My partner-in-crime [Art Between](#) made that connection so I cannot take any credit for it. That doesn't really do Tsai Pao-Chang's work justice but, again, without giving too much away I'm not sure what more I can say.

I found this a very moving performance; I thoroughly enjoyed it and could easily watch it again, if only to think more about the ideas and thoughts it left me with. While it did remind me of other AI-related work I've seen – there was a one-off BBC drama around 2007 for instance that involved downloading social media entries into a synthezoid in particular – Solo Date is very much its own creature.

I must admit I did have trouble adjusting to the subtitles to start with, partially as they were above the stage and my ageing eyes had trouble adjusting to their size at first. However, after a few minutes I got used to them but it confirmed that I really must get fitted for glasses soon.

Don't let that put you off though because it was a negative only because of my frailties.

I look forward to seeing Tsai Pao-Chang's next work and can only hope it measures up to Solo Date.