

“Both Harrowing and Vital”

Prayers for a Hungry Ghost

Tobacco Factory, 19th May 2026

Disturbingly poignant and elegantly crafted, Prayers for a Hungry Ghost calls into focus the weight of cultural perception, familial responsibility and the failings within ourselves at the fate of the world around us. Kiss Witness holds this surreal space with clarity and truth through the Chinese mythological suggestion of ‘Hungry Ghosts’: honouring those who have passed on with offerings of food, money and ritual to feed their unquenchable appetite in the afterlife. It is a tale of human greed, undershadowed by the perception of model minorities to act in perfection- a sentiment which is both harrowing and vital to watch in this art form.



This one-act psychological play explores the struggle of Mother, a Chinese-American immigrant as she watches the growing strain between her two non-identical daughters. Little Sister, played by Vienna Law, is the model child who fully assimilates into their American life; as an esteemed concert pianist with a quiet demeanour and intelligent conversation, she calmly navigates the stage and relationships with grace and the ‘aspirational narrative of a model minority’. This perfect fantasy of societal acclimation only grows an appetite in Big Sister for lust, success and paralysing jealousy. Elisabeth Gunawan inhabits this space of desperation with masterful physicality and stage presence, using silence and pause to instill dread upon all the audience. It was almost impossible to comprehend this performance - it felt as though a single blink would cause chaos somehow, as the whole room was unexpectedly understanding of the discomfort which enfolded within the hour they took the stage. It was truly a feast to watch, perhaps painfully so.



Bordering on more of a physical piece than the regular straight play, the company of Kiss Witness are dominated by their ability to physicalise words and concepts. Alongside use of projection, sound bites, mirrors, cameras and shadow, the actors inhabit the space with a lucid dream-like quality through frequent dance sequences and partner work, which drives the narrative forward in a grotesque dream-turned-nightmare fashion. All of these small details clarify the idea of the double, the expectation and reality and the ‘trying to talk your way out of destiny’ only to fall victim to greed of the Hungry Ghost in all of us.

This piece screams with exceptional relevance, shining light on mythology in a way that we can relate to as modern audiences, especially under the shadow of technology to forge a life of glorified success within our social media presence.

Although not directly mentioned, it could be felt the connection of the audience to this story as an allegory as to what we value in life, and what we chase to perceive ‘perfect’. The 4th wall was certainly peered through, as the cast held moments of comedy through monologues littered with rationale in a play so consumed by the insane. You could feel the room breathe within these moments, a small moment of repose before diving once again into the ghostly memories of the family's past and haunting present.

‘Prayers for a Hungry Ghost’ is a disturbingly sharp outlook on the immigrant experience and family connections within times of crisis. A work of pain and struggle, it is deeply moving, critical and profound in its physical language and hunger to seek the darker elements of cultural identity in a world so consumed by success.

