

# MONSTRESS - The reclaiming of Medea and Medusa

## Pre-show Notes

### Introduction

Welcome to the pilot staging of MONSTRESS - The reclaiming of Medea and Medusa presented as part of ART:DIS Emerging and Professional Artist Programme. This is an original script written collaboratively by acclaimed playwright Jean Tay and visually impaired artist-educator, Claire Teo. This production runs from 6th of March to 9th of March and will take place in the Black Box of the ART:DIS Bukit Merah Centre. The shows on 6th, 7th and 8th March will be at 7.30pm and there are 3.00pm shows on 8th and 9th of March.

MONSTRESS runs for approximately 75 mins with no intermission followed by a 20 minute post-show dialogue. This production is suitable for 18 years old and above.

### Synopsis

MONSTRESS follows Mei, a young blind girl who moves into a new neighborhood and finds solace in an unlikely friendship with Melissa, a mother struggling to protect and care for her son with high support needs. As their lives intertwine, as if they instinctively recognize the hidden wounds each carries, they navigate a world that often silences the vulnerable. This play challenges audiences to rethink justice, compassion, and what it truly means to see and be seen in a fractured world. How can we create a community that is ready to offer support, before it's too late.

### Production and Creative Team

Playwrights: Jean Tay and Claire Teo

Director: Yvan Karlsson

Movement Artist Collaborator: Zhuo Zihao

Dramaturg: Oon Shu An

Lighting Designer: Stella Cheung

Stage Manager: Wisely Chow

Caption Designer and Operator: Joanna Ong

Creative Narration Writer: Su Paing Tun

Project Manager: Nurarina Awang

Production Assistants: Ng Xiao Zhen, Emma Tan, Ho Yan Xi

## **Cast, Character and Costume**

### **Cast**

There are three main cast members, Claire Teo, Oon Shu An and Syarifuddin Sahari. There is also a cast member that will not be physically present on stage, Su Paing Tun, who plays a dual role as Investigation Officers and the Creative Narrator.

### **Character and Costume**

#### **MEI LING**

The character Mei Ling is played by Claire Teo. Mei is blind and uses the white cane to get around, navigating confidently from scene to scene. 10 year old Mei, is seen wearing a white cropped hoodie and her flowing mid-back long hair untied. She strikes a friendship with Sam, who provides her with a sense of connection. She sees him for who he is and he, in turn, accepts her without pity. Mei's upbringing is marked by neglect and abuse, particularly from a family that fails to protect her. Her personality is fierce, skeptical of authority, blunt but caring. At 14 years old, Mei is seen with braided hair placed on her side and as a 20 year old, her long hair flows neatly and she is seen wearing a white denim sleeveless top. As an adult, Mei becomes determined to fight for justice, against the sexual abuse she suffered. Her character arc revolves around reclaiming her voice, resisting the erasure of her truth and finding the strength to move forward.

#### **SAM**

The character Sam is played by Syarifuddin Sahari. Sam is a neurodivergent boy with high support needs who experiences the world through sensory exploration. He finds comfort in textures, repetitions, and routines, particularly in his yellow blanket and his fascination with turtles. He often communicates through repeated words and sounds like "Sam, Turtle!", physical gestures, and non-verbal cues. His emotions are intense and unfiltered. When he is happy, he radiates warmth, and when upset, he struggles to regulate himself. Physically, he expresses himself through movements like rocking back and forth, bouncing on his feet, flapping his hands, or tugs at his clothes when excited or nervous. He wears a yellow shirt at the beginning of the play when he plays his 10 year old self and as he ages, he switches to a darker shade of yellow.

#### **MELISSA**

The character Melissa is played by Oon Shu An. Melissa is Sam's mother, a single parent navigating the challenges of raising a neurodivergent child in an unsupportive society. She is in her late 30s. She wears neutral-colored blouses in shades of brown and blue. Her black hair is slightly messy, tied into a bun. She is fiercely protective of Sam but also deeply exhausted, overwhelmed and at times resentful of

her situation. Her love for Sam is unquestionable, but the lack of resources, emotional burnout, and societal judgement pushes her to breaking points. She constantly fights against a world that refuses to accommodate her son, yet she, too, struggles to understand his needs fully. Her expressions are always filled with frowns, worry, guilt and vulnerability.

INVESTIGATION OFFICER often referred to "INVESTIGATION OFFICER 147" and "INVESTIGATION OFFICE 227"

A police officer leading interrogations of Melissa and Mei regarding the events surrounding Sam's death and Mei's abuse allegations. This character does not physically appear on stage but is heard as a voiceover. The voice sounds formal, methodical and emotionally detached.

## Set & Setting

"MONSTRESS" takes place across three acts, with the set changing to reflect each stage of the character's life and memories.

- Act 1: Childhood (10 years ago), Sam and Mei at 10 years old
- Act 2: Rebellion (6 years ago)
- Act 3: Present Day

This play takes place in an intimate black box theatre with a grayscale minimalistic set consisting of an arch, cubes and black panels. The only colored elements are Sam's belongings—his yellow shirt, colored chalk, and yellow bowl. The arch serves as a versatile frame, representing a window, the turtle dome at the playground, and a plaque. Grey cubes are repurposed throughout as pillars, tables, chairs, or drawing blocks.

Dynamic lighting, sound effects, spatial shifts are used to depict different time periods and perspectives. As the play progresses, the set expands—starting at the center of the stage before utilizing the entire space, symbolizing an expanding perspective. During transitions, the stage blacks out, and the sound of waves at the beach is heard.

The scenes take place in various locations such as:

### Playground

The arch represents the turtle dome, set during daytime, with projections of silhouettes of monkey bars and trees framed within it.

### Sam & Melissa's House

The arch is transformed with curtains, daytime interior lighting, and window projections. Cubes are used as furniture, Sam's drawing table and chair.

### Interrogation Room

Characters sit on a block, lit by a single overhead light bulb.

### Limbo Space (Memory/Dreamscape)

A stylized, otherworldly transitory space with overlapping bright colors. Characters enter this space during long monologues, representing their memories.

### Beach

Orange light sets the sunny day, while blue light focuses on the characters, representing the ocean and setting the moment of tragic serenity before the accident happens.

## Access Information and Directory

ART:DIS Bukit Merah is located at 3779 Jalan Bukit Merah, #03-02, Bukit Merah Community Hub, Singapore 159462.

The venue is accessible via MRT, bus and cars. The nearest MRT station is Redhill MRT Station with an added 10 minutes walk on foot. Nearby bus stops are Bukit Merah Town Centre, Blk 161 Bukit Merah Central and Bukit Merah Interchange. Nearby public parking facilities at Bukit Merah Central can be found at Blk 162, Blk 163 or Blk 119. Parking rates and availability may vary and it is advisable to check the latest information before your visit. Taxis or private cars can drop off near the Bukit Merah Community Hub, within Blk 161 carpark. Upon reaching Bukit Merah Community Hub, please enter through the main entrance at Level 1 and proceed to take the lift up to Level 3. The hub is wheelchair accessible.

The Black Box is an intimate theatre space consisting of not more than 40 seats. There are three kinds of seating options available which includes, theatre row seats, single seats at the sides with a backrest and floor seating. For wheelchair users and the visually impaired, seating will be on the first row. For those who need access to captioning, the best seats for viewing will be on the second and third row. Accessible toilets are available nearby the centre.

When you enter, you will see the sides of the theatre space covered with black curtains, which helps create the performance area and keep the space dark when needed. Textured blankets in varying shades of yellow cover the corners of the audience seating, creating a tactile connection to the story. The yellow blanket is a symbolic object in MONSTRESS representing comfort, safety, identity and connection for one of the characters, Sam.

## Access and Care information

This performance will be audio described and live-captioned, making it accessible for all audiences.

This production contains references to death, physical violence, and sexual assault. As this is a relaxed performance, you are free to enter and exit as needed. If you choose to step out, the exit is to your right, and a staff member will be available to assist you when you're ready to return. Your well-being is important to us.

If you or someone you know needs support or counseling, here are some resources:

### **AWARE (Association of Women for Action and Research)**

Provides support for survivors of sexual violence, family violence, and gender-based discrimination.

Helpline: +65 6779 0282 | Email: [helpline@aware.org.sg](mailto:helpline@aware.org.sg)

Website: [www.aware.org.sg](http://www.aware.org.sg)

### **MINDS Therapy Services**

Offers counseling and therapy for individuals with intellectual disabilities and their caregivers.

Phone: +65 6479 5655 | Email: [minds@minds.org.sg](mailto:minds@minds.org.sg)

Website: [www.minds.org.sg](http://www.minds.org.sg)

### **Community Psychology Hub (CPH)**

Provides psychological support for mental health, family violence, and child protection concerns.

Helpline: +65 1800 225 5529

Website: [www.cph.sg](http://www.cph.sg)

If you have any other queries regarding access information, please email [nurarina@artdis.org.sg](mailto:nurarina@artdis.org.sg).

We look forward to welcoming you to "MONSTRESS".

-End of Pre-show Notes-