

FEELS LIKE HOME:

NEW
SINGAPORE
PLAYS
VOLUME 3

Edited by Lucas Ho and Huzir Sulaiman
With an Introduction by Dr Alvin Eng Hui Lim

CHECKPOINT
THEATRE

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To C42
Thank you
for
hjj

Done
2023
♡

With compliments
**CHECKPOINT
THEATRE**

To C42
Thank you for
all you do!
Lily

For C42!
Thank you!
Stanley

REVIEWS OF THE PLAYS

***FRAGO* by Lucas Ho**

"*FRAGO* is plain, honest, gently humorous and... possibly the most realistic portrait of the NS experience to ever take to the stage."

(The Business Times)

"*FRAGO* offers a wistful and candid snapshot of reservist life that will strike a chord with anyone who has been through this process or ever experienced a sense of dislocation upon returning to a place that has remained the same while they have evolved as a person."

(ArtsEquator)

***Still Life* by Dana Lam**

"*Still Life* leaves the viewer wanting to know more about the artist and her paintings... There is plenty of life left in the concept, which already invites repeat viewings just for the visual art."

(The Straits Times)

"I was particularly touched by the element of evolution present in the work. The evolution of emotion and perspective with regards to life's incidents. The generosity in inviting the audience to go through the entire journey of disdain, regret, joy and comfort came through beautifully. Opinions and perspectives change with time, perhaps also due to hindsight and nostalgia, and to be able to journey with Lam was a privilege. In an age where we are constantly bombarded to be succinct, to simplify and to quantify, I appreciated the attention to subtlety and the bravery in fleshing out the complexities of life and matters of the heart."

(Popspoken)

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28.8 by Adib Kosnan

"Adib Kosnan's deft direction of his play, about a couple coping with differing attitudes towards money, is pure gold... [Adib] seemed to know instinctively just when to dwell on his script and when to let it breathe. Such mastery and trust in his cast made this bare-bones production, which was performed in English and Malay, one of the sleeper hits of this year."

(The Straits Times)

Eat Duck by Zenda Tan

"Playwright Zenda Tan's debut script is immensely relatable, with recognisable character types: the grandson who regrets not spending time with Grandma while she was alive, the eager-to-please girlfriend who shows up every day, the overbearing brother who bullies everyone into the performance of grief. ... It is not all heavy stuff; Zenda Tan knows to leaven the mourning with comic moments, whether it is trying to navigate rituals nobody really understands or scotch-taping rips in the joss paper house so Grandma does not fall through the floor."

(The Straits Times)

"*Eat Duck* is a quiet evocation of grief, loss and fractured family relationships, reminding us to live our lives to the fullest and carve out a legacy we would one day be proud to leave behind. What will our loved ones say to one another when we finally go?"

(Crystalwords)

Swipe Right by Luke Somasundram

"It's kind of insanely good—you think it's going to be a romantic comedy about dating apps, but it becomes an incredible... festival of weirdos and MRT track spelunkers that also works as an ensemble piece to showcase the talents of every single cast member."

(Ng Yi-Sheng)

A Fistful of Rupees by Shiv Tandan

"*A Fistful of Rupees* considers the idea of what it means to truly 'arrive' in this expansive and yet tiny world. The protagonist Raghav shows up in Mumbai without much of a plan, and throws himself headlong into the ruckus. Flitting between grim realism and outright absurdist humour, the play is both an ode to Mumbai's overpowering personality, as well as a heartfelt journey of a young person navigating opportunity and despair with equal earnestness."

(Mumbai Theatre Guide)

"Anyone who has shifted base to a different location at some point in life will easily find friends, acquaintances, or even oneself among the play's canvas of 27 characters and lots of familiar, everyday situations. The play is a rich concoction of humour and emotions."

(Times of India)

A Good Death by Faith Ng

"It is its multi-faceted, open-minded and true-to-life quality that marks *A Good Death* as Faith Ng's next signature work since her landmark play *Normal* (2015)... Ng is adept at tackling such difficult topics, and it's refreshing that instead of using her characters as didactic spokespersons to address contentious issues, she often allows the situations they are placed in and their interactions to speak about these themes. *A Good Death* is no different. This is her first monodrama, and it is a laudable foray into writing for a different kind of performance, and I look forward to more tough and tender works from her, brought to life by stellar collaborators."

(ArtsEquator)

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Introduction: FEELS LIKE HOME

The everyday within the seven plays collected in *Feels Like Home: New Singapore Plays Volume 3* umbilically connects spaces to people. Some spaces make us feel and think about home. Others segregate people and control their freedom to enter and exit such spaces. Home may be a concrete space with four walls; or it may be an elusive concept, to long for but never realised. The notion of “home”, when explored through theatre, reveals a complex relationship. These collected plays, each hatched from one’s private space, have been performed in a theatre space, pushing the limits of the interior—the mind, the writing interface, the confessional box—into the public sphere. They provide an opportunity to reflect on home and everything associated with it.

The domestic setting has long been thought as the interface between the universe and the private interior, or as Walter Benjamin (2004) puts it: “[a] living room is a box in the theatre of the world” (220). The renowned modernist architect, Adolf Loos alludes to this relationship when he says, “the smallness of a theatre box would be unbearable if one could not look out into the large space beyond” (1966, 148). In a different cultural understanding of space, the most unsanitary room in the house, the washroom, has been described by Junichiro Tanizaki as being “surrounded by tranquil walls and finely grained wood, one looks out upon blue skies and green leaves” (1977, 4). More to the point though is Tanizaki’s observation that “we do love things that bear the marks of grime, soot, and weather, and we love the colors and the sheen that call to mind the past that made them” (11).

In this collection, you will not find manicured trees along Singapore roads, tranquil walls, and metallic modern architecture. You will not glimpse into the universe or a black hole. Instead, the interface of home, biography and fiction gathers in a theatre box and in print as a critical force. The cracks and fault lines in homes and private lives become occasions to bring to focus the social drama of our times. They foreground experiences of loss, pain and gain, giving audiences the vantage point through which our everyday and lived conditions find nuanced articulations in a theatre. We are invited to the playwrights’ stories and their hospitality renders us as guests not quite at home but placed in all manners of

comfort, ranging from being in a fight to taking part in a celebratory feast or dance party. Characters step outside of their homes into liminal and transitional spaces—the train, in-camp training in a forest in northwest Singapore, a hospice, an art studio, a void deck space, and Mumbai traffic. These spaces, rather than to contrast the interior home of characters, allow the private lives to bleed into the present and the theatre box.

Home is not always a physical space but who we are with. Home can be an emotional state; it is a feeling about home that can appear simultaneously comfortable and unpleasant, inhabitable and homely. At the heart of these plays are the negotiations and labour that go into sustaining the concept of home, both lived and imagined. Where spaces cease to be or are in ruins, they are remembered and they haunt our memories. Together they offer many avenues for thinking about what home means to us, and what it means to write about Singapore as home.

This volume begins with Lucas Ho’s *FRAGO*, set in an in-camp training for a group of Singaporean men in an armoured infantry reservist unit. Staged with an ensemble of eleven characters, Ho weaves together fragments of encounter with men away from home who must again thrust themselves into the unit’s coded hierarchies and divisions based on rank, gender, and education. Old mates who rarely meet gather together once again, as if they had always been close buddies. And yet, many cannot wait for an end to their ten-year cycle of National Service. Others enjoy the return to military training, a welcome break from reality. There is also an element of hyperreality involved—these men take over assault rifles with blanks and simulate war in a forest in Lim Chu Kang as a test of what to do when they must defend Singapore, their home. As the play’s title implies—*FRAGO* is the code for a change in operation orders when the situation changes—an SAF100, the order from your army unit to return for in-camp training, has a profound effect on Singaporean men.

Wrought together is a microcosm of Singaporean fraught meritocracy and a close observation of Singaporean masculinity, where men struggle with maintaining conventional notions of self, family and home. The site of the army camp becomes, in the first instance, an enforced separation from home, away from their domestic responsibilities. But the identity formations in-camp are ultimately informed by how one identifies oneself outside camp. This tension between identities is particularly alluded to through languages used in the play, and references to social class and status. Ho’s play captures the subtleties of Singaporean speech—the “Hokkien Peng” or working-class Chinese men who formed the infantry speak a different language from the platoon commanders

Pages have been omitted from this book preview.

FRAGO

pronounced Frag-oh

Lucas Ho



PRODUCTION HISTORY

FRAGO is Checkpoint Theatre's Associate Artist Lucas Ho's first full-length play. Lucas first met Huzir Sulaiman, Checkpoint Theatre's Joint Artistic Director, at the National University of Singapore in 2007, and studied playwriting under him. *FRAGO* opened on 13 July 2017 at the Drama Centre Black Box in the National Library building, with the following cast:

BOBBY / MR TEO	Timothy Nga
LAWRENCE	Adib Kosnan
WINNIE / MRS TEO	Jo Tan
WAN QING	Cerys Ong
ALBERT	Stanley Seah
WEI JUN	Zaaki Nasir
SAM	Chong Woon Yong
TIAN DE	Derrick Tay
JIA HAO	Tan Sieow Ping
BENEDICT	Ali Anwar
DAVID	Alfred Loh

<i>Directed by</i>	Huzir Sulaiman
<i>Set Design</i>	Aaron Yap
<i>Lighting Design</i>	Andy Lim ARTFACTORY
<i>Sound Design</i>	Shah Tahir
<i>Costume Design</i>	Laichan
<i>Assistant Directors</i>	Andre Chong Kai Sundermann Myle Yan Tay
<i>Production Stage Manager</i>	Izz Sumono
<i>Produced by</i>	Claire Wong Huzir Sulaiman

CHARACTERS

LTC BOBBY WONG, 52 years old
LTA (NS) LAWRENCE TAN, 30 years old
1WO WINNIE LOW, 52 years old
3SG (NS) DAVID CHUA, 30 years old
3SG (NS) BENEDICT TEO, 30 years old
3SG (NS) ALBERT LEE, 32 years old
CPL (NS) FENG WEI JUN, 31 years old
LCP (NS) ONG JIA HAO, 34 years old
LCP (NS) SAM PHUA, 34 years old
LCP (NS) TUN TIAN DE, 33 years old
WAN QING, 29 years old
MR TEO, early 60s
MRS TEO, late 50s

BOBBY and MR TEO are played by the same actor.

WINNIE and MRS TEO are played by the same actress.

1.

0615hrs. *H minus 8.*

Somewhere off a Rover rumbles to life. Voices, footfalls.

ALBERT and BENEDICT, in the armskote.

The army cadence 'When the Cold Wind Blows', sung by a group of young men, drifts in from the distance:

*In the early morning march
With the field pack on my back
With an aching in my heart
And my body full of sweat*

*I'm a long long way from home
And I miss my lover so
In the early morning march
When the cold wind blows*

*When the cold wind blows
When the cold wind blows...*

ALBERT Copy the serial number from here.

BENEDICT So...one bino and one compass?

ALBERT Pen gun also.

BENEDICT Must draw pen gun also?

ALBERT Yah.

BENEDICT *Sian*, got to draw so many things. Draw out also never use.

ALBERT Topo no need use compass meh?

BENEDICT Use phone GPS can already what. Eh, sorry, I didn't draw arms earlier. Had to settle signal manpack.

ALBERT Mm. Eh, you are from Platoon 2 right?

BENEDICT Yah.

ALBERT Your platoon everybody draw everything already or not?

BENEDICT Yah.

ALBERT Sure or not?

BENEDICT Should be. You didn't see them all come down?

ALBERT I dunno who is from your platoon lah.

BENEDICT Aiyah, see the book whether got 20 people sign out.

ALBERT Different weapon all got different sign out book. I can't keep track.

BENEDICT Should be all drawn lah.

ALBERT Help me check.

BENEDICT I'll Whatsapp David.

ALBERT Don't 出¹ stunt again like last week.

BENEDICT What stunt?

ALBERT During last week's turnout. One of the men from your platoon never draw his weapon, then fall in already said he didn't know had to draw. Why he want to be so special one?

BENEDICT Oh, Ah Goh ah. He's just blur. Since active like that already.

ALBERT Dunno lah. I didn't do NS with all of you, so I don't know what he's like.

BENEDICT PC OC both cannot control him. Wanted to charge him but he is quite *garang*² outfield, so they just talked to him and told him to play ball.

1 (Mandarin) pull

2 (Malay) fierce

ALBERT Don't *saboh*³ me again. I had to answer to OC why I didn't ensure everyone draw arms.

BENEDICT All of us commanders also kena what.

ALBERT But I'm the armskote spec. Anything wrong they'll ask me first.

BENEDICT Eh, do you hear that?

ALBERT What?

BENEDICT That song. Can you hear it?

ALBERT No.

BENEDICT What song is that ah? Who's singing it?

ALBERT Dunno lah.

BENEDICT (*singing*) I know I know
You have to go
So hurry back home
Cos I miss you so

ALBERT *Mai chiu kua liao lah. Kah kin leh.*⁴

BENEDICT Used to sing this song in SISPEC. Haha.

ALBERT Eh, draw bino pouch also. And check your compass properly. Xuan Jie found one of the screws missing, but only after he sign out. Now have to go and write statement.

BENEDICT Ok.

ALBERT And make sure you secure it to your SBO.

BENEDICT *Han nah han nah.*⁵ Eh, what did you do during active?

ALBERT I was at 7 SAB.

BENEDICT Brigade ah?

ALBERT Yah. Admin spec.

BENEDICT Brigade admin spec! Special posting *sial*. Don't need to go outfield at all right.

ALBERT What don't need. Brigade also got exercise one, still have to go outfield and accompany all the crabs on their planning mission.

BENEDICT Yah, but no need *chiong sua*⁶ what. Then you downgraded some more.

ALBERT Fuck you. You come and do armskote lah. So your platoon all draw already not?

BENEDICT Yah.

ALBERT You sure?

BENEDICT I think so.

ALBERT Eh, you think, I thought—

BENEDICT Confirm. David just replied me.

ALBERT Ok ok. Hurry up. I've got to close armskote and go get ready.

BENEDICT Get ready for what?

ALBERT For turnout lah.

3 (Singlish) From the English word (sabotage)

4 (Hokkien) Stop singing lah. Hurry up leh.

5 (Singlish) Yeah lah, yeah lah.

6 (Hokkien) Lit. rush the forest. In the SAF, it means having to go out to the field and engage in a military exercise.

BENEDICT You also need to turnout?

ALBERT Downgrade personnel all have to go outfield also.

BENEDICT Really?

ALBERT Yah.

BENEDICT And you're going to stay outfield the whole time with us?

ALBERT *Arbuthen*.⁷

BENEDICT So *suay*.⁸ Haha.

ALBERT See. No one is special.

BENEDICT But you go outfield do what?

ALBERT Dunno. Have to report to some officer from battalion HQ. Some of us will take picture for the yearbook, some of us will have to play civilian. See how lor.

BENEDICT But better than *chiong sua* lah.

ALBERT Please lah. The best is to rest in bunk and *zuo bo*.⁹ Who likes to go outfield? Not even the regulars. And after so many years already, you never get used to it.

BENEDICT Actually, sometimes can be quite relaxing lah. It's like going for outdoor camping lor.

ALBERT Yeah, camping without the sleeping.

BENEDICT No sleep but then you still will have dreams.

ALBERT *Siao*. Dream what dream.

BENEDICT Dream about all kinds of things. About the life you want to have, about what you could be doing instead of this. And then you wake up and it's all gone. But at least you're in the middle of nature, so you stay calm.

ALBERT Orh

BENEDICT Eh, why don't we sing those songs nowadays ah?

(singing)

When the cold wind blows
When the cold wind blows...

ALBERT Eh you how old ah? Still want to sing.

BENEDICT *(singing)* I'm a long long way from home
And I miss my lover so
In the early morning march
When the cold wind blows...

ALBERT *Kin lah*.¹⁰

BENEDICT Quite nice what this song.

ALBERT You want to sing army songs, go and sign on. Or else just serve and fuck off.

BENEDICT So, one bino with pouch, one compass, and one pen gun. So much fuck shit to bring out.

ALBERT Eh, your bayonet.

BENEDICT gathers up everything and makes to leave.

ALBERT And your rifle.

BENEDICT Oh yah. Haha.

ALBERT Quickly.

7 (Singlish) But of course.

8 (Hokkien) Unlucky; unfortunate

9 (Hokkien) Do nothing

10 (Hokkien) Hurry up

2.

H minus 12.

0630hrs.

The parade square.

JIA HAO 几点了?

[Jǐ / diǎn / le?]

[What time already?]

TIAN DE 你说 leh? 看不到月亮还在天空 meh?

[Nǐ / shuō / leh? / Kàn bú dào / yuè liang / hái / zài / tiān kōng / meh?]

[You say leh? Can't see that the moon is still in the sky?]

JIA HAO 为什么铃声还没响?

[Wèi shén me / líng shēng / hái / méi / xiǎng?]

[Why the bell haven't ring yet?]

SAM 这么 *kanchiong* 做么?

[Zhè me / 'kanchiong' / zuò / mo?]

[So / 'kanchiong' / do / what?]

JIA HAO 我还没有大便冲凉。

[Wǒ / hái / méi yǒu / dà biàn / chōng liáng.]

[I haven't shit or showered yet.]

TIAN DE *Siao!* Camo liao, 还要冲凉?

[Siao! / 'Camo' / liao, / hái / yào / chōng liáng?]

[Crazy. Put on camo already still want to shower?]

JIA HAO 冲凉后, 可以回去睡觉。

[Chōng liáng / hòu / kě yǐ / huí qù / shuì jiào.]

[Showered, then can go back to sleep.]

TIAN DE 你整个星期躺在床上, 躺到床都快要破了。

[Nǐ / zhěng gè / xīng qī / tǎng / zài / chuáng shàng, / tǎng / dào / chuáng /

dōu / kuài / yào / pò / liǎo.]

[Still want to sleep. You lie on the bed all week, the bed also break already.]

JIA HAO 你 leh? 每天冲凉冲三四次。一大清早就起床去冲。噼哩啪啦的, 整个

bunk 被你吵醒。

[Nǐ / leh? / Měi / tiān / chōng liáng / chōng / sān / sì / cì. / Yí / dà / qīng zǎo / jiù / qǐ chuáng / qù / chōng. / Pī lǐ pā lā / de, / zhěng gè / 'bunk' / bèi / nǐ / chǎo xǐng.]

[You leh? Every day bathe three four times. Wake up in the morning first thing go and shower. Make so much noise. Woke up everyone in the bunk.]

TIAN DE SAF 的水免费的嘛。

[SAF' de / shuǐ / miǎn fèi / de / ma.]

[SAF the water is free what.]

JIA HAO 你冲到你的皮也破了。

[Nǐ / chōng / dào / nǐ de / pí / yě / pò / liǎo.]

[You bathe until your skin break.]

WEI JUN 天德一大清早起来不只是去洗澡, 是去念经。

[Tian De' / yí / dà / qīng zǎo / qǐ lái / bù / zhǐ shì / qù / xǐ zǎo, / shì / qù / niàn jīng.]

[Tian De wake up early not just to bathe. He also chant the sutras.]

JIA HAO Harnoh, 噼哩啪啦的。

[Harnoh, / pī lǐ pā lā de.]

[Harnoh, make so much noise.]

SAM 哇, 几时变得那么虔诚?

[Wa, / jǐ shí / biàn dé / nà me / qián chéng?]

[Wa, when you become so devout?]

TIAN DE 没有啦。只想出outfield之前应该求菩萨保护我们。

[Méi yǒu / la. / Zhǐ / xiǎng / chū / 'outfield' / zhī qián / yīng gāi / qiú / pú sà / bǎo hù / wǒ men.]

[No lah. Just thought that before go outfield, should ask Bodhisattva for protection.]

JIA HAO 为我们那么着想。感谢感谢。

[Wèi / wǒ men / nà me / zhuó xiǎng. / Gǎn xiè / gǎn xiè.]

[So thoughtful. Thank you very much.]

DAVID and LAWRENCE arrive at the parade square.

LAWRENCE You guys, all drawn arms already or not? Ready for the turnout?

SAM Wah lau. Sir, you this kind of question also need to ask. You cannot see we are all standing here already, helmet on, camo on, everything draw out already.

TIAN DE Sam is ever ready mah.

SAM Why don't quickly ring the bell, then can go back to bunk and rest before move off?

LAWRENCE Cannot go back and rest, we still have a lot of prep to do.

JIA HAO Only a few people do, not everyone need to do right?

DAVID Everyone do together, can finish faster right?

TIAN DE Always liddat one.

WEI JUN How long you been in SAF already? Everyone suffer together.

LAWRENCE Hey, David.

DAVID Yes?

LAWRENCE This morning, you got up quite early?

DAVID 5AM. Why?

LAWRENCE I went upstairs to your bunk at 5:30. Wanted to ask you if you have drawn out the NVD¹¹.

DAVID Yeah, I drew out last night. Hey, you could have called me.

LAWRENCE I was at company line already. No problem. So, did you get any sleep last night?

DAVID Ok lah. You?

11 NVD: Night Vision Device

LAWRENCE Yes. I did. Hope you commanders understand. The new map, given to us by HQ quite late. So no choice, had to get you guys down, update all the terrain changes on your telt.

DAVID We're used to it already.

LAWRENCE Thanks. The bell, should ring any time soon.

A fire bell rings.

DAVID There.

ALL Turnout. Turnout.

JIA HAO 快点啦。

[Kuài diǎn la.]

[Hurry up lah.]

SAM Fuck, 重到要命。

['Fuck,' / zhòng / dào / yào / mìng.]

[Fuck, damn heavy.]

TIAN DE 重到要命? 你拿这个 Matador¹² 再说啦。

[Zhòng / dào / yào / mìng? / Nǐ / ná / zhè ge / 'Matador' / zài / shuō / la.]

[Damn heavy? You come and carry this Matador then say.]

WEI JUN Why the turnout so early in the morning one.

BENEDICT Ah come, everyone act on the ball a bit ah.

They place their field packs on the ground, lay out a ground sheet, and begin to unpack their gear, laying out the regulation items in a set order for inspection. The commanders go about checking their items against a list, while umpires observe the entire process.

LAWRENCE Check all their equipment properly. Make sure they have everything. Don't just go through the motions. The umpires are here.

DAVID Ok.

12 Matador: A locally-developed anti-tank weapon, weighing over 10kg.

Pages have been omitted from this book preview.

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THEATRE

Feels Like Home: New Singapore Plays Volume 3 features seven critically-acclaimed plays by Checkpoint Theatre's Associate Artists. Thought-provoking and emotionally charged, they delve into the complexities of what it means to call Singapore home.

Discover a whole new world beneath Singapore's MRT tunnels in Luke Somasundram's adventure-comedy *Swipe Right*, or soak in the quiet charms of the autobiographical one-woman play *Still Life* by Dana Lam. There are unflinching examinations of uniquely Singaporean family dynamics: how financial troubles impinge on a young married couple's happiness in *28.8* by Adib Kosnan, and the unravelling of an extended family at a matriarch's funeral in *Eat Duck* by Zenda Tan.

Other highlights of this anthology include: *A Fistful of Rupees* by Shiv Tandan, which explores the complications of returning home to make a life after having studied abroad; *FRAGO* by Lucas Ho, a darkly comic examination of reservist life and Singapore masculinity; and *A Good Death* by Faith Ng, which sensitively examines end-of-life caregiving.

With engaging characters, powerful storytelling, and razor-sharp dialogue, *Feels Like Home: New Singapore Plays Volume 3* is an essential collection of contemporary Singapore theatre. Settle in, get comfortable, and let these plays take you to a place that feels like home.

The *New Singapore Plays* series underlines Checkpoint Theatre's commitment to nurturing a diversity of Singapore voices, and to developing original work from page to stage. Steeped in themes of love, loss and belonging, these plays serve as a record of modern and contemporary Singapore plays, and as a valuable resource for students and makers of theatre everywhere.



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