

Headline Adam's plight  
Date 18 May 2010  
MediaTitle The Star  
Section StarTwo  
Journalist N/A  
Frequency Daily  
Circ / Read 304,904 / 1,026,812

Language English  
Page No T19  
Article Size 538 cm<sup>2</sup>  
Color Full Color  
ADValue 20,133  
PRValue 60,399



# Adam's plight

## Adam The Musical sings the fine line between life and death.

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**A**IDS and HIV are deadly serious issues which flirt around taboo subjects. Now, in morally conservative Malaysia, how do you make a light-hearted musical about all this? And a show which can also, as the organisers declare, raise public awareness of an issue that is often filled with either scientific jargon or moral condemnation?

First of all, *Adam The Musical* bucks the trend of recent years which has witnessed several big-budget musicals with elaborate sets and fancy costumes.

Instead, this feels like a smaller scale production performed at the more intimate setting of Actors Studio Lot 10 roof top theatre (which was opened last year).

Hence, the venue helps bring the audience closer – literally – to the performers; and should (theoretically) be better in terms of humanising the pain and discrimination that HIV patients face.

The story line is simple: Adam (played by Malik Taufiq) and Sylvia (Maria Yasmin) are due to get married. But while preparing for their wedding, he is hospitalised.

As Adam lays on his bed, the doctor can only tell Sylvia: "Your husband is not well." Should she go ahead with the wedding?

In between, there's a lot of sugar and spice to help make the bitter truths of HIV/AIDS go down easier. The thing about *Adam The Musical* is that what are supposed to be side shows to lighten the mood, end up being the most memorable segments.

The zesty transvestites with attitude, Jambu (Mo Dee) and Mangga (Fairuz Tauhid), leave me laughing as they sing: "When it comes to protection, the hardest part is persuasion ... if they still say no, I'll stroke their ego until they rise and say they need a jumbo size."

With a joke about the Ministry of Safe Sex,

it's great fun seeing the kind of sex education

that school students should (but will not) get.

The bubbly, enthusiastic ensemble highlights the conundrum of HIV/AIDS patients as they are compelled to wait for ages in public hospitals since they are seen as long-term, low-priority cases. Their cure? As their song goes: "Here, here's a lollipop."

After these fun songs and dances, it's a bit difficult to come back down to earth and feel the pain and loneliness of Sylvia as she sings of darkness, cold and fields that never bloom in

the song *It's Funny*.

It also doesn't help that her voice is a bit underwhelming for a song that is designed for soaring, soul-piercing sopranos.

Perhaps another reason why it's hard to plumb the depths of Sylvia's despair (upon discovering what afflicts her fiancée) is that she is also upstaged by Mark Sobels, who plays a ghost called Mek Mek Besar.

This spirit seems to have more spirit than the two main characters, and he often interjects with comic or cynical comments to lighten up (or distract from) the poignant moments.

Mek Mek Besar later meets yet another ghost, Mable (Tria Aziz), the latter of whom has the best performance of the show as she sings: "It sucks to be alive, but while you're at it, make full use of it ... after all, you'll really miss it when you're dead."

Weirdly inspiring indeed!

Datuk Faridah Merican, whose last appearance in a musical was in the 1972 production of *Uda Dan Dara*, comes on as Auntie Noni, and sings two lingering, weepy songs.

As for the music, my favourite is *Let's Switch Places*, which has a nice offbeat Kurt Weill touch to it, what with lyrics that wax lyrical about the sound of saline dripping!

While the main couple face life and death dilemmas, Sandra Mannas Wolf does well as the acerbic Elsa, a carping relative of Sylvia

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who adds religious pressure: why does she want to leave her Catholic faith to be with Adam?

Malik, who plays the title character, Adam, gives a pretty grounded performance with decent vocals, but the chemistry with Sylvia is not entirely convincing.

As the musical moves on, it's not entirely certain if the audience is very moved or engaged by the plight of the main couple – which is a pity as the title song, *Bertuah*, about realising one's blessings in life, would have made for a great emotional climax.

In the end, it seems that it's more of the side characters, the two transvestites and the two ghosts, who steal the show.

■ **Adam The Musical** is on till June 20 at The Actors Studio on the Roof Top of the Lot 10 Shopping Centre, Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. Shows are at 8.30pm daily except Sundays (3pm) and Mondays (no performance). Ticket prices range from RM30 to RM60.

For tickets: call 03-2142 2009/ 4047 9000 or go online at [theactorsstudio.com.my](http://theactorsstudio.com.my) or over the counter at Axxess offices.



Tria Aziz, who plays Mabel the ghost, has the best performance in the musical.



**Bucking the trend:** The cast of *Adam The Musical*, which, unlike musicals of recent years, is a smaller scale production, and is being staged at the Actors Studio Lot 10 in Kuala Lumpur.