

Sing Lit Body Slam
Aliwal Arts Centre
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Sing Lit Body Slam was a weird beast to sit through, but that doesn't stop me from also saying that it was hugely entertaining. While it's initial premises might lead to conclusions elsewhere—for example, that something combining wrestling and poetry couldn't possibly augur anything productive—about ten minutes into *Sing Lit Body Slam* it produced something miraculous. It happened thus that a motley crew of wrestling *and* poetry fans shouted 'BOOKS, BOOKS, BOOKS' after Joses Ho, host and participating poet, graciously told audiences how they could further support the rambunctious lovechild of Sing Lit Station and Grapple MAX Dojo by buying swag, and books.

But this is not to review the event. No. This is the product of an off-the-cuff bet that there was an aesthetic case to be made for wrestling poetry off the page, and hewing the sublime out of rehearsed violence on-stage. Well, is there? Joshua felt like meta-commentary could be served anyway. Here's what stood out.

1. Had anyone thought a little about pro-wrestling's proclivity towards a presentational style of performance rather than a representational one, the difficulties of melding poetry and wrestling together would have evaporated altogether. I am not completely sure if Joshua already knew this, but *Sing Lit Body Slam* very cleverly veered away from an emotionally complex lyric in all of the poetry performed that night, and opted instead for archetype and polemic. It was a fight from all corners: page poetry vs. spoken word poetry; Raffles vs. Farquhar; English vs. Singlish. Emotion didn't arrive at the end of a punch line, but was outsourced to a crowd who became as much of the performance as the wrestler-poet pairs became villain/hero-avatars for larger purposes.
2. And the crowd went wild. It would be tempting to draw parallels between this and how a theatre-going crowd consumes performance, but the mechanism of this crowd's participation is far more radical. Through the convention of hooting, heckling, jeering and cheering that pro-wrestling might be accustomed to, the lyric was finally invaded by an audience who might have been told, at some point or other, that reading a poem must always entail using a set of learned

decoding practices that, if not properly respected, rendered their reading experience irrelevant.

3. Thus the essential point of why the entire thing damn well worked: poetry was told to inhabit bodies and *speak*, or otherwise tackle an adversary to the ground. But it was not told to lie low in printer ink and play enigma. It was strangely ironic to watch David Wong's persona as Mr. Uppity-Highbrow-Poetry in the first segment participate in this somatising of poetry (always the highbrow child of the arts) even as 'he' denigrated the smelly classrooms 'he' would teach poetry to less-privileged kids in. All not real, you see— and yet, there he was. There was something to shout at and disagree with. It was also challenging to watch Raffles pummel Farquhar to the ground in the second segment *and* listen to the rich historical details performed by Joshua Ip and Rajita Ray. And the final segment descended into a pool of chaos as Singlish and English were trading barbs between linguistic registers, bringing code switching out into the light of the ring where it could be seen *and* heard.

For something so unabashedly 'anything-goes', it was surprisingly to see how rhyme brilliantly held *Sing Lit Body Slam* together. The rhythms of all the poetry that night kept the brain buzzing even as the battling bodies kept the heart pumping and got everyone riled up. How Joshua, meta- meta-enough?