

COOL
ING-
OFF
DAY

The text 'COOLING-OFF DAY' is rendered in a bold, sans-serif font. Each letter is filled with a different icon: 'C' is solid black; 'O' contains a lightning bolt; 'L' contains a hand holding a pencil; 'I' is solid black; 'N' is solid black; 'G' contains a sun with rays; '-' is a solid black dash; 'O' contains a star with the Audi rings below it; 'F' is solid black; 'F' is solid black; 'D' is solid black; 'A' contains a star; 'Y' is solid black; the first 'O' contains a star; the second 'O' contains the Audi rings.

Alfian Sa'at

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

PLAYS

*Bisik: Antologi Drama [Melayu Singapura
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*Collected Plays One: The Optic Trilogy, Fugitives,
Homesick, sex.violence.blood.gore (2010)*

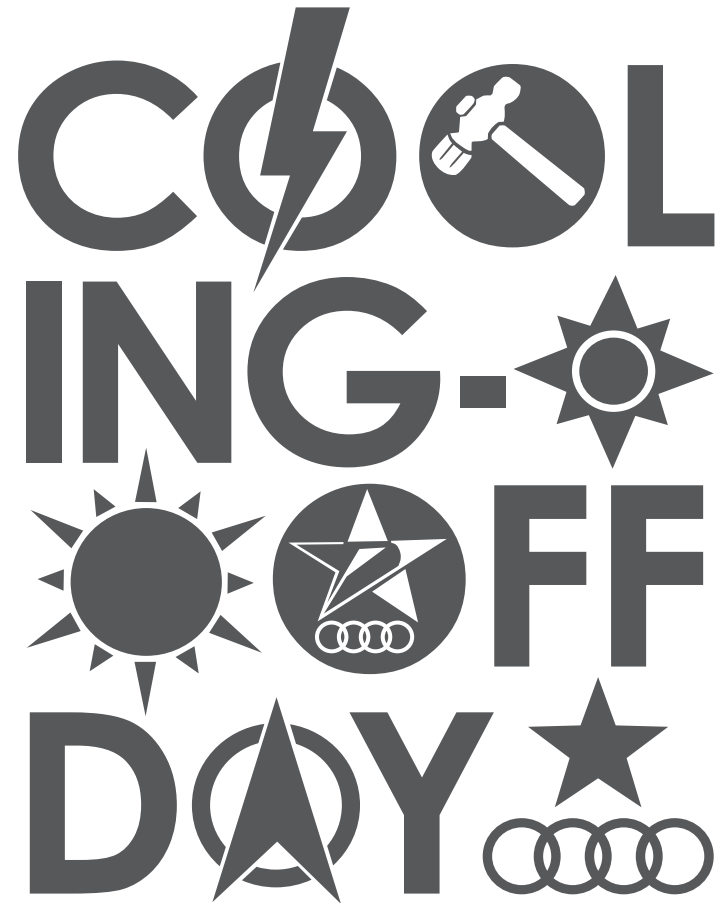
*Collected Plays Two: The Asian Boys Trilogy
— Dreamplay/ Landmarks/ Happy Endings (2010)*

POETRY

One Fierce Hour (1998)
A History of Amnesia (2001)
The Invisible Manuscript (2012)

PROSE

Corridor (1999)
Malay Sketches (2012)



Alfian Sa'at



Cooling-Off Day
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*The hate of men will pass, and dictators die,
and the power they took from the people will
return to the people. And so long as men die,
liberty will never perish.*

– Charlie Chaplin in 'The Great Dictator'

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Playwright's Message

When I first heard of the term 'Cooling-Off Day', my first reaction was one of disbelief. Apparently, Singaporeans needed a day off to properly deliberate on how they were going to vote. The rationale for Cooling-Off Day was that the campaigning period that preceded Polling Day would be full of sound and fury, and that Singaporeans would be susceptible to the various kinds of feverish and emotive rhetoric that was blasted at rallies.

In other words, we needed a Cooling-Off Day for a restoration of rationality.

This, however, didn't square with my personal observations. If anything, many Singaporeans I knew tended to vote in an irrational manner. By this I mean that quite often, fear would govern their decision-making process. A whole spectrum of fears which one might term 'irrational' in any functioning democracy where voter secrecy is guaranteed: fear of not being promoted at work, of losing their job, of being sidelined in the queue for flats or school placements. Add to that also the fears of Singapore descending into chaos, with investors panicking, a gridlocked Parliament, etc.

It made me curious about how Singaporeans conceived of their voting rights, and the considerations at work when they put that cross on the ballot slip. Did they feel empowered? Fatalistic? When scaremongering becomes the main tune during the campaign season, what other little voices are drowned out?

And so I went around interviewing various Singaporeans, in the hope of getting a portrait of the Singaporean as a citizen voter. Some were very articulate, some less so; some were very certain of their convictions, some were still

skirting around inchoate ideas. But the more I listened to the interviews, the more I realised that no matter the mode of expression, Singaporeans did care about being co-authors of the Singapore Story.

I would like to thank Jo Kukathas and Ivan Heng for bringing such a difficult work to fruition on stage. The play would also not have been possible without a versatile ensemble, whose members were willing to stray out of their comfort zones to play characters very different from themselves.

I hope that the voices that you hear in the play speak for themselves.

Alfian Sa'at

Directors' Message

It has been our great pleasure and privilege to have worked on Alfian Sa'at's *Cooling-Off Day* which offers a glimpse and gives voice to a range of people who wanted to share their deeply personal reasons for voting, each believing that their vote would contribute to a better Singapore.

In Singapore, theatre dealing with politics is always viewed with suspicion, but in rehearsing and presenting this play, we are more convinced now than ever of theatre's role in serving the community it represents.

Our task in presenting *Cooling-Off Day* was to find empathy with voices and views not our own, and not merely to mimic those who were interviewed. These are the views of our community. We read, researched, listened, interpreted and rehearsed the transcripts of the interviews, trying to find ways of expressing these voices with clarity and honesty. We have come to understand them through their wisdom, their humour, their grievances, their hopes, their worries and their contradictions.

We trust that in the shared experience of the theatre, these points of view will offer us a glimpse into our histories, our geographies, and the problems and possibilities of our times.

Lively debate was a feature of our rehearsal process. We are grateful for the diversity of opinions among the participants of our rehearsal room. Thank you to the actors and to the crew and the interns who freely shared their views and argued passionately for their point of view.

Cooling-Off Day is a new feature of the electoral process but in a way, there is no Cooling-Off Day. Even now, months after

the elections, people continue to debate and argue the merits and demerits of the candidates, the issues and the system.

In working on *Cooling-Off Day*, we have learnt that politics is not something that merely happens to us, but is something that we can participate and have a say in; not once in four years and in some constituencies, but every day in every constituency.

We hope that *Cooling-Off Day* will inspire us to think about our vote, encourage further coffee-shop debate and water-cooler conversations, and a lively participation and engagement in the question of what it means to be a citizen of Singapore.

Ivan Heng

Artistic Director of W!LD RICE

Jo Kukathas

Artistic Director of The Instant Café Theatre Company

Production Notes

Cooling-Off Day premiered at the National Library Drama Centre from 10 - 14 August 2011 with the following cast:

Jo Kukathas
Najib Soiman
Neo Swee Lin
Rodney Oliveiro
Peter Sau
Tan Kheng Hua

It was later restaged at the School of The Arts Drama Theatre from 23 Feb - 11 Mar 2012 with the following cast:

Jo Kukathas
Najib Soiman
Neo Swee Lin
Rodney Oliveiro
Peter Sau
Janice Koh

Both productions were directed by Ivan Heng and Jo Kukathas.

ACT I

Anything Can Happen

Daphne Chinese, student, 18

I have to say that I'm worried.
I'm only eighteen, and I'm too young to vote.
But I was following the elections very closely.
I had conversations with my friends.

One day we were hanging out at Starbucks.
I was just asking my group of friends
Who they would vote for
If they had the chance.
And all five of them said Opposition.
I've got nothing against people
Supporting the Opposition.
But when I asked my friends why
One of them just said,
"Because it's the cool thing to do."
I swear to God.
I asked him if he was joking
But all he said was
"Aren't you tired of the PAP"
Talking down to you?
Aren't you sick of the way
They only pretend to listen
And then they go ahead
Doing what they think is best for you?"

Another one said
It was important to show the PAP
That they are not indispensable.
She said, "We have to show them
Who's really the boss."

But that didn't make sense to me.
Let's say you have a worker
Who's been working for you
For the past forty years
And he's damn good at his job,
Very efficient, very hardworking.
Maybe he becomes too good
At what he does, and so you think
His head is getting too big.
So one day, you decide to replace him
With someone totally inexperienced
Just because you want to remind him
That you're the boss.
Does that make sense to you?
It didn't make sense to me at all.

I'm not sure about democracy sometimes.
They say it's supposed to reflect
The will of the people.
But when I was having that conversation
With my friends
It seemed as if it was more about
The whims of the people.
Because I don't think many young Singaporeans
Know what they want at all.

Maybe they're more sure
About what it is that they don't want.
When people say that they want
An Opposition in Parliament
What they're saying is that
They don't want PAP to be the only party
That's in Parliament.

It doesn't mean that the Opposition is good.
It only means that all the Opposition
Needs to do to be considered good
Is just to oppose what the PAP says.

There's also another thing
Which I don't like about Singaporeans.
I think we get easily envious
Of people with more power
And more money than us.

We don't want to ask why those people
Are doing better in their lives
Than we are.
It's so much easier
To take out our frustrations on them.
I think it's childish and I think it's spiteful.

I'm worried about my generation.
I'm worried about people who think
Politics is like fashion.
What's cool and what's not.
What's old school and what's not.
Change for the sake of change.
Opposition for the sake of Opposition.
I told my friends that
We should be careful about gambling
With our future
But one of them said, "If whoever we voted
Doesn't do a good job, we'll get rid of them
After five years."

That's a weird way of looking at the future.
The future isn't five years away.

For me, the future is what happens tomorrow.
It's the day that comes after today.
And anything can happen on that day.
One day is all it takes
For everything to change.
Anything can happen
And everything will change.
And not necessarily for the better.

All You Young People Will Take Over

Branson Chinese, taxi driver, 40's

I ever go to one of the
Meet the People's session.
I tell you ah, I want to vomit halfway.
When he talk to you ah,
I think something like just
How to say ah—kay kay°,
You know what I mean?
Make you happy only lah°. Make you shiok° only.
Talk talk only lah. No action taken.

I go three four times already.
Wah lao pek chek° lah.
He say, don't worry, we will settle for you.
This is not a big problem. Talk until so big.
Every case he write letter only mah°.
Or he tell his assistant to write.

But still nothing happen.
If you cannot ah, if you boh° power, then say lah,
You scared lose face one is it?
Every time Wednesday come and look for you
Very sian° one leh.
Have to take queue number blablabla.
Some more I doing night shift.
I wait for you, my taxi at the car park
Waiting for me.

Then after that I go to Hougang,
Look for Low Thia Khiang.
Because where I live is just next door.

I tell you ah...
Tio leh°! Got thing happening.
I don't know what he do,
He write one time, and then after that
My problem don't have any more.

Even my friend ah, Potong Pasir,
That time PUB the bill ah,
Got some problem.
I think overcharge or something
Like that lah.
He call PUB drag and drag,
Then he look for Chiam See Tong.
You know this Chiam See Tong ah
Don't even have proper office you know,
He see his resident at the void deck one.
Boh air-con, boh TV for you to watch
When you wait.
But very fast after my friend see him
PUB give him a new bill.

You see ah, people think if the MP°
Is from Opposition thats mean
The MP have no power.
But this is not true thing I tell you.
Government is also scared
Of what, you know or not?
If this part not under their control,
If got problem someone raise up ah,
Opposition sure bring up the matter
In Parliament. They will kao peh kao bu°
Ask why government agency
Not doing their work properly
Make the Minister malu°.

If the Minister is from your own party ah
Then you friend friend mah,
You won't dare say so loud
In Parliament. Tio boh?

I tell you, I last time vote PAP one.
Because I think Opposition MP
Boh power one.
I from Aljunied you know.
But now I know they can get
Your thing done for you
Better than the PAP MP.

I believe this election ah
LKY° say one word ah, salah° one.
Make people very tu lan°.
He say if opposition party win
You take care of yourself lor°.
Government won't take care of you.
Wah...threaten neh!
Ngia liao° tu lan!
Wah lao I TL know, tu lan know!

This kind of thing is old tactic one.
You see they still use same old tactic.
Upgrading lah, give you ang pow° lah. Correct?
900 dollars 700 dollars 500 dollars.
Wu hua boh°? Boh hua mah°!
500 dollars honestly speaking ah
I go Zouk one time ah boh liao°.
Correct boh? 500 for what?

The only people where this tactic can work ah
Is for the old people.

Because they all old people
Very easy to content mah.

But they now notice this tactic ah
Not working ah.
Not for this generation.
A lot of PAP win ah
All from old people.
That one all grandfather grandmother
Go and vote.
I go and see at the Opposition rally ah,
So shiok to see
So many young people.
You go to PAP rally
You only see the uncle there
Just stand around
The hand put behind the back
Just listen only, never shout anything.
Because that generation ah
Only know how to listen.

I tell you hor°, when they die one day
All you young people will take over.
Because now for us our generation
And next time our son ah
Our daughter ah
Different already the thinking.