

## EdFringe 2025: Practice of ZEN

★★★★ EdFringeReview

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Theatre at its finest should transcend language. That is precisely what Practice of Zen aims to do at SpaceOne. Performed in Cantonese, with perfectly timed English subtitles in the background, Practice of Zen forces those of us who don't speak Cantonese to divide our attention between the written word and what is being performed.

The show dives into the world of Wuxia, a Chinese fiction genre of ancient martial artists with supernatural powers. Themes of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are combined with historical, romantic, and mystical narratives to create a truly unique experience at the Fringe. Directed, written, and designed by Alex Tam Hung Man, the renowned founder of Theatre Ronin, Practice of Zen pares down theatre to its very essence.

At first, entrancing music steals the show. But then, it is overtaken by the sheer artistry of the four performers. Beautifully and symbolically dressed, their costumes help to explain a story with juxtapositions as old as time itself: love and hate, good and evil, nature and civilization, ying and yang. The actors use light and shadow to masterfully enhance these contrasts with little more than a flashlight and paper. The most complicated prop used is a mask, otherwise it's just paper and bamboo sticks, a reminder that everything comes back to nature. Their choreography is fluid, combining martial arts and swordfighting. At times, I lost track of the subtitles because I was so entranced by their ethereal movements, perfectly matched to the beat of the music.

However, I do have a couple of small gripes. At times, the actors' bodies cover parts of the subtitles, making it more challenging for non-Cantonese speakers to follow the plot. I had one of the best seats in the house, so it's difficult to imagine that others did not experience this issue. I think this could be easily remedied by a larger screen or perhaps two screens on opposite sides of the stage. I also think that the subtitles could be differentiated by character, as it can be hard to keep track of who is saying what. However, the quality of the acting more than makes up for this, as the general themes can be experienced through other mediums that the show provides. If you have a chance to go see it, you will experience a show unlike any other at this year's Fringe.

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