

SF Theater Blog

Dis-Oriented: Nguyen, Nakamoto and Noorbakhsh

Friday, August 20, 2010

RATINGS: BANG BANG BANG

San Francisco's cup is overflowing with brilliant solo performers these days. The Solo Performance Workshop Festival features two weeks of one-person theater pieces. Last night's premiere "Dis-Oriented" showcased Thao P Nguyen, Colleen "Coke" Nakamoto and Zahra Noorbakhsh.

Each woman does her own segment, although Nguyen and Nakamoto do a short bit together at the beginning and Nakamoto and Noorbakhsh finish the evening with another short short. The concept has something to do with Asian-ness but is really more about each woman finding her own place to stand in a complicated world.

Thao P. Nguyen is the most multi-faceted. Her tale of Obama-mania leading to gay rights marches from City Hall to the Castro -- and back to City Hall -- is beautifully drawn. She uses her Vietnamese parents to great effect, especially the portrait she draws of her dad peeling a piece of fruit for her mom, as he has done every day of their life together.

Next comes Coke Nakamoto, who is a few decades more than eight years old but has channeled her inner eight year old brilliantly, as the child searches for exactly what it means to be a woman.

Nakamoto appears to have no hip or leg joints as she bounces around the stage in a plastic skirt with constant looks of fluid amazement on her face. Her bit about finding the Playboy and Penthouse magazines in her brothers' room is priceless.



We are assuming the selection of James Brown's "sex machine" on the house music system, after Nakamoto's questioning of female roles, was an unfortunate accident and not some kind of really twisted irony.

After intermission, Zahra Noorbakhsh spins a delightful story about how she and her Perisan Muslim father come to a compromise over her choice to have her white atheist boy friend move in with her. Love conquers all, especially after the boy friend is willing to chant a little incomprehensible Arabic. "All Atheists are Muslim" reminds us that with a little humor and a lot of food anything is possible.

All three women do beautiful portraits of their parents, and all three stories have a common thread: exactly how much do we, as independent women, choose to fit in or stand out from our culture? If the rest of the festival is as good as Nguyen, Nakamoto and Noorbakhsh, this will be a terrific two weeks.

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The San Francisco Theater Blog Awards Division awards Thao P. Nguyen, Coke Nakamoto and Zahra Noorbakhsh Three BANGLES of PRAISE. Each was thought-provoking, and all three showed off a different side of themselves. Nguyen is brash but still leery -- she's openly gay to everyone but her family. Nakamoto is wide-eyed as a child but clearly guarded as an adult -- she is, for example, unwilling to believe that even Asians can be racists.

And Zahra Noorbakhsh is all of us -- the modern adult anxious to make her own decisions while still desperately wishing to be at one with her family. The culmination of her story is quite touching -- she and her father know they either have to compromise their hardened positions or they will lose each other. Neither is willing to do that. When her dad says "Daddy take care of this, man," both are pleased. And he does. Daddy knows best.

A lovely night of theater at Stage Werx.



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- "Solo Performance Workshop"
 - Different performers through August 29
 - Stage Werx Theater
 - 533 Sutter Street (at Powell Street), San Francisco
 - \$20-\$35 (or all 7 shows for \$69)
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