



One-woman show 'Fortunate Daughter' juggles family values, sexual identity

Written by Bryan Vo
October 1, 2012
A&E, Theater Section

There is no perfect way to say, "I am gay."

SF State graduate student Thao P. Nguyen plans to show her parents that she is gay instead of telling them.

"My plan is to bring my girlfriend home to the family over and over again until they warm up to her and see what she's like," Nguyen said.

She remembers the uneasy pressure from her Vietnamese parents as they expected her to marry a man four years ago while her queer activist friends urged her to come out.

"What am I accomplishing by saying those words (I am gay) and why do I need to validate anything for my own benefit?" Nguyen asked. "The point of communication is to understand and I don't need to mention I'm gay to family when nonverbal communication is more effective in a particular situation."

While respecting her traditional Vietnamese family values and balancing her beliefs about sexual identity, Nguyen will take audiences on a journey of what it means to be a queer Vietnamese American woman struggling between two different worlds in her autobiographical "one-dyke" comedy show and 2012 FringeNYC hit, "Fortunate Daughter."



Comedian Thao P. Nguyen performs a stand-up piece from her show, "Fortunate Daughter," at the San Francisco Theater Festival Sunday, Sept. 30, 2012. "Fortunate Daughter," a comedy show about the difference between "coming out and coming home," is running in San Francisco for the month of October. Photo by Deborah Svoboda

Martha Rynberg, director of the play, said this show is a conversation about larger stereotypes of community and how we expect certain people to react and operate.

"(Nguyen's) piece on coming out gave me an incentive on changing the way I supported my queer brothers and sisters," Rynberg said. "This show really asks me to think about how I can best support folks without applying my own experiences. It asks people to take on an old story in a new way."

The play is a blend of performance and theatrical investigation according to Amy Kilgard, assistant professor of communication studies who worked with Nguyen as her adviser for her master's degree. Nguyen tackles a topic that's both difficult and uncomfortable while making it enjoyable.

"The way she talks about coming out as a white Western construct makes me think about the ways we often try to make one-size-fits-all and I don't think it works like that," Kilgard said. "Coming out has become the dominant narrative."

"The coming out story is written based on a lot of Western values I feel," Nguyen said. "One of my mini-goals in my show is to really challenge our U.S. conception of Vietnam."

However, anthropology major Chelsea Jordan wonders how Nguyen can stay true to herself while keeping her sexual orientation a secret to her family.

"Coming out and living your own life is a part of growing up," Jordan said. "They should be who they are instead of a picture-perfect person their parents wanted them to be. I love all kinds of drama and I have friends who have been in this type of situation, so I would be interested to see this show."

"The secret to keeping your family happy is keeping your other family secret," Nguyen said.

"Fortunate Daughter" runs at 8 p.m. every Saturday of October starting Oct. 6 at The Stage Werx Theatre. Admission is \$20 and tickets can be purchased at brownpapertickets.com.

Fortunate Daughter

When: Oct. 6, 13, 13, 20, 27
at 8 p.m.

Where: **The Stage Werx Theatre** at 446 Valencia St.

Cost: \$20 at
brownpapertickets