



A Cultural Experience Enlightens at the Denver Arts Complex

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Gwendolyn Yeo is a one woman show in "What People are my People?"

I'm originally from Loveland. So it is safe to say that until college I didn't have much culture in my life, though college itself wasn't something I would call cultural either. Even in Denver, it can be hard to get involved with something like that. And I guess if you don't see much of it yourself, then it helps to get some perspective through another person's eyes. That's what I got from Gwendolyn Yeo's one-woman performance of her original work "What People are My People", from *Laughing with my Mouth Wide Open*.

To say that Gwendolyn Yeo is stunning is putting it lightly. She is gorgeous to begin with, not to mention multi-talented. She is an accomplished musician, and an actress who has been on television in shows such as NYPD Blue and Desperate Housewives. And now she has her own show, one that she acts out alone with searing honesty, accompanying herself on the Chinese Zither, about what it was like to grow up as an immigrant from Singapore to San Francisco as she was on the verge of adolescence.

The show was both funny and sobering. Upon coming to America an eleven year old Gwendolyn is fascinated with the way Americans interact with each other, from the hi-fives they give to the hugs they receive. But her experience in America is a tough one, trying to learn to fit in, but still trying to please her traditional family. Grades are the most important, where Gwendolyn is often overshadowed by her older siblings. She struggles with all the things a typical adolescent girl would; beauty and acceptance, but in a way that's unique for her, in that on top of this, there is a cultural barrier.

The show takes the audience through Gwendolyn's first experience with peer pressure, through her first defiance of her father, to exploring her body, to college where a professor betrays her trust, and finally to her graduation day. All this is done quite seamlessly, with Gwendolyn switching from herself to the characters of her father, mother, sister, brother, classmates and other adults.

Gwendolyn is expected to be perfect, and to follow in the path her father has set out for her and her siblings. Instead, she wins a scholarship to UCLA where she graduates. Her path to do the things that would make her happy reveals the yearning for love and acceptance that all people, no matter what ethnicity, long for. It was a heartwarming performance.

The only criticism I could find in this performance is that the stage direction (when the lights come up, where Gwendolyn is on stage), and the professor Gwendolyn encounters at her college, are all read by a narrator. This, unfortunately, really took me out of the wonderful things Gwendolyn was doing. I don't see why the light direction could not be incorporated into the show as tech, unless it had to do with the fact that it was a one day showing of this piece. As for the professor, I felt that a man reading the professor as a voice over would have had just as powerful of an effect, if not more of one.

Regardless of this, I am very happy I got to see this show. I only wish that it was running for at least another day. On the bright side, *Laughing with My Mouth Wide Open* will be mounted in Los Angeles in 2010 and a synonymous TV pilot script is in the works. Please keep an eye out for this wonderful production in the future, as it is sure to make you laugh, reflect on the way of the world, and hopefully, see people in a new way.