

Special Off-Broadway treats — Ma-Yi & more!

Written by Administrator
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ORLANDO PABOTOY

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By MARILYN ABALOS

Exclusive to the Filipino Reporter

It was a special treat to catch a few plays and readings Off-Broadway this past few weeks.

After the spectacular glitz of Broadway musicals, Ma-Yi's productions of SESAR and THE CHINESE LADY was a refreshing immersion of theater in New York.

In addition, attending a unique reading of THE GRANDMOTHERS in a loft near Union Square by Fil-Am playwright Kristine Reyes and the chance to enjoy Asian-Am Kate Rigg's upcoming show ZOMBIE ASIAN MOMS at La Mama leaves me in theater heaven!

SESAR, written by and starring Orlando Pabotoy, who previously acted with Ma-Yi, makes his debut as a playwright; directed by Richard Feldman (The Juilliard School) in Theatre Row on West 42nd Street in New York.

SESAR, depicts the story of a 14-year-old Filipino boy, who after watching an excerpt of "Julius Caesar" on television, locks himself in the only family bathroom to dive head-first into the world of ancient Rome, determined to make sense of Shakespeare's famous tragedy.

The boy's father, a former town mayor now exiled because of his democratic beliefs, joins his son in the bathroom, and using his own experiences, teaches him real-life lessons about power, love and loss.

We all know it can be quite a challenge to launch a one man show.

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OBIE Award winning Orlando successfully portrayed both father (and Shakespeare characters) and son in this insightful narrative of exiles during the post-Marcos era.

He is splendid on stage able to recite our favorite lines from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

Upbeat and entertaining, Orlando in Sesar was energizing to watch.



The Chinese Lady. (Photo by Carol Rosegg)

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THE CHINESE LADY, written by Lloyd Suh, directed by Ralph B. Peña and starring Shannon Tyo and Daniel K. Isaac, is inspired by the true story of America's first female Chinese immigrant.

It is a tale of dark poetic whimsy, a piercing portrait of America as seen through the eyes of a young Chinese woman; Afong Moy reflects on life in 1834 and beyond, as she is brought to the United States from China and put on display for the American public as "The Chinese Lady."

As Afong Moy, played by Shannon Tyo with delicate refinement, chronicles her time in America, most of us are introduced to the historical experience of Chinese-Americans in America.

With the tutelage of her insignificant and unimportant servant Atung (the very elegant understated Daniel K. Isaac), we are reminded of our parents' dictates of proper decorum and propriety.

It's our family orientation of "Oriental stoicism."

Most interesting was the brief highlights of the Chinese Exclusion Act, enacted in 1882 excluded immigration of Chinese laborers into the United States.

It was repealed in 1943 and finally abolished direct racial barriers by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

Not surprised and appalled to learn of the "Driving Out" period in the late 1800s when a number of notorious massacres of Chinese in Western states.

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I was introduced to the work of Fil-Am playwright Kristine Reyes, *THE GRANDMOTHERS*, at the readings of “Truth & Reconciliation of Womyn: Building Bridges to an Oppression-free World” in Deepak Studio in Union Square, NYC.

Reyes’ play was about “lolas” from the Japan, Korea and the Philippines, survivors of the infamous “Comfort Women” program of Japan’s Imperial Army to provide women to serve and service Japanese soldiers during World War II.

Women and girls were forced into sexual slavery from Japanese occupied countries in Asia: China, Korea and the Philippines.

Reyes’ play opens with statues of Comfort Women coming to life in a park in San Francisco where they meet up with an elderly Japanese woman.

Reyes’ play was provocative and insightful as she strived to depict authentic narratives.

The grandmothers related their stories eventually coming to terms with the past, life choices and their fate.

Indeed, it was an innovative evening of 20-minute readings by some of the theatre’s most dynamic and talented artists.

