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Blood Wedding



The Bride looks intently at her lover, telling him that she wants "to rip your veins open and spill out your life." Her lover confesses his constant struggles when he had to hate his love: "I built a wall between our houses, I put sand in my eyes when I saw you." Hatred and love are so closely intertwined, the moment of greatest happiness in love is at its most basic level also colored by the ominous forebodings of the deepest execration.

Jon Lawrence Rivera's production at Odyssey theatre of "Blood Wedding" is a rhapsodic retelling of one of Federico Garcia Lorca's most expressionistic plays, transforming the virtues of both motherly and sexual love in the audience's eyes into human being's capacity for ruthless and instinctive destruction.

This version of the play is scripted by Tanya Ronder. The story begins with the Groom (Willie Fortes) asking his Mother (Sharon Omi) if he can marry the Bride (Nikki McKenzie), uniting their two distinguished family for the sake of land and title acquisition, for why not let "the weak be weak?" Mother is afraid that his knife-wielding son would succumb to violence: "I wish you were a woman," she says. The Neighbor (Donna Pieroni) arrives with gossip a boy named Rafael who had his arms mangled, and informs her of the Bride's ex-lover, the now-married Leonardo Felix (Joshua Zar), from the same family that killed the Mother's husband. But she reminds Mother to say nothing.

At the Felix house, Leonardo is angry with his pregnant Wife (Jennie Kwan), the cousin of the Bride, for no apparent reason. After Wife sings the "horse is crying" song for the first time to put her child to sleep, we move to a meeting of the Groom and the Father (Alberto Isaac) of the Bride. The wedding is arranged to be on the Bride's twenty-second birthday. Meanwhile, the Maid Servant (Ivan Davila) interrogates the Bride over whose horse it is that came by her window. The "Wake up, birdie" song is sung for the first of many times.

What best characterizes Rivera's production is the rapid succession of moments of expression, moments that seem to hurt even in scenes of daily portrayals. From the beginning of the play, when Death (Robert Almodovar) and Moon (Ochuwa Oghie) play with the destiny dolls of the individuals to be onstage, to the point where the Servant hovers close to the Bride to caress her, and tell her about the lover's breath "like a nightingale's feather," the performance is filled with moments of anxiety in midst of seeming tranquility. The audience is made to feel that something is afloat throughout the play, something irrational that ultimately led to its rational consequences, its climax. Rivera and Ronder bring this about by using songs and expressionistic music to bring the separate parts together, making us wonder what lurks underneath.

McKenzie and Zar together are magical, portraying the love-hate relationship down to the smallest nuance of movements. They argue over pride with the Servant present, McKenzie moving quickly from one side of the stage to the other, rationalizing how she loves her current husband. Zar has a knack for displaying suppression of emotion, and the understating of the line following the pride argument illustrates his temperament: "not seeing you, and you alone, lying there night after night, it served to stoke the flames higher!" During the wedding, Zar's sulky expression becomes a test of endurance, as he begrudges having to follow his Wife around in a cart. Both Leonardo's blindness and the Bride's deliberate ignorance serve to subvert the love, which bleeds through quite clearly during the couple's

elopement, as if it was destined to occur all along.

Omi's performance as the Groom's Mother transposes that love-hate relationship into the mother-son dimension. When she discovers the elopement, she, although somewhat against the marriage in the first place wants a horse to track the lovers down: "I'd give what I have for one, my eyes my tongue even." Omi overacts at spots, such as when overly anxious during the wedding, but her emotional response doesn't take away from the play's main theme. Her waiting at the altar for her son's return is one highlight of the play. Ironically she plays the suppressed emotion from the other side from Zar, explaining "I'll be able to sleep at night, sleep free of the fear of guns and knives," when the violence already happened.

It is McKenzie and Omi's dynamics that best characterize the play, not necessarily the lovers', for at the end, the women are left to suffer. When Omi ran out of tears, exclaiming "we wish for no one, the earth and I, my grief and I, and these four walls," we are left to feel the blood, and the terror that blinded love eventually led to. Omi keeps telling herself to be calm, just as Zar did, but she could not help but lose it. McKenzie's highlight comes when she walks in on Omi, blood drenched. At the end, she was helpless just like Omi, and the Blood Wedding was the men's game. "I did not want it," she exclaims powerfully, "I was a woman on fire, wounded inside and out, and your son was a stream of water... but the other was a dark river."

Omi's Mother could do little but say that she is not to be blamed, but refuses to take revenge. She hates her, yet at the end it may have been a sort of love as she invokes God: "what does your death matter?" Garcia Lorca's love turns into hate, and hate into love, as we are all thrilled to death by it.

"Blood Wedding" is performed at Odyssey theatre (<http://www.odysseytheatre.com/>) in Los Angeles, California, until 14 of August, 2011.