

A&E

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THE L.A. ART EXPERIENCE EVELINA GIANG // STAFF WRITER // egiang@media.ucla.edu

ImaginAsian Center

The ImaginAsian Center, located in the heart of downtown Los Angeles, is dedicated to Asian and Asian American cinema and culture.

<http://www.theimagineasian.com/lal>

Asian Roots/American Reality: Photographs of Corky Lee

For over 35 years, Corky Lee, a New York-based photojournalist, has documented and participated in the progress and growth of the Asian American Pacific Islander community through his photography. His images, which capture the personal stories of those involved in political movements of the 1970s to today,

will be exhibited at the Chinese American Museum in Los Angeles through May 31, 2009.

<http://www.camla.org/>

English Only: A Fight for Words in America

By Annette Lee

Directed by Richard Martinez

In 1986, the passage of the Official English referendum in Monterey Park, Calif., made English the official language of the city. Annette Lee's "English Only: A Fight for Words" in America looks at the referendum, as well as race and culture in the area during this time. Produced as part of New Play Festival 2008,

which features original works by students in the UCLA Theater Department's MFA Playwriting Program, "English Only" will play from Dec. 5 to Dec. 7 at The New LATC in Los Angeles.

20 Years Ago Today: Supporting Visual Arts in L.A.

Japanese American National Museum

"Twenty Years Ago Today" exhibits the cultural emergence of visual arts in Los Angeles over the last 20 years. Showcasing a variety of arts from paintings to films, the exhibition will be running until Dec. 11, 2008 and is free to the public.

<http://www.janm.org/>

"Joy" Finds Home on Stage

RAY LUO // PACIFIC TIES CONTRIBUTOR // rlo@media.ucla.edu

A four-year old child who lost her way after falling overboard encounters the Moon Lady, who appears once a year to grant a secret wish. Instead of wishing for the world, the child merely wants to be "found." Thus ends one act of Susan Kim's adaptation of "The Joy Luck Club," based on the Amy Tan novel which began its East-West-Players run on Nov. 13.

The theme of returning home is carried out through the play, which climaxes with the protagonist's return to China to meet her lost

and daughters are linked by the mothers' participation in regular games of Mahjong, where they recall both their past lives in China and how they dealt with their children as recent immigrants in the United States.

One story depicts a mother who was forced to abandon her twin daughters while fleeing her village attempt to reunite with her children after she settles down in America. In another story, a woman raises her daughter to be a chess champion in America after leaving a loveless arranged marriage in China. These and other

to pass on that story," said Rivera, who wants his nieces and nephews to know "it wasn't always like this," and that they "must work hard to get someplace."

Rivera's work on "The Joy Luck Club" is inspired by his own extended family's gatherings. "Whenever we get together," he said, "it's always storytime."

To make the stories more active, to maintain continuity and to create the illusion of a journey, Rivera employs a strategy he witnesses in his family get-togethers.

"When somebody starts a story, someone else continues the story or enhances it," he recalled. "All of a sudden, there are seven people all telling the same story from a different point of view."

When it came time to direct "The Joy Luck Club," Rivera felt inspired by these gatherings to ask, "What if all the mothers and daughters are part of the telling of the story, just like in my family?" This idea was the inspiration for a device of successive narration that is not found in the book, and only possible when expressed

daughter in the play. Png herself is married to an American, and has a mix-raced daughter of her own. "The daughters in the play complain constantly of their mothers," said Png. "They don't understand me, I don't know what they want."

On the other end of the spectrum, Png also feels a connection with the daughter's character. As someone who also grew up completely immersed in the Western culture, Png feels as if she has lost "the Chinese way of thinking." She sees "The Joy Luck Club" as a way for Asian Americans to "revisit their cultural background," to rediscover the "value in Asian thinking," and to allow our own identity to "make ourselves relevant" in a multicultural America.

Other members of the all-Asian-American cast include Katherine Lee, who plays a 9-year-old daughter as well as the grown-up version of her character. Lee plays the cello in scenes where she appears as part of a symbolic narrative device.

The main actresses each have their own



PHOTO COURTESY OF EAST WEST PLAYERS

Cast members at the Joy Luck Club rehearsal. In the photo (LEFT - RIGHT) Ben Lin, Karen Huie, Edward Gunawan and Celeste Den.

twins. Like the performers and director of the play, we also sense that they are returning home by putting on the play, as their Asian American heritage brings cultural influences to the table.

Susan Kim's adaptation of "The Joy Luck Club" has been around for 15 years, but it is finally getting its Los Angeles premiere with East West Players, a local theater company. The book on which the play is based on has become one of the best-known novels about the cultural heritage of Asian Americans. Its separate stories about four pairs of mothers

stories are linked together by a clever narration designed by director Jon Lawrence Rivera to give a sense of journey. "A scene would end," he said, "but the actors in that scene would continue on for a few moments while the next scene happens."

Rivera himself is a Filipino American who came to the United States when he was 19. In the past, he has directed musicals like "Into the Woods" and new plays such as his previous work for East West Players, "Mixed Messages." Rivera compares directing "The Joy Luck Club" to acting as a storyteller. "It's important

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-DEBORAH PNG

through live theatre.

Rivera was not the only Asian American inspired by his heritage while working on "The Joy Luck Club." Deborah Png, who plays the character of Ying Ying, was originally an actress in musicals like "The King and I" and "Mama from China" in Singapore before coming to the United States in 2001. In "The Joy Luck Club," Png is a woman who marries a womanizing husband in China and kills her own son in revenge when her husband abandons her.

After moving to the United States, Ying Ying marries an American. When she realizes her daughter Lena is trapped in a loveless marriage, Ying Ying decides to tell her about her own past in hopes that her history will help Lena make decisions about the present.

Png identifies with both the mother and the

associated instrumental sounds, such as those of a piano, those of a recorder, or percussion. Along with music composer Nathan Wang, Rivera designed a play with four musical themes for each pair of mothers and daughters.

For example, Jing Mei, the daughter of Suyuan, plays the piano in an early part of the story. From then on, the sounds of the piano act as a motif for the relationship between Jing Mei and her mother. Rivera hopes that the complexities created by having multiple characters played by the same actress can be clarified by the use of an identifiable musical motif.

The Joy Luck Club runs from Nov. 13 to Dec. 7 at the David Henry Hwang theater in downtown Los Angeles.