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American Family Project

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Michael Criscuolo · Mar 2, 2007

Rising Circle Theatre Collective's new docudrama, *American Family Project*, looks at what constitutes the term "family" in this day and age. Judging from what the play's five characters have to say, a family is ultimately what one makes it, no matter how extended or unorthodox it may be. In telling the respective stories of its multicultural cast, this affecting production presents thought-provoking family values of its own.

The protagonists include Rachel, a fourth-generation Korean woman from Hawaii who grew up in California; Jin Hee, a Korean adoptee raised in Detroit by Jewish American parents; Melinda, a Latina from the Bronx raised by her single mom and her grandmother; Kiara, a young woman of Afro-Caribbean heritage raised in Georgia; and Sam, an African American man who bears his absent father's last name even though every other member of his family bears his mother's. *American Family Project* chronicles their collective struggle to either eke out a cultural history for themselves despite feeling no connection to their ethnicity, or build a sense of family security against difficult odds.

Lead writers and co-directors Sanjit De Silva and Deepa Purohit shape each character's narrative journey for maximum effect. Especially moving are the stories of Sam, who inadvertently causes further estrangement from his father by dropping Pop's last name in favor of Mom's; and Rachel, who touchingly recalls the story of her white grandmother's mysterious marriage to a Korean man back in 1913 Chicago. There's also Jin Hee's recollection of always being asked if she was related to Bruce Lee (who was her all-white neighborhood's only other exposure to anyone of Asian descent).

Opened

Mar 1, 2007

Closed

Mar 11, 2007

Lead Writers

Sanjit De Silva &
Deepa Purohit

Director

Sanjit De Silva &
Deepa Purohit

Producer

Rising Circle Theater
Collective

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De Silva and Purohit also emphasize family unity. None of the characters comes from a traditional family structure, but all of them crave the stability and sense of normalcy of such structures. They stand as positive examples that one can build a positive, healthy family out of the most unorthodox, piecemeal parts.

All of the actors do good work here. Catherine Jhung, Nancy Kim, Kerry Mantle, Arlando Smith, and Paula Wilson are a cohesive on-stage family of their own, each one giving a strong performance. De Silva and Purohit direct with loving care, providing a lovely array of movement, dance, group tableaux, and slide projections that augment the show's theme.

American Family Project is another worthwhile endeavor from Rising Circle Theatre Collective. Their mission to give voice to America's unheard minorities is as inspiring as it is expansive. Whatever their next move is, it will be one worth keeping an eye out for.

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