

Déjà vu for ReAct Theatre's "Prelude to a Kiss"

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"There's a strange sense of déjà vu in revisiting a show one has worked on so long ago," says David Hsieh, director of ReAct Theatre's next production, "Prelude to a Kiss." The play, by local award-winning playwright Craig Lucas, first graced ReAct's stages in 1994, also under Hsieh's direction. Hsieh sees the play as a parable of the AIDS epidemic, and argues that the play is still timely.

When "Prelude to a Kiss" was first produced, "the AIDS crisis was already in full swing for about a decade. Many of those who had loved ones afflicted watched their partners get sick and pass away very quickly," Hsieh says. "Here it is, nearly 15 years later and AIDS is still a major world issue."

Hsieh also asserts that the play resonates with a broad American audience: "Everyone out there who has loved has that fear of experience of losing someone, or finding their loved ones changing, for better or for worse."

Actors performing in the latest production agree. Eloisa Cardona, who will play the role of Marion Boyle, mother of the female protagonist Rita, also performed in the earlier ReAct production.

"I am delighted that David extended an invitation to me for a return engagement," Cardona says. "Its message of being strong enough to risk being open to loving someone, anyone in this less-than-perfect world is inspiring, encouraging, and comforting."

Other actors offer other reasons for their interest in participating in this production. Toni Rose, a Filipina American actor, performs the role of Rita, who is typically cast as Caucasian. By playing Rita, Rose hopes to reduce the "gap between the 'exotic minority' and the American mainstream."

Hsieh adds, "Hopefully the work that we do in showcasing productions that are cast non-traditionally to better reflect the world as it really is helps to change our audiences' perceptions about other people, other lifestyles, and other cultures."

Actor Maydene Pang, who portrays Aunt Dorothy and other ensemble roles, particularly appreciates the opportunity to work with ReAct Theatre: "David Hsieh created this theater for the purpose to give actors of color a chance to play roles they normally would not have been given."

ReAct Theatre has pursued this mission, and this reprise of "Prelude to a Kiss" occurs as part of ReAct's 15th anniversary season. "In addition to usual presenting some local premieres and exciting new productions, we knew that we wanted to encore a couple of successful shows from our past," Hsieh says.

As part of the selection process, Hsieh reads a variety of new and previously-produced plays. "We also have a terrific fully-staged play reading series which helps us test out various shows in seasons prior and see how they work and are received by actors and audiences alike," he says.

"I love putting together a season full of great dramas, hilarious comedies, and unique musicals," Hsieh says. "Most importantly I like to choose a season that is as diverse as the casting we do."

The process of choosing the plays for the anniversary season was complicated by other events affecting the Seattle theatre community. "We're faced with the local issue that many of the spaces we regularly have used in the past are no longer around or will be disappearing soon," Hsieh says, referring to venues that have either closed or have discontinued renting to non-resident theatre companies.

"It has made the season announcement process a lot more difficult and a lengthier process," Hsieh says, "trying to find and confirm new spaces and struggling to raise additional resources for increased rents."

Hsieh also intends to take on some additional tasks with this reprise of "Prelude." Hsieh is working to create "a new production with three wonderful new lead players," he says. "There were a few updates to the script in last year's Broadway revival and we hope to incorporate them, too."

Despite the challenges, Hsieh reports that the excitement is building for the ReAct artistic team.

Hsieh reports more *déjà vu*: "Just last night as we were doing the same thing for our new production, the same thing happened," he says. "This

should be a lot of fun."

"Prelude to a Kiss" runs March 27 - April 20 at Theatre Off Jackson, 409 Seventh Ave. S., Seattle.