

“Stories Waiting to be Told”

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Jude Narita is taking her place in the midst of Asian women, real and imaginary, past and present. In “Stories Waiting to be Told”, Narita crosses generations and ethnicities in order to break stereotypes of Asian women.

“I decided to create some real Asians,” she says. “We do not all look alike.”

For her stage performance, Narita draws upon a range of material to give voice to women in Asian American society. Especially influential, she says, were “the internment of Japanese Americans, the way the wars in Asia were written about, the way the Asians that were in these wars were portrayed and so often, demonized.”

In contrast, Narita sought to connect with the Asian Americans in her audiences. “I’ve been so amazed at what my work has meant to so many Asian Americans,” she says. “They saw themselves or a family member for the first time on stage. They heard their stories. Their voices.”

Although Narita’s emphasis is on creating characters reflective of real Asian experience, Narita insists that her performances go beyond ethnicity.

“I’ve performed in areas of the United States where there were no Asian Americans, and people would come up to me afterwards and say —that was my mom you portrayed, or my sister, or even, that was me—across race and gender lines,” she says.

Narita feels this kind of response is what makes her work rewarding. “It’s difficult to create, act, book and produce, but I do it all to continue as an artist,” she says.

“Some artists have tremendous professional support — agents, managers, producers, etc. I never have had that kind of professional encouragement and support.”

Instead, significant in inspiring and supporting her theatre performances have been Narita’s own experiences and family life. “My mother, Cobi

Nobuko Narita, was and is incredibly supportive.”

Narita lauds her mother as being the person most responsible for her accomplishments as an artist. “It wasn’t easy for her, as a single mother raising seven children, but she got us all music or dance lessons, and took us to theater,” she says.

Cobi Narita still has a hand in Jude Narita’s work. “Many years ago she was the first person to book one of my plays,” Narita says. “She has since helped me produce my theatrical runs over the years.”

Jude Narita passed down this familial involvement to her own daughter, Darling. “She is inspiring and fearless, challenging me to do things I would never think of,” Jude Narita says. “I love working with her.”

Family continues to be important to Narita as she explores her next theatre piece.

“I’m in the beginning stages of working on a piece about missing fathers,” another story waiting to be told.

“Stories Waiting to be Told” runs on March 20, 2009, at the Kirkland Performance Center, 350 Kirkland Avenue, Kirkland 98033.