

“A Theory for Everything”

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Extraterrestrials and the API identity frame this latest installment of SIS Productions, popularly known for its *Sex in Seattle* plays.

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Searching for extra-terrestrial life may seem distantly removed from current events surrounding the global economic crisis and the election of the first African-American president of the United States, but alienation and hope serve as common threads connecting America in 2009 with the play currently in production by SIS Productions: “The Theory of Everything” by Prince Gomolvilas. Inspired by her grandmother’s tales of outer-space aliens, Patty and her group of friends in “The Theory of Everything” keep watch overnight for an exciting encounter. As the hours pass, their encounters inevitably take place on solid ground with themselves and each other.

SIS Productions Literary Manager Roger Tang recommended the play for production because of the depth of its character portrayals.

“Being Asian American is important for them, but it doesn’t consume or dominate their existence,” Tang says. “And when aspects of Asian American life are touched on, they are dealt with in new, unexplored ways.”

Tang expects the play to strike the audience as being very contemporary. “Some of the writing about being Asian American might not seem that out of the ordinary in 2009, but that’s because reality has caught up to many parts of Prince’s vision from 1999.”

SIS Productions Co-Executive Producer Kathy Hsieh notes that “The Theory of Everything” is unusual in that it includes characters of a wide range of ethnicities. This diversity of characters in the play has created some unique challenges for the artistic team.

The play includes “a very Americanized sister and brother of Chinese ancestry, a Filipino mom and her son, a Thai American woman and her elderly mother, plus her Japanese husband,” Hsieh says. “Since several of the characters are immigrants, but most of the cast is American born, it’s

been an interesting process to incorporate so many different Asian accents and keep them authentic.”

The diversity in the actors’ backgrounds and skin colors serves the play’s central focus on alienation and its links to current American events.

“We’ve made huge strides as a country to be sure,” Hsieh says, referring to the recent presidential election. “But there are still many people who believe that if you aren’t white, then you don’t belong and are therefore ‘foreign’ or ‘alien’ no matter how many generations your family may have lived in America.”

But accents and identity are not the only components of alienation for Asian Americans. A key aspect of alienation is also often location. For the characters of “Theory of Everything,” it is precisely their location on American soil, rather than in Asia or even outer-space, that influences their perspectives and what they dare to hope for.

Hsieh ties the theme of geographic location to a broader thread in SIS Productions’ work. Enumerating the company’s past work, Hsieh says, “our long-running hit ‘Sex in Seattle’ is all about Seattle,” and notes that two other productions were also strongly rooted in specific American regions.

Hsieh sees this emphasis on location continuing in the current production. “With ‘The Theory of Everything’ our audience will definitely see the influence its Las Vegas setting has on the script,” she says. “So if you look at all the productions as a whole, it would seem to reflect that the culture of location has almost as much of an influence on our Asian American identity as our race or ethnicity does.”

Gomolvilas’s play is a departure from the long-running “Sex in Seattle” show that SIS Productions has staged for many years, but fulfills a larger vision for the company.

“We created a popular episodic show but the goal was always to use that as a fun way to introduce more Asian Americans to theatre with the hope of encouraging them to see other contemporary Asian American work that they might also enjoy,” says Hsieh. “So producing plays like “Theory” is part of a very specific long-term plan we’ve always had.”

In 2009, SIS Productions launches a new three-year plan for the company,

but won't reveal any details yet. Co-Executive Producer Hsieh expects to unveil these plans concurrently with the events of the new presidential administration, through 2012.

"The Theory of Everything" runs from February 20 to March 15, 2009, at the Richard Hugo House Theatre, 1634 Eleventh Avenue, Seattle 98122.