

MARK SAVITT REVIEWS NISEI; THE UNSUNG HEROES OF WWII

Fringe show: Covenant Ballet Theatre of Brooklyn

Concept and Choreography by Marla A. Hirokawa

Music by Craig Brann after Keith Hall and Taki Rentaro, Additional music by Harold Payne and Jake Shimabukuro

Covenant Ballet Theatre of Brooklyn's *Nisei: The Unsung Heroes of WWII* is a full length dance piece telling the story of a second generation Japanese American's participation in WWII. It starts with this Nisei as an old man (Lawrence Lam) playing with his grandson (Sebastian Huynh). The old man wears a Disabled American Vets shirt decorated with a variety of Army medals. As they play, the old man remembers pre-war rituals with his mother (Mandy Sau-Yi Chan), sister (Nozomi Ariake), and brother (Sylvester Hunyh). At a dance party, the young Nisei (Kei Tsuruharatani) and his army friend (Dylan Baker) jitterbug with their girlfriends (Jessica Higgins and Tanya Trombly). Their excitement is cut short by FDR's radio speech proclaiming the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor as a "day of infamy." With the exception of his army friend, the other party guests (Christopher Martinez, Jaqueline Montoya-Burke, Diana D'Ambrose, Nicole Garcia, Simona Garcia, and Suzanne Lemmon) turn against the Nisei and his family. During preparations for combat, the commander (Matthew Westerby) gives the Nisei a broom instead of a gun. Remembering his mom's advice, the Japanese American swallows his anger and follows the virtues of strength and perseverance. Later when the Nisei proves his competence, the commander gives him a gun allowing him to become a war hero. The lighting is especially good for the battle scene (with dancers Rebeccah Hope Brann, Daniella Cipriano, Jessica Higgins, Sonia Jones, Benjamin Montoya-Burke and others) Although much of the movement is cliched, the total effect is very powerful and moving. The songs, and musical mixture of Western and Japanese sounds are also effective. Marla A. Hirokawa's concept and choreography spring from her father's experience and the family photos shown are her paternal grandparents' wedding photos. You will surely need a few hankies to deal with the overwhelming emotion unleashed by the patriotism, power, and grandeur of this piece, much like that evoked by John Ford's historical films.

HAPPY FACE

VENUE #8 THE THEATER AT THE 14TH ST. Y, 344 E. 14th St.

Remaining performances:

Tue. 8/12 7pm

Wed. 8/13 5:45 pm

Fri. 8/15 6:15pm

Sat. 8/16 2pm