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Time to get real

‘Achievers’ shatters stereotypes

April 25, 2005

By [David Kuo](#)

A workaholic. A shy and socially awkward computer programmer. A loveable stoner. A seductress. A talented writer stuck penning one-liners for fortune cookies. These were the title roles of the Asian American Theater Project’s stereotype-busting show “Achievers,” which concluded its run yesterday in the Ballroom of the Asian American Activities Center.

The five Asian-American college graduates portrayed in the show inhabit a dank two-bedroom apartment in Los Angeles. Already missing their idyllic college days, the quintet is evicted and must learn to adapt to life’s harsh realities, exploring their hopes, fears and outgrowing their archetypes in the process.

One character, Murphy, the fortune-cookie author, struggles to seek an Asian-American identity that transcends media stereotypes. At the same time, his friends Ellen and Akira attempt to confront the painful scars of their childhood in trying to reconcile who they are with what their parents wanted them to become. In one flashback, it is revealed that Akira’s father sexually molested her as a young girl, a wound that has never healed.

While it addressed the difficult aspects of being an Asian American, the play wasn’t only about psychological dilemmas. Comic relief was in ample supply thanks to the pre-med turned stoner and the socially awkward porn collector. In addition, the character Johnny Wang, a figment of Murphy’s imagination, served as the counter-stereotype — he is bad at math, has a monstrous vocabulary and is exceptionally well-endowed.

“Each character was distanced from their stereotype,” said Rich Liu, who plays the stoner Shingo. “The play was a good way to send a message.”

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said.

Freshman Gordon Koo, who attended the play, said he felt that the performance was successful in forcing the audience to rethink Asian-American identities in the media.

“‘Achievers’ addressed issues that Asian-Americans face that aren’t acknowledged by everyone else,” he said. “The play broke through Asian-American stereotypes.”

Director James Kung, a senior, said he believes the billing of an all-Asian cast did not diminish from its accessibility to all people.

“‘Achievers’ used Asian-American motifs but the writer, Michael Golamco, wrote it so that American youth could relate to it,” he said.

Kung added that he felt the play addressed stereotypes in the media about Asian-Americans in performing arts.

“There’s this preconception that Asian-Americans can’t act,” Kung

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