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Cowboy V. Samurai

November 15, 2005

By Gwen Orel

Home, home on the range, where the deer and the antelope cannot find tofu, a point that disgruntles both members of BAA, the Breakneck, Wyo. (population 1,000) Asian-American society. "You sound like a militant sheep," comments Travis (Joel de la Fuente, also the theatre's artistic associate) to the group's founder, Chester (C.S. Lee). Chester's adoptive parents forgot to ask what country he was from; one of the better running gags in Michael Golamco's new play *Cowboy v. Samurai* is Chester's enthusiastic identity shifts.

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The play sweetly blends an adaptation of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* with *Northern Exposure*. Travis is in the tiny town to teach English, and when Veronica (Hana Moon) arrives to teach biology, she captures all hearts. But Veronica dates only white men. So Travis pours out his love for Veronica in cowboy-poetry letters from Del (Timothy Davis), a dumb, hunky local yokel. Del looks like a cowboy, and Veronica wants him.

Cowboy v. Samurai reproduces Rostand's heartbreaking lover-by-proxy letter writing. But replacing Cyrano's disfiguring nose with identity politics is unsatisfying, nor does living in the boonies parallel the war that sealed the fates of both Cyrano and Christian. Veronica is so articulate and her chemistry



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BACK STAGE BULLETINS

NYC Evening With... Actor/Director Tommy Lee Jones

December 10, 2005
On December 13, Back Stage East is thrilled to present an "Evening With..." actor and director Tommy Lee Jones in NYC, including a screening of his new film *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*.

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with the handsome Travis (who recalls an Asian-American Thomas Gibson) so strong—she tells him, "You make me feel good"—that the play's central conceit falters.

The Asian-American jokes had the audience laughing knowingly (apparently, the first name Grace suggests a Korean background). Lloyd Suh's lively direction emphasizes the jokes but sometimes blurs the character development and plot.

Snippets of detail about Breakneck are evocative: "I used to watch TV; now I watch horses," says Veronica. The local stores are threatened by Wal-Mart. Golanco is a bit of a cowboy poet himself. *Cowboy v. Samurai* charms the most when it leaves Rostand behind.


Presented by the National Asian American Theatre Company at the Rattlestick Theater, 224 Waverly Place, NYC. Nov. 8–27. Tue.–Sat., 7 p.m.; Sat. and Sun., 3 p.m. (no show Thu., Nov. 24). (212) 352-3101.



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