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## The love below

### Investigating untidy matters of the heart

BY ROBERT AVILA

Wednesday July 18, 2007

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> [a&eletters@sfbg.com](mailto:a&eletters@sfbg.com)

Flexing muscles new and old, the 34-season-strong Asian American Theater Company bounds into its new home at Thick House with young Los Angeles playwright Michael Golanco's wry 2005 comedy, *Cowboy vs. Samurai*, a clever nod to Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* set in Breakneck, Wyo., among its modest Asian American community.

The town's Asian American population is so small that it actually doubles (and a community technically forms) with the arrival of high school English teacher and Korean American Travis Park (Chuck Lacson), an easygoing if increasingly exasperated LA transplant. Even this tight-knit society begins fracturing beyond repair with the arrival of a beautiful, self-confident Manhattanite named Veronica Lee (Melissa Navarro), a Korean American who dates only white men.

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Her sights soon fall on Travis's friend, PE teacher Del (Wylie Herman), a winsome bit of lanky, twangy beefcake in a rumpled cowboy hat whose eloquent love letters, filled with wonderfully offbeat anecdotes and homespun ruminations on the meaning of love, have her swooning.

But in Golanco's shrewd and droll calculation, nobody is quite what he or she seems, or is supposed to seem, in this backwater galumphing into multiculturalism. The most unexpected disguise relates to the sure, mature drama that emerges from behind the mask of puerile comedy. If, as Golanco suggests, identity politics in 2007 lie far beyond simple formulas, the AATC's well-cast and nicely paced production (deftly helmed by San Francisco Mime Troupe veteran Keiko Shimosato) does plain, straightforward justice to this smartly contemporary take on love's muddled p.c., post-p.c., and pre-p.c. negotiations.

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