MIKE MYERS IS THE LOVE GURU

THEATER REVIEW

'Thumping Claw' is sharp in spots

"The Thumping Claw," a festival of one-acts by Asian American playwrights, returns to Actor's Playpen in Hollywood for its second season. It's a mixed bill, but its merits outweigh its disadvantages.

In the opening playlet, Carla Ching's "Dissipating Heat," the director is listed as "Anonymous," but considering the slipshod staging, one suspects the omission of the director's name was not due to modesty. The play, about three store clerks in various states of crisis, feels oddly fragmented, as if Ching had shuffled three individual monologues into one loosely linked whole. The evening goes from a whimper to a Bang, quite literally, with Michael Golamco's "Please Stand By," which stars Vivian Bang as Wendy, a young autistic woman who has been institutionalized by her sister, Audrey (Monica Hong). "Stand" provides Bang with tour-de-force opportunities in Heidi Helen Davis' solid staging, which also features Bernadette Bonfiglio as Wendy's therapist.

Short and sweetly rendered, Julia Cho's "Post It" features Tess Lina as a depressed young woman who takes a phone call from her meddling father (Paul Nakauchi), who bolsters his daughter's sagging self-confidence by relating a sweet memory of her childhood -- a tiny incident that draws his daughter back from the brink of despair. Sharply directed by Leslie Ishii, "Post It" is a miniaturist gem.

Lloyd Suh's "Happy Birthday, William Abernathy," directed by David J. Lee, concerns centenarian William Abernathy (Weston Blakesley), the white forebear of a now almost entirely Asian clan. Greg Watanabe plays Albert, William's great-grandson, who dismisses William's Archie Bunker-esque racism -- until William confides a shocking past transgression that has blighted his entire life. Exposing the hidden human cost behind the title character's "humorous" racism, the play closes "Thumping Claw" with a fitting punch.

-- F. Kathleen Foley

"I'm Just Wild About Harry," St. Matthew's Church, 11031 Camarillo St., North Hollywood. 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays (dark June 27 through July 6). Ends Aug. 3. $20. (818) 942-6684. Running time: 2 hours, 10 minutes.

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