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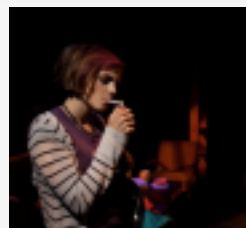
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★ YEAR ZERO AT THE COLONY THEATRE, BURBANK

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Year Zero ensemble. Photo by Michael Lamont

The Colony Theatre in Burbank tends to present safe choices for their predominantly elderly subscribers, so it was a pleasant surprise to experience Year Zero, a contemporary play about a sister and her younger, teen-aged brother who are the kids of a Cambodian refugee.

Review by Pauline Adamek

Michael Golamco's fine play doesn't pander to any particular audience group; this is simply great theatre.

Set in the Cambodian community of Long Beach, we meet big sister Ra (Christine Corpuz) and her kid brother Vuthy (David Huynh) who are packing up their Mom's home after her death. Ra is studying medicine up at Berkeley University while the teen-aged Vuthy is still at school and a victim of bullying by bigger Samoan kids. Now that their Mom has passed, Ra has plans to send Vuthy to live with an 'Auntie' while the both of them complete school. But Vuthy doesn't understand why he can't live with her in Berkeley, where she resides with her Chinese boyfriend Glenn, even though Vuthy clearly doesn't even like her Banana Republic-wearing, 'white bread' boyfriend (Eymard Cabling).

Complicating matters is Han (Tim Chiou). He's a super hunky, muscular and tattooed gang member who has just finished serving some time, but he's not a hooligan. Han remembers their Mother's kindness over the years and wants to help his neighbors, to 'give back.' The fact that he clearly holds a torch for sweet, petite Ra is also an incentive...

Interestingly enough, Han seems to know more about Ra and Vuthy's Mom and her grim past than they do, seeing as she kept her nose to the grindstone providing for her two kids and making sure they didn't end up in gangs, prison or knocked up like so many other teens do. Pretty soon he's telling them both (independently) revelatory tales about their mother's past from the horror of the Cambodian killing fields, relating her struggle to escape the Khmer Rouge and make it to the promised land of America. When Han talks about how Ra's Mom was spurred to flee after she "saw" that she was going to have a baby (sometime in the future) and then met the man she was convinced she'd have that baby with, it's an exquisitely beautiful and magical story.

This is the power of Golamco's amazing writing. In this tender play, his short yet enjoyable scenes move with a pleasingly cracking pace, assisted by Peter Bayne's contemporary and dynamic score. David Rose does a great job directing his cast and extracting subtle and honest performances that are delineated well.

Supplying most of the humor in this warm play, Huynh gives a broadly funny yet still authentic teen performance as the idiosyncratic and charismatic young teenager.

Full of full of endearing, likeable characters and a sweet story, Year Zero is a simply marvelous play.

Don't miss it!



Tim Chiou and Christine Corpuz in "Year Zero." Photo by Michael Lamont

Year Zero

The Colony Theatre

555 N. Third St.,

Burbank CA

Performances:

Runs until July 3, 2011

Thursdays, Fridays 8 p.m.; Saturdays, 3 & 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2 p.m.

Running time:

Approximately 2 hours, including a 15 minute intermission

TICKETS:

\$20.00-\$42.00

Box Office:

Purchase tickets here or call (818) 558-7000



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