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### Theater review: 'Year Zero' at the Colony Theatre

June 9, 2011 | 7:00 pm

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For assimilated children of immigrants, probing beneath the American melting pot veneer to try to reconnect with more ancient roots can prove an unsettling journey. Case in point: the recently orphaned Cambodian American and her younger brother at the center of "Year Zero," Michael Golamco's fresh, moving take on conflicted cultural identity at the Colony Theatre.

Golamco writes with insight and compassion about unique

challenges facing the offspring of Cambodian refugees: their lack of stature even in Asian communities and the horrific legacy of Khmer Rouge genocide.

Events unfold in Long Beach in 2003. The recent death of an immigrant shopkeeper — a survivor of the "killing fields" — has drawn her daughter Ra (Christine Corpuz) back from pre-med studies at Berkeley to pack up their apartment and deliver her troubled adolescent brother Vuthy (David Huynh) to the care of a family friend. Ra's return to the impoverished site of her childhood compels her to understand the family tragedy from which their mother had carefully shielded them.

Caught between the dream of a better future and an unresolved past, Ra's predicament is further complicated by the release from prison of her former flame, gang member Han (Tim Chiou). His return is an unwelcome development for her current boyfriend Glenn (Eymard Cabling), a clueless upscale Chinese American.

Layering humor with heartbreak, David Rose's staging builds emotional impact with sure-footed momentum, though at times the conversational rhythms could use some fine-tuning. Most important, the play doesn't settle for easy heroes or villains — each of these flawed characters tries to do the right thing as he or she sees it, but unfilled need for belonging clouds moral vision and lends the dilemmas universal resonance.

-- Philip Brandes

**"Year Zero,"** the Colony Theatre, 555 N. 3rd St., Burbank. 8 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 3 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays. Ends July 3. \$37 and \$42. (818) 558-7000 or [www.colonytheatre.org](http://www.colonytheatre.org). Running time: 2 hours, 5 minutes.

Photo: Tim Chiou and Christine Corpuz. Credit: Michael Lamont.

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