The Appearance of Impropropriety

Reviewed by Robert Windeler


It is the aftermath of recent events in Washington, the public blames the press as much as the politicians. Thus it makes sense dramatically to examine the ethical standards of journalists, and to offer the proposition that they may be held accountable for their work-related and private sins as the public officials they cover. This gritty back-room story, a sort of "The Front Page" for the late 1990s, a mix of murder, humor, and shame, is provocative, and the production is well cast.

Muna Tseng/Ping Chong: SlutForArt

Reviewed by Phyllis Goldman

Presented by the Wind Street Y Harkness Dance Project, at Playhouse 91, 316 E. 91st St., NYC, March 2-7.

Muna Tseng in collaboration with writer-director Ping Chong (whose voice is eloquently heard reading the text) has mounted a dark, moving, bitter-sweet homage to her brother Tseng Kwong Chi, a noted photographer who died of AIDS in 1990 at the age of 39. Tseng's fine, clean choreography moves against elaborate slide projections of her brother posed in juxtaposition to various American historical sites. In most of the photographs he is wearing a Mao suit and glasses—his uniform, seen almost as if he is ridiculing the culture from which he emerged. Tseng admits her brother did not like being Asian and had difficult times resolving his homosexuality and his relationship with his father. All these sub-texts are interwoven in words and movement as Tseng tells the story of her relationship with him.

Tseng portrays herself as the mourning, aging sibling left too soon by a brother wiped away by an angry disease. Her death is perceived as an endless punishment for her which is finally drawn when she dances as the betrayed one. Yet her anguish, carefully realized, is combined with strong reverence for this brother who lived a carefree, adventurous life from a charming little boy with prying eyes, to a member of the Andy Warhol '60s "rat pack",

Tokyo Can Can II

Reviewed by Irene Backalender


I only express endeavor and light energy were enough to compensate for the lack of professional polish! Such is the case with "Tokyo Can Can II," a new Japanese musical, now at the American Theatre of Actors. The show, written and directed by Japanese theatre artist Yotaka Okada, depicts Japanese life during the American occupation following World War II.

Certain the subject matter—Japanese society as seen through its own eyes—is absorbing. And if Okada sees the Americans in that time and place as mostly evil and the Japanese as mostly good, he is probably not far off the mark from his point of view. He is speaking from within and vanquished.

But this piece comes off as decisively amateurish, both in content and in execution. Its high melodrama and one-dimensional characters are more suited to a 19th-century opera. Its choreography is unimaginative, and most of its performances vary in quality from adequate toGod-awful. While Okada is to be commended for nontraditional casting, acting skills should still have been the determining factor.

Yet there are compensating moments, as when the young couple (played by Travis Leung and Bimuni Dames) sings a love song. Saburo Ikawaka has written some lovely, haunting music for them. Dames, whose voice is pure and whose smile lights up the stage, is a most engaging young actress—and good woman. But she seems to have lost the fire in her eyes, and most of her scenes are handled with a gentle, almost somber touch.

From a sense of impressive credentials in Japan, one wonders at his success. Can he be that East and West have very different forms of art? God only knows. The good art surrounds cultural barriers. And, indeed, there have been magical Asian productions in New York in the years this. This, however, is not one of them.

The reviews of the performing arts are excerpted from Back Stage - The Performing Arts Weekly. The reviews are from the April 2, 1999 to April 8, 1999 issue. The International Index to Performing Arts Full Text is a database of reviews and articles on the performing arts.