

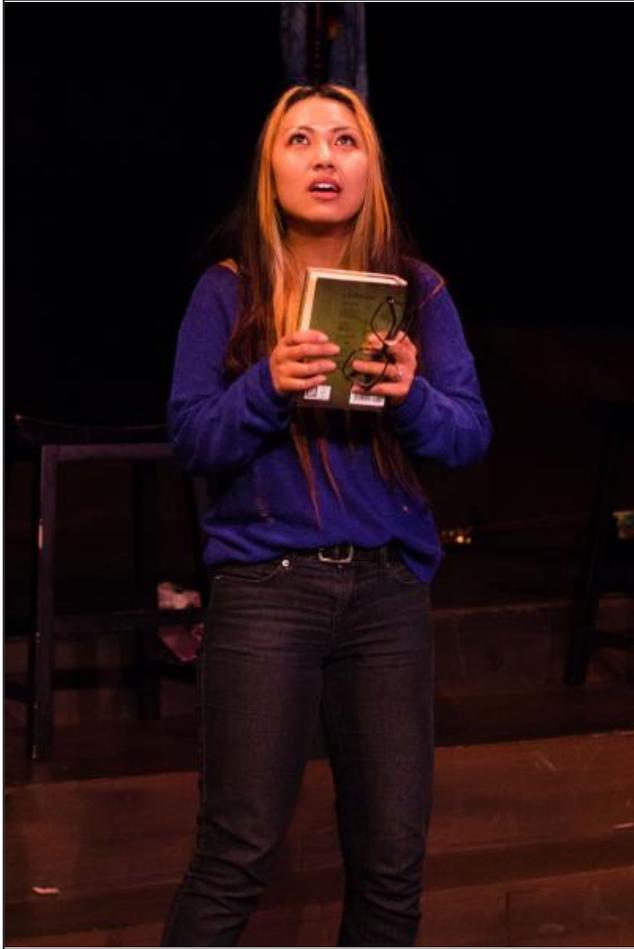
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LGBT PLAY HITS EMOTIONS

Submitted by stanleyl on Fri, 01/31/2014 - 16:05



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The premier night of "Yes, I Am: Leeward Edition" brought together an incredible group of students, family and friends to experience life through another person's eyes. Through tears, laughter, and countless raw moments the cast taught the audience that "Love is love".

The play started with the cast members becoming one with their audience. They created a feeling of attachment and being on the same level. Each character presented themselves as normal people — equal to anyone else in the audience. This mood of understanding and connection is carried throughout the rest of the production.

The cast began to remove the masks they wore out in society and came face to face with their self-identities, ultimately announcing the empowering statement, "I am me," and defying all other judgements against them.

Characters and stories are continuously introduced, each portraying a different face of society that has encountered the hardships and joys of the LGBT community. The football player, the *mahu*, the coined "soondu-butch", the construction worker and even the teacher all present their personal struggles and battles with becoming comfortable with their sexuality.

The *mahu* role is surprisingly very prominent throughout the production, leading some of the most heart-wrenching and enlightening scenes. Actress Kahana Ho represented many of these roles and proclaimed that "without self-love, you cannot accomplish anything". She acted with

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passion to give the audience a real look at the feelings behind this group in society. One character played by Ho, dealing with rejection and retaliation from family for being *mahu*, stands strong in a rage and announces “You couldn’t scream it out of me. You couldn’t beat it out of me. IT IS ME.”



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Scenes in the second act also encompassed the events that took place in the rallies and testimonies regarding the legislature’s same sex marriage bill, ranging from families to Native Hawaiian representatives. Despite the feelings of hurt and outrage demonstrated in this scene, it concluded with the statement “Mau Ke Aloha No Hawaii” from Jonathan Reyn and the uplifted characters joining in song to “Somewhere Over the Rainbow”, played on 12-string guitar by Ho.

Following this, the fragile topics of religion and family are touched upon. Christianity and Buddhism are highlighted as the characters express how their experiences were changed or affected by their lifestyles.

One of the closing scenes dealt with acceptance. Each character hung up the garments and masks that veiled their true self from society and wholly accepted themselves. Each told their own story in waves of pure emotion and genuinity. Even the actors could not contain their emotions through this, as they teared up or their voices began to waver. Many in the audience were also touched by the soulful performance and shed some tears.

After the play, we learned that this extremely moving scene was more than just an act to most of the performers. They in fact revealed some of their own struggles and feelings on stage, demonstrating once again the mission of the production: to showcase real stories from real people.

“I’ve never acted in a play where so much of myself was in it,” said actress Kristen Misaki. Misaki plays multiple lesbian and bisexual roles throughout the play, and did in fact reenact some scenes from her life regarding the events at the Hawaii State Capitol during the same sex marriage rallies and her own experiences.



The frequent removal of masks worn by characters and the use of mirrors to reflect one's being made a great impact on the messages sent to the audience. The repetition of phrases such as "What defines you as a person?", "What do you see?", and "Come as you are," were also used in a sense that welcomes and empowers each person in the audience to reach self-actualization and validation.

This unique performance sheds light on topics that many might not always consider and opened windows to the hearts of all who offered their experiences. They will take the stage once more on Saturday, Feb. 8 at 8 p.m. in the Leeward Lab Theatre. Tickets are \$10 at the door.

To find more information and productions done by PlayBuilders, visit PlayBuilder.org or contact Terri Madden at terri.madden







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