

Review: San Jose Rep's 'Love in American Times' emphasizes the unconventional



David John Chavez
[San Jose Theater Arts Examiner](#)
June 3rd, 2011 4:12 pm PT

"Love in American Times" is what one may call "intriguing." In spurts, it is very captivating. And on an acting level, it is clearly spellbinding.

But when it comes to what drives the piece, it is not always clear. It is a piece that explores what brings two people from two different spectrums together; an older, extremely wealthy white man in his seventies and an ambitious, driven Asian woman in her early thirties.

The play's author, Philip Kan Gotanda, spoke in the liner notes about what motivated his writing of the piece. Names like Woody Allen and Gene Hackman, who married Asian women much younger than themselves, inspired the exploration of the science of such an oxymoronic phenomenon.

The story is a tale of two halves, the first exploring the first arranged date between Scarlett (Linda Park), a fundraiser for a non-profit, and the corporate tycoon Jack (J. Michael Flynn). While she is a vision in the bar, first approached by a nice-looking young gent spitting his game, it is not he whom she is interested. She has her sights set squarely Jack and his well-endowed bank account.

What is most interesting in the piece is the absolute pragmatic nature of the relationship. This is what I want, says she. This is what I need, says he. This is what you get, says she. This is what you may not have, says he.

But after such a static set of introductions, what is intriguing is the softening of stances, the guards being let down just a tad, and a friendship, and ultimately, a relationship is formed.

There is also a nice progression of trust that is handled quite gently in director Rick Lombardo's staging. Lombardo, along with the principals, really allow for the audience to sense the trust creep into the fold, and lets us into the much deeper connection evolving between Linda and Jack.

The second half plays a bit murkier, initially focusing on Jack's immediate family on a Christmas yachting trip. And while there are some funny moments involving Jack's unsettled daughter (Arwen Anderson) and his stone cold ex-wife (Rosina Reynolds), who is none-too-happy to see trophy wife showing up on their family Christmas, the scenes feel a bit strained.

While there are most certainly nice turns from the ensemble cast, it is the talents of San Jose product Park and co-star Flynn that make the fireworks happen. Their moments on stage together provide all that is needed, and they probably could have easily carried the play on their own. Their performances were built on many dazzling moments.

Even though there many highlights, a lack of true understanding of the characters hinders the action. The play, although filled with many literary gems created by such a skilled writer as Gotanda, still does not feel totally complete. Most notably with Linda, I did not always feel that I understood what was driving her. Is it just her desires to have the most disposable of funds? Was it true companionship and warmth that she could not find in much younger men? The

journey concludes with a very satisfying discovery of two people, but I just wasn't always sure of the journey as it was happening.

Visually, the sets created by Robin Sanford Roberts were amazingly delicious, with a smattering of simple that truly created amazing counterpoints in each moment.

In society, we often look at age as wisdom. With that being said, how can a 33-year-old possibly teach a 70-year-old man about the meaning of life and love? Even though I may not have always liked Jack, I do appreciate that at his advanced age, even when I didn't believe he was willing to learn, he proved me wrong. At the heart of the play, out somewhere on the Caribbean Sea, there are still a few lessons that Jack was able to learn. And ultimately, it was the young wife doing all the teaching.

San Jose Repertory Theatre Presents "Love in American Times"

Starring Linda Park and J. Michael Flynn

Directed by Rick Lombardo

Through Sunday, June 5th

San Jose Repertory Theatre

101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose, CA 95113

Tickets range from \$17.50 - \$69

For tickets, call (408) 367-7255 or visit the Rep's official [website](#).

David is a member of the [San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle](#). Email him at dchavez04@att.net

Become a subscriber to David's theatre column by going to the top of the page and clicking "subscribe." Follow David on twitter at twitter.com/davidjchavez

Become a fan of San Jose Theater Arts Examiner on [Facebook](#).