



"Chinglish" is humorous and sexy fun
by Hindi Greenberg, The Prospector of The Union, April 14, 2016

"Chinglish," Community Asian Theatre of the Sierra's (CATS) current production, is a funny, sexy, raucous and political romp through the clash of two disparate cultures.

What is "Chinglish?" It's both the title of the play written by David Henry Hwang and a term used for often erroneous and humorous translations from Chinese to English. Some examples are "Slip and fall down carefully" for "Slippery, watch your step," or offering a toast of "Up your bottoms!" instead of "Bottoms up!"

In "Chinglish," an American businessman travels to China to try to cultivate contacts to reinvigorate his family's failing sign-building business. He finds that traversing the gulf between the two dissimilar cultures and languages isn't as easy as he hoped and, both figuratively and literally, makes for some odd-bedfellows. Take note that the play has some adult language and sexiness, but nothing your 14 year old can't teach you.

The play premiered in Chicago in 2011 and then opened on Broadway later that same year. Because of the necessity for Mandarin-speaking actors (much of the dialog is in Mandarin, with the English translations projected on the upper area of the set, much like opera supertitles), it isn't often performed. So CATS is to be congratulated for its ambitious and successful production, bringing in actors from both Seattle and the local area who speak English and Mandarin.

In his well-done interpretation of Daniel, the hapless American businessman, Laurence Hughes alternates between charming and clueless. Kathy Hsieh exhibits both sexiness and strength as Xi Yan, the forceful and focused Communist official whose mash-ups of language are often hilarious. As Peter, the British teacher who is trying to cultivate work as a consultant, Mandarin-speaking David Rosprim does a fine job in his first theatrical role. And Hock Tjoa has found his niche as the somewhat stoic government minister who sings Chinese opera. The natural interplay between all of the actors is also notable. The evening I saw the play, the timing of the actors was perfect, but the projected English translations didn't always keep up with the spoken dialog, necessitating occasional rapid reading.

Director Annie Lareau, who is from Seattle and directed CATS' production of "Hotel at the Corner of Bitter and Sweet" in 2015, does an impressive job with a complex production. The smooth flow of the numerous scene changes is particularly noteworthy. As always, Pamela Hodges' set design is creative, functional and contributes greatly to the entire ambiance. Jill Kelly's well-executed costumes and Lisa Moon's simple but appropriate properties also add greatly to the play, as does Tim Dugan's distinctive lighting work.

I have occasionally been accused of not being critical enough in my reviews. Of course, this isn't New York or London, so I do need to be a bit circumspect in my comments. However, readers can always tell how well I really like a production by how many complimentary adjectives I use. For "Chinglish," I have incorporated numerous of those adjectives because it is a funny, innovative, timely play, well-done by a talented cast and crew. See it at the Nevada Theatre through April 30th.

Hindi Greenberg's favorite Chinglish signs in Taiwan were seen posted on a building project ("Erection in progress") and in a park ("Tiny grass is shyly smiling and would not like to be interrupted") and posted below a display of glass vases ("Please don't touch yourself. Let us help you to try out").