

Theatre in Our Hearts by Daphne Jung

Theatre is at the heart of many peoples' lives. Especially for students, theatre allows for self-exploration as well as building life skills. So many students each year suffer from burnout caused by the gruesome grind of intense academic courses. Having access to theatre as entertainment and as courses to partake in alleviates this stress and improves their overall well-being. During high school, students are at a time when they must begin to consider their career path. Without the exposure to theatre, we would be robbing these students of opportunities to explore as many fields as possible. Some students do not learn well in a "sit down and study" environment, as many academic classes are set up. They require the physical movement or the social engagement of theatre to enhance their communication, organization, and confidence. Not all traditional skills, like debating, must be learned through academics like the humanities. Critical discussions build critical thinking and argumentation during Theatre Criticism. Cooperation and teamwork are strengthened during drama and theatre productions. It is clear that theatre is such a valuable experience to a student's career, but it does not end in high school.

Whether people like to acknowledge it or not, society relies on entertainment. Just within the past year, we could see how morale could be raised in the darkest of times. I watched the East Van Panto by the Cultch when lockdown and full restrictions were still in place. Despite the horrendous events seen in the news, it was the lighthearted entertainment which made life bearable. The family-friendly pantomime included characters from various fictional worlds and sing-a-long songs using current day pop tunes. The stories and lyrics were written to reflect the current state of the world, but it was done so in a way which brought hope to the audience. Simple lessons like washing hands or tropes like "we'll get through this" give light back to those who were lost in the dark.

Theatre isn't always about butterflies and sunshine; art is a form of expression, and often it is inspired by those who are trapped in the dark. In Greenthumb's production "Still Falling", the journey in dealing with mental health struggles is beautifully depicted. The play follows the life of a young girl whose schoolwork and relationships are sabotaged as a result of mental illness. Often, sensitive subjects are difficult to discuss because of all the stigma built up around them. However, productions similar to "Still Falling" open a gateway for conversations and aid in reducing the stigma around such important topics. It is work like these which help to reassess our values as a society.

Growing up, I felt constricted by the stigma in society. Whether it was because I was a little girl, or because I am visibly Asian, there were many expectations set out for me. In the past, the picture-perfect life was for me to be a doctor with a prideful family and successful husband. This ideal caused much inner conflict and turmoil, which in turn wasted years of youth to confusion and suppression. I always knew that I was not alone in this struggle, but I only ever saw people who looked like me perfectly abide to those stereotypes.

That is why when my class and I spoke with Tetsuro Shigematsu after watching his performance, "One Hour Photo", I felt hopeful. Shigematsu spoke of his own struggles as a child, growing up Asian with rigid stereotypes and a narrative he was edged to follow. He questioned why the only Asian person in the Hollywood scene reinforced destructive stereotypes and took it upon himself to pursue his passion in acting. Hearing his journey, combined with emerging mainstream Asian actors, gives me hope that race will soon be eradicated as a discriminatory factor in not only theatre, but in every aspect of our society. In a world where everything is forced to fit a certain ideal, it was so relieving to see public representation of someone going against the narrative that I had struggled with for so long. In its rawest form, art allows us to voice our opinions. This is what allows minorities to be seen and for their struggles to be heard. It has the power to reconstruct society and give hope back to those who were lost in the dark. As a student who will turn to her next chapter in life, I will be forever grateful for these experiences and keep theatre at the core of my heart.