

Different paths, same moon

Refugee and immigrant stories rivet in 'Same Moon: Lansing'

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By PAUL WOZNIAK, for the Lansing City Pulse

Their stories could not be more different, from fleeing ethnic cleansing and the Taliban to their family taking a job at Michigan State University. But the feelings of displacement and the courage required to forge a new identity are universally powerful.

That's the message in "The Same Moon: Lansing," presented this weekend by Peppermint Creek Theatre Co. The non-fiction play features the immigration and refugee stories of five people who could have ended up anywhere, but now call Lansing their home. Telling Project executive director Jonathan Wei weaves

the unique tales of Dilli R. Chapagai, Celia Mengran Li, Yusuf Sultani, Lana H. King and Amelia M. Roccocka into a tidy, hour-long script. Directed with the subtle style of Blake Bowen, the play is layered with gravity and humor, while the stories harmonize like voices in a choir.

The three most harrowing tales are those of Chapagai, Sultani and King who each fled horrific violence in their native countries of Bhutan, Afghanistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina respectively. The tension and suspense in all three tales of survival leave you wondering if they will make it to safety. Although less harrowing, stories from Li and Rogocka show how traumatic it can be to lose your sense of self. Li turns a period of her life— where she left her childhood passion for acting for the conformity of Chinese public education — into a theatrical gut punch. In a distinct moment, Li, dressed in a yellow shirt and pigtails, removes the elastic bands from her hair and says, "that's the day I locked little Celia away."

Technical effects including lighting design by Nick Eaton, sound design by Augustine Martinez and a series of pictures and maps projected behind the actors, give each story context and dramatic flair. But the best moments are when the cast recreate their memories. One actor will play a younger version of themselves while the others become their mothers, siblings or peers. Skin color, accent and nationality are seemingly erased; allowing the cast and audience to see the humanity — or lack of it — in everyone.

"Same Moon: Lansing"

Peppermint Creek Theatre Co.

8 p.m. Thursday, Apr. 18 - Saturday, Apr. 20;

2 p.m. Sunday, Apr. 21

\$15/\$10 student or senior 65+

Miller Performing Arts Center

6025 Curry Lane, Lansing

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peppermintcreek.org

