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## Review: Run, Don't Walk, to See THE CHINESE LADY at Denver Center for the Performing Arts

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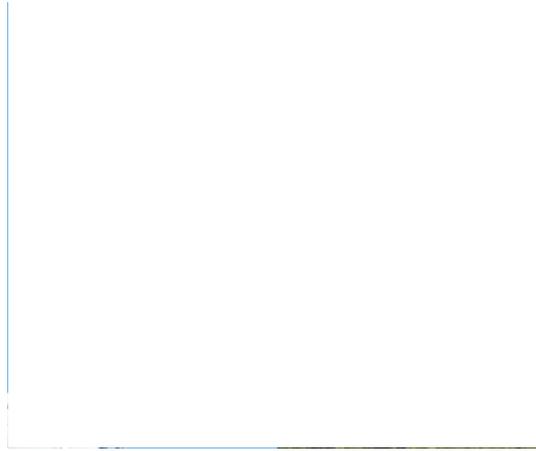
by Jon Bee Sep. 26, 2022



Picture it: New York City, 1834. Afong Moy has been taken from her home in Guangzhou and brought to America by Nathaniel and Frederick Carne. She is put on display and becomes known as "The Chinese Lady" - all at the adolescent age of 14 years old. For years on end, she sits; walks; eats; drinks; repeats. Such is how Afong Moy is once again on display in DCPA's latest production, *The Chinese Lady*. Only this time - she's telling the story.

I cannot express enough the importance and historical reverence of this show. Written by Llyod Suh, I went in without any knowledge of Afong Moy, her translator Atung, and their journey in America. I came to the theater with fresh eyes and left with a wealth of history I should have known for years. The play does an impeccable job of disseminating information to the audience while remaining a theatrical production in all its glory.

Seema Sueko is back at DCPA after directing *Vietgone* and let me just say - they've hit another homerun. Under Sueko's direction, the creative team and dynamic duo cast have once again offered theatrical excellence to the Denver community. Among the creative elements, the standout was the scenic design by Alan E. Muraoka. Muraoka's design uses traditional theatre scenic elements to create depth to the set that is otherwise not there. It works incredibly well in the more intimate Singleton Theatre, not to mention it is visually stunning.



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With only two cast members, every little thing an actor does is fully exposed to the audience. Every step, every choice, every bumb in the road. Narea Kang as Afong Moy and Sky Smith as Atung are, in so many words, masterful in their performances. Though the character is "irrelevant," Smith's performance in the role is ever-present. He is always engaged on stage even when he is not in the scene. In the titular role, Kang is the personification of dark satire. Afong Moy's story is anything but glamorous. Kang takes the unglamorous nature of Afong Moy's being put on display and offers it to the audience in all that it is - outrageous. The two of the actors, together, guide the show along from start to finish and leaves you wanting at least one more scene.

Toward the end of the show, the playwright offers up historical moments in history that had deep, negative, long-lasting impacts on Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Americans. For this local Denver production, the creative team worked with Suh to add in additional context about the October 31, 1880 riot in which racists burned to the ground a prominent Chinese neighborhood in Denver. The riots would prove to be successful - what used to be the city's thriving Chinatown is today known as LoDo.

*The Chinese Lady* runs through October 16, 2022. For tickets, visit

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