

This review appeared in The San Francisco Chronicle and at sfgate.com on Sept. 23, 2014.

The Late Wedding review: Dizzying dip into marriage and Calvino

By Robert Hurwitt

In Christopher Chen's **beguiling and relentlessly inventive** "The Late Wedding," the form of the narrative, not to mention its content, is more unreliable than the narrator. Or any of the six narrators — unless that's one narrator being played by six actors. That's only partly because Chen's latest play is inspired by the fiction of Italo Calvino, an Italian journalist also known for his short stories and novels. A comic, dramatic inquiry into human relationships — between lovers or spouses; between playwright and audience — the Crowded Fire world premiere that opened Monday is another of **Chen's slyly metatheatrical, blissfully funny, whiplash-smart creations. It's a roller-coaster ride along the lines of his exhilarating "The Hundred Flowers Project," although easier to follow through its shifting story lines.**

That starts happening before there are any stories, during the preshow announcement, and continues for what seem an effortlessly engaging 85 minutes in director Marissa Wolf's handsome, gently paced production. What begins as a look at anthropological research into the marital arrangements and lore of a few odd tribes segues without warning into a political drama cum action thriller. Actors begin speaking not only their characters' lines but the playwright's notes to himself. Or perhaps that's notes to herself, if this script is by one of the characters who turns out to be a playwright. The next thing we know, we're on a voyage through outer space to the Calaman Islands, which may be a planet made up entirely of seashores. Or they may be islands in the memories of the first people we meet, a Bakaan tribe couple. Michael Anthony Torres and Lawrence Radecker's lazily lounging spouses reconstruct their memories of vacations on the islands, their mutual tenderness laced with an anxious, edgy need to make sure their memories are in sync to the smallest detail.

Kathryn Zdan is a rigid traditionalist and Lauren Spencer her glowing new bride in a marriage that may founder on this tribe's belief that the greatest marital happiness lies in anticipation — even if that means putting off consummation indefinitely, while having children with somebody else. Ogie Zulueta and Michele Leavy speak glowingly of their tribe's life-in-death carpe diem traditions while betraying numerous little and huge cracks in their marriage. **Spencer will become a magnetic mystery-action hero later, and Zdan a remarkably acrobatic cohort. As stories shift, [Stephanie Buchner](#)'s lights seem to open up the enticing boxes of Melpomene Katakalos' beautiful, white-on-white set. And as the visual layers of Wolf's stagings deepen, so too do the comic, emotional and psychological resonances of Chen's theatrical hall of mirrors.**