

This review appeared on the San Francisco Examiner on September 29, 2014.

Crowded Fire stages wild, witty ‘Late Wedding’

By Jean Schiffman

So you’re probably wondering why this review of San Francisco playwright Christopher Chen’s new, 90-minute comedy, “The Late Wedding,” is starting out so oddly, with the colloquial expression “so,” although – well, why not? After all, you know that Chen’s work itself is decidedly unusual, because you saw his earlier play, “The Hundred Flowers Project,” which was about the Cultural Revolution in China and other stuff, and which you loved, and which was also produced by Crowded Fire Theater, which always chooses offbeat and intriguing plays and commissioned this one, so you’re figuring that this review (which uses the word “which” too many times) is a lame imitation of Chen’s meta style of writing, and you’re also wondering why the editor has allowed this sentence to be so long, and whether the reviewer is going to use the tedious second-person form of address for this whole review.

(But you also know that the review will only be 400 words, and how can you complain when this newspaper is a freebie?)

Also you’ve heard (but from whom? you can’t remember; memory is so elusive) that the witty Chen was influenced by Italian writer Italo Calvino in writing “The Late Wedding,” which (oh no! the word “which” again!) is about the vagaries of love and marriage, both homo- and heterosexual, and the way that we both cherish and distort the past, and about the creative process itself. [Note to self: return books to library. (Huh? What? Another effort to imitate Chen’s basically inimitable meta-theatrical style, which provides comical insights into the playwright’s cluttered mind?)]

And you figure that, similar to “Hundred Flowers,” Chen’s characters are likely to switch roles, and settings and genres will probably change in imaginative ways – maybe a “Saturday Night Live”-type faux-anthropological sketch about the marriage rituals of non-existent tribes; a scene in a space ship; a play-within-a-play set in a lifeboat, who knows?

You trust that Fire’s artistic director Marissa Wolf will pull Chen’s disparate threads together in a cohesive way and create moments both contemplative and poignant.

Plus you know that her top-notch ensemble — Michele Leavy, Lawrence Radecker, Lauren Spencer, Michael Anthony Torres, Kathryn Zdan and Ogie Zulueta — will reveal truths about contemporary relationships.

And you figure that Melpomene Katakalos’ set design will be functional and will mirror Chen’s sense of playfulness and mystery.

You know you gotta see this funny, brilliant play.