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Wry and Intense, *The Great Leap* Gets Poignant Treatment at Interact

The Great Leap by Lauren Yee is a play that makes you the audience laugh, feel, and think. Fortunately, it is being mounted by Interact Theatre Company who has established a reputation with this kind of play. Doubly fortunate to have it directed by Producing Artistic Director, Seth Rosin who is one of the Philadelphia area's finest directors and is especially facile with an emotionally layered play like this.

The focus of the play is China in 1989, the summer of the Tiananmen Square protests and massacres. Basketball coach Saul Slesak is facing the downside of a mediocre career at The University of San Francisco and the dissolution of his marriage. All he has are "his boys" who play for him. In 1971 he had made a visit to China as a goodwill ambassador to teach Chinese players and coaches the intricacies of American style. He trained the coach of Beijing, and he is looking forward to going back to a happier time with his team for a friendship game.

Before Saul leaves, he is accosted by Manford, a young Chinese American kid who wants to play for him in China. Manford is a high school student who has distinguished himself with his play on the street courts of San Francisco. The two eventually become linked as he accompanies the team to the game in 1989, the summer of the Tiananmen Square riots. Saul's personal agenda is pitted against the agendas of both Manford and Wen Chang, the coach he left behind to develop Chinese basketball.

Yee's play delightfully challenges how things are connected in the strangest ways. Rosin's clean, crisp direction tells the story with maximum clarity, intensity, and humor. He has assembled an incredibly talented ensemble starting with one of Philadelphia's finest actors, Scott Greer. He captures the layers of Saul's emotions and deftly handles the change of Saul in 1971 to 1989. Richard Chan imbues Manford with a driven peripateticism that makes the audience feel his inevitable movement towards his fated meeting with Chinese coach Chang. Coach Wen Chang is handled with palpable trepidation and insight. His narration is told with believability and resignation. The fourth member of this wonderful ensemble is Bi Jean Ngo as Connie whose parents have looked out for Manford. She represents Manford's best interest and helps provide some valuable back story. They work seamlessly to tell this story of cultural misunderstanding both international and personal.

Assisting Rosin is a wonderful staff. Mellie Katakalos's spare, representational set works wonderfully with Peter Whinnery's lighting design to keep the audience in the moment. Daniel Ison's sound design and Natalia de la Torre's costumes complete the picture that director Rosin presents to the audience.

Interact Theatre continues to present thoughtful, stimulating theater. They take great advantage of the Drake proscenium theater. *The Great Leap* plays until June 23rd.