



## Teenagers, seniors collaborate on compelling 'Being Something'

By Chad Jones, STAFF WRITER

Inside Bay Area, OAKLAND TRIBUNE, ANG NEWSPAPERS Tuesday, April 26, 2005

ONE OF THE MOST satisfying moments at Sunday's matinee of "Being Something" happened after the final curtain call.



All had gone well during the performance of this intriguing collaboration between two Oakland-based groups: Stagebridge, the nation's oldest senior theater company, and Opera Piccola (Small Works), a multicultural education and performance organization.

The actors, including three teens from Oakland's Carter Middle School, two official senior citizens and two in the middle of the age spectrum, had taken their bows.

The audience was thanked, the lights came on and some Stevie Wonder music started blasting throughout the theater, the Oakland Metro. That's when 14-year-old Kenneth Foreman and 89-year-old Isabel Ferguson started to dance. No, they weren't just dancing; they were boogying, and they both looked extremely happy.

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Though "Being Something," which is saddled with the cumbersome subtitle "Living 'Young' and Growing 'Old' in Oakland," isn't quite that spontaneous when it comes to illuminating the experiences of teens and seniors, the spirit is similar.

The sense of collaboration is strong in this two-hour show, which was created and directed by Ellen Sebastian Chang for Stagebridge and Opera Piccola.

Even if all the pieces don't quite fit together, there's a palpable feeling of joy coming from the performers as they work their way through short scenes and songs cobbled together by Chang and eight writers and composer Stephen Duffy. It's clear they like working together and know they're part of something entertaining and valuable.

The first act is primarily the domain of the young people. Foreman, La'Sharae Williams and Tia Hicks shine in Tom Swift's sketch "Numbers," which pits a teenage Romeo between his two

feuding Juliets. Fergusen and Tim Hannon bookend the scene as seniors involved in their own romantic drama.

Foreman takes the stage alone for a moving recitation of Robert Henry Johnson's "The Sending," and then Jane Chen, as the spirit of Oakland, sings Johnson's "Far Place."

In Act 2, Williams performs her own "Mongolia, a Bedtime Story," a disarming tale of a girl who becomes a star.

Eugenie Chan's "B'umblebee" is a scene between a teenager of mixed race (Hicks) having a heart to heart with her Chinese grandfather (Jay Chee), who has a hard time seeing that because she's half African American, she has difficulty fitting in with her peer groups at school.

The scene goes on too long, but the actors are excellent.

Chan's scene is really the only one in the play that directly addresses intergenerational conflict.

The best scene in Act 2, Anne Galjour's "The Final Inning," is about a brother (Hannon) battling his sister (Fergusen) over selling the house and putting her in a home. Wearing a tiara and holding cap guns and water pistols, Fergusen wants to stay put. "I want to die where I lived," she says.

It's a powerful scene, but there's not a teen in sight.

There are terrific moments in "Being Something," not the least of which is the teens dancing to Chinaka Hodge's slam poetry performance of "Barely Audible"; the show is enormously entertaining. It just seems there were opportunities missed to let the teens and the seniors address one another from their specific vantage points in life and to try to understand one another better.

Undoubtedly that happened in real life during rehearsals for the show. Too bad we don't get to see much of it onstage.

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