

Identity Politics Give Ohio Group Their Edge

by Channing Joseph

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Yella': An Asian -American Female Dance was performed in Hales Gymnasium on Monday, to a small but attentive audience. Directed and choreographed by Tamara Welch, a graduate student from the Ohio State University dance department, the performance was created in pursuit of Welch's Masters degree in the fine arts.

Intended as an artistic exploration of the intricacies of racial and gender identity, the hour-long modern dance presentation seemed to captivate the audience with its vision of the day-to-day life of an Asian -American female. At the end, the audience seemed stunned, evidenced by the fact that no one rose from their seats for at least half a minute, an indication that they may have wanted to see more from Welch and the three other dancers: Danah Bella, Mira Kim and Mei-Chen Lu.

The sound design and arrangement of the production, a collaboration between K. Terumi Shorb (OC '99), Brian Casey and Welch, was a notable highlight and point of interest. Seemingly inspired by the electronic textures and voice manipulations increasingly prevalent in some of today's popular music, it was a fitting complement to the piece's choreography.

At points one heard high -pitched whining soundscapes supporting the dancers' movements, and at others one heard voice -recordings of the dancers and composers, poignantly reciting poetry like, "I'm a thought in your head with no room to exist / I'm like paper, like plastic / I'm wrapped 'round your fist."

The piece was divided into four sections, and each section was titled poetically to signify some of its intended meaning. The first was called "Photos are Worth More than Two Dimensions," and began with the dancers walking on the stage holding large metal pots and performing various movements with them, imitating what seemed to be cooking, washing and other domestic activities, and perhaps evoking the struggle of Asian -American women against the stereotype of them being good housewives.

This scene transformed as the dancers overturned their pots and stood on top of them, adopting the postures of people posing for photographs. Welch said this part of the dance was a reference to photographs as metaphors for stereotypes, because photographs are two -dimensional and, like stereotypes, do not represent every aspect of a person.

The other sections of the presentation, respectively titled "Differing Overlaps Sameness," "Day In and Day Out" and "Steering Through American Eye Flow" were, according to Welch, dance interpretations of the everyday struggles of Asian -American females.

She said that her intention with these consecutive sections was to deal with the desire of Asian -American females to be treated equally, to capture the emotion behind the daily pains of Asian -American females and to explore the fluidity of identity. "We just want to be treated like everybody else. That's something across the board for Asians and other minorities... We are American even though we look Asian... [but] with different contexts, we identify as different things. We're steering through what people see us as, [so] I've found that I've never wanted to label anything," she said.