

On Stage

"Take Me Out" Comes Out Swinging

By Jeffrey Lo
Staff Writer

On Nov. 4, a lot was at stake for America and, more specifically, for California. On Election Day, we decided whether or not we were to elect a bi-racial president and we voted on a proposition that could possibly decide the fate of gay marriage in our state.

There is perhaps no time in our country's history more vital than now for Richard Greenberg's "Take Me Out," the 2003 Tony Award winner for best play that encapsulates so much of America's inner psyche. Much like America, the play focuses on issues of racism, masculinity, homosexuality and religion while still making room for something as "insignificant" as baseball. The catch: Baseball isn't so insignificant.

"Take Me Out" follows the season of the New York Empire, a fiction baseball team, after its half-black, half-white star player Darren Lemming, played by third-year graduate drama student, Nathan Crocker, comes out as gay. What follows is a spiral of uncomfortable situations, inevitable acceptance of homosexuality and the shunning of AA closing pitcher Shane Mungitt, who, is racist and homophobic.

The most beautiful thing about "Take Me Out" is how real each character is. There is no person without fault or a redeeming quality about his or her self.

It makes for an unusual experience that leaves the audience not sure what to believe, which is where the play's strength lies. It doesn't have any answers, and it doesn't tell you who is right or wrong. Instead, it presents the issues and allows you

to figure them out yourself.

The character who is the least at fault is Japanese pitcher Takeshi Kawabata, with a touching performance from third-year undergraduate drama major Sean Cruz. In Kawabata's defining moment, he displays the struggle of being alone in a new country with nothing but a dream and the guilt he feels for not pitching the game and allowing closer Mungitt to get in the game and kill a hitter.

The play hits the audience with a series of emotional instances that quickly shift to tense moments, and ending with a punch line that evokes laughter. The scenes with Lemming and his accountant Mason Marzac, played by third-year graduate drama student Michael Doonan, exemplify this seriocomic nature of the play. They tell tales of death, money and friendship, but their dialogue is sprinkled with many sexual "gay jokes."

This production of this Pulitzer Prize nominee rides the strength of the individual scenes. In a moment where Mungitt bangs on a table in prison, questioning why he isn't allowed to pitch anymore, the entire audience was left speechless and unsure about whom they should feel sympathy for. Third-year graduate drama student Benny Wills' brilliant performance as Mungitt was encapsulated in the pure rage he portrayed as he was carried out of the prison.

Along with the fantastic acting and scene transitions came the wonderful pictures and the overall atmosphere that director Dennis Beasley and his artistic team created. The play's opening image of a baseball team frozen in its victory celebration, with the catcher lifting



NIKKI JEE | Staff Photographer

UC Irvine's latest production, "Take Me Out," is based on Richard Greenberg's Tony Award-winning play about a gay baseball player who comes out and the conflict that ensues regarding his homosexuality.

the pitcher in the air, is an image that can put a child-like smile on one's face.

In between the second and third act, the entire audience stood up, stretched and sang along with "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" as part of

a "seventh-inning stretch." It was as close to a baseball field as a theater will ever get.

The closing image of Marzac sitting on the baseball field, just soaking it all in, is a beautiful piece that symbolized the entire work. This

closing picture reminded the audience that though there is so much in the world that has yet to be sorted out, we must never forget to sit and soak in the little joys in life. "Take Me Out" will surely be a big delight for anyone who witnesses it.