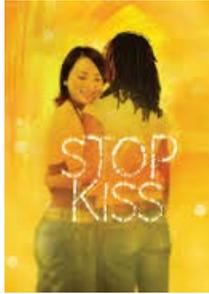


**STOP KISS**  
**By Lorraine Viade, PsyD**



As a season ticket holder at the Pasadena Playhouse, I go to each performance never knowing what to expect. Often I don't know anything about the play or how I am going to react to the subject or the performances. I attended the preview of *Stop Kiss* and was blown away by everything this important work by Diana Son has to offer. The story is relevant, timeless and transcendent. This is a love story about courtship, about self-discovery and about overcoming misfortune. It is about prejudice, stereotypes and misconceptions set in the melting pot of New York City. What makes this production so special is how universal the emotions and the dialogue are when two people engage in the journey of falling in love, and how love knows no limit and holds no boundaries between two people who are meant to be together. If you want to see what love is about, see *Stop Kiss*.

*Stop Kiss* includes everyone and excludes no one. There is not a person alive who has ever loved someone that could not find something to relate to in this play. You may not approve of interracial relationships or accept people for being who they are, but you cannot deny that love in any form, in every form is the most precious thing we have as human beings. When two people have that spark and are committed to each other in the privacy and safety of intimate acceptance, they can overcome anything. Family, friends, lovers and strangers may have opinions. But they cannot fully understand the tenacious yet fragile bonds that are built between new lovers if they are in their roles of parents, boyfriends, or those envious haters who would rather destroy the beauty of love than to seek it for themselves.

What moved me the most was that you did not have to see the violence or the hatred acted out to feel the pain or the impact of the physical and emotional trauma. Because you saw love blossoming and the relationship building between these two people who just wanted to explore each other's similarities and differences; to laugh, cry, fight and make up, be jealous, be afraid of rejection, be seen and known fully in all the complexities that life and love can offer.

The cast includes Sharon Leal, Angela Lin, Amanda Carlin, Jeff De Serrano, Brandon Scott and John Sloan. Directed by Seema Sueko, *Stop Kiss* illustrates that when two people fall in love, nothing else matters to them, but everything matters to those who watch them, who are afraid of them, who have loved and lost them, who raised them but who do not understand that love is not bound by gender, race, culture, ethnicity,

physical condition, size, shape, beauty or any of the other unimportant factors that society sometimes puts in the way.

Prejudice gets in the way of love, peace and freedom. We must be brave enough to push it away in ourselves and others and to embrace who we are, who we love and to help people understand that there is no shame, guilt, sin and wrong in the power of love between consenting adults. We are all different and all similar. We choose what we focus on. We are each responsible for how we relate to everyone in our lives. There have been great strides in the areas of inclusion, cultural, gender identity, and other differences, but there will always be those whose ignorance and fear lead to hate and violence. Embrace love and love will embrace you, whoever you are.

After the play, the cast and director answered some well-crafted questions posed by community organizer Alison De La Cruz. Sandra Oh, who has performed in *Stop Kiss*, commented on how more artistic productions need to embrace the diversity of our communities. I agree.

In our department, we strive to be culturally sensitive and appropriate, to appreciate and understand our differences and learn about the individuality of our clients. We seek better ways to engage members of the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender communities.

As people in the helping professions, our task is to help people who have suffered pain, trauma and loss, and who need acceptance, kindness, understanding and compassion. Every one of those elements can be found in *Stop Kiss*. There are scenes that resonate with poignant tenderness that are universal in their emotional impact. There are laughs and tears, joy and fears, regrets and hope. In the end, you have to have hope. I hope that every person reading this will get the chance to see this play. If you know of anyone who is struggling with love, from who they love to how they love, take them with you. There is a message for everyone here. Love boldly and bravely, love publicly and intimately, love who you love and know that love includes everyone who seeks it and finds it. But know that love involves risk. Take the risk.

We need more productions like this. The Pasadena Playhouse may have upset some patrons, and I respect anyone's right to not accept difference, but the fact that they moved forward with this production demonstrates their artistic commitment to the theater and to embracing diversity in every way. Please be receptive to this great production.

I give *Stop Kiss* five curtains.

