



Portrait of Heartaches

Ardent Song

Stages abound at this time with portraits of heartache. From the angst of the Marasigan sisters in the Vineyard Theater's outstanding productions of Nick Joaquin's *Portrait of an Artist* to the wretchedness of *Uncle and Niece* in *How I Learned to Drive*, the depiction of chaos reveals the eventual empowerment of the faint, the weak, the suffering. *Portrait of Heartaches: The distress of Candida and Paula Marasigan during a time of economic, cultural and emotional changes* is the most palpable portrait this writer observed. The sisters are caretakers of their ancestral home, their reclusive father and his celebrated painting. The sisters are genteel and refined and nostalgic of the old world. The transition of the times plashed the colors of these sister's troubles and humiliation, loss and struggle, hope and empowerment of this portrait of headaches.

Directed by Jorge Ledesma and adapted by dramaturg Jane Ann Crum, *Portrait* was well produced, fast moving and remarkable to watch. While still digesting the cast changes in each of the three acts, the palette of characters who swirled around and on this portrait were marvelous. The sisters were exceptional. Ruth Henry and Catol De la Mesa gave compelling performances as Paula and Candida. Mehr Mansuri too played a formidable Candida and in the moments of the play, quite irresistibly portrayed her descent into near meagerness and desperate subsistence. Joshua Spafford's Tony Javier was the charmer, rogue and scoundrel. The only man compassionate and assuring is Bitoy Comacho, most simpatico by Ken Leung.

The bare living room echoes the wavy transitoriness of a beach. Designed by Donald Eastman, the angled platform set is the battlefield for an eternal tug of conflicting cultures. Opposing forces vainly attempt to shape its destiny; the irony is that the painting itself (never shown but gestured at) willfully disenchant onlookers.

Portrait of an Artist is an ardent song to a faceless nation that braves the future by donning a mask of faith, hope, and sympathetic magic.