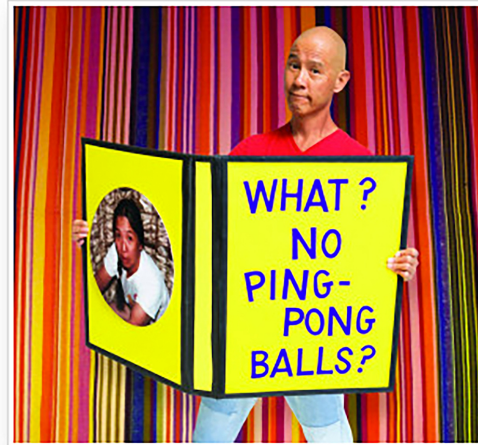


BY DANBACALZO IN REVIEWS

A wealth of Asian American theatrical talent descended upon Philadelphia this past weekend for the [National Asian American Theater Conference and Festival](#), organized by the [Consortium of Asian American Theaters and Artists](#) (CAATA) and co-hosted by [Asian Arts Initiative](#).



— Dan Kwong in a publicity image for *What? No Ping-Pong Balls?*

Among the highlights was Dan Kwong's *What? No Ping-Pong Balls?*, a moving tribute to the artist's deceased mother, Momo Nagano Kwong. The writer/performer tells us of Momo's rebellious streak as a child, her formative years in a Japanese American internment camp during World War II, her college education where she was the only person of color on campus, her marriage and divorce from Kwong's father, and her award-winning career as an artist who specialized in weaving.

A show about motherhood, written and performed by a man, is fraught with potential representational landmines. Kwong addresses the issue upfront with a humorous rapidly delivered voiceover disclaimer acknowledging his limited perspective. In addition, the video component of the performance includes interviews he conducted with single Asian American moms (some, like Nobuko Miyamoto, are artists like his own mother) that also help to give a broader context to what could become an overly sentimentalized story.

Kwong also breaks up the narrative in whimsical ways, such as depicting himself as a newborn baby boy via the use of a puppet body. Vintage black and white commercials are shown, amusingly demonstrating the rampant sexism within the society in which Momo grew up. And Kwong reads excerpts from his mother's autobiography (which has the same name as his own show), represented by a ridiculously oversized book. Best of all is the live musical performance by musician Kenny Endo, who underscores parts of Kwong's narrative and lets loose with an incredible drum solo that closes out the first act.

At times, Kwong tries a little too hard in his efforts to provide adequate social context. For example, a video segment featuring Free Speech Movement activist Mario Savio didn't seem necessary to the story Kwong aimed to tell. And a little trimming of the overly long first act would likely help the flow of the show as a whole. The second act is much tighter. I was particularly fascinated by the weavings created by Momo, and her growth and recognition as an artist is poignantly contrasted with her body's physical decline.



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Dan Bacalzo joined the faculty of Florida Gulf Coast University as Assistant Professor of Theatre in Fall 2015. He received his Ph.D. in Performance Studies from New York University and has previously taught in the Dept. of Drama at New York University and the Asian American Studies Program at Hunter College. He is the former artistic director of Peeling, an Asian American writing/performance collective. He wrote and performed in the solo shows *I'm Sorry, But I Don't Speak the Language* and *Sort of Where I'm Coming From*, and is also the author of the one-act play *Say Something*. He currently serves on the literary board and as dramaturg for Guinea Pig Lab Theatre. He worked over 15 years as a theatre editor and critic in New York City, including eight years as managing editor of TheaterMania.com. His academic publications include articles and/or reviews in *Theatre Journal*, *TDR*, and *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre*.