

HIGHLY COMMENDED

IT'S MY HOME TOO *by* DINDA WIDYA MURTI

[Teenage Asian girl stands in the middle of a dimly lit stage wearing all black, her shoulders slumped.]

'They looked at me differently.'

[She raises her head to meet the eyes of the audience, retracing her memories.]

'I walked through the supermarket aisles with their hateful eyes following us [she points from the right side of the audience to the left side, mimicking the eyes that followed her] as we spoke in what they'd describe as gibberish. At the age of four I was already scared to walk in front of white strangers.'

[Bass drum playing crochets at 115 bpm.]

'I never knew hate could exist in a country like Australia. Naively, I thought that everything was sunshine and rainbows. Oh, how I wish it was like that. Seriously? Why can't they just mind their own business? If they're so disgusted by my people, then why can't they leave us alone?'

[Bass drum stops suddenly. Crotchet accents

on the crash cymbal start playing at 55 bpm. The lights turn red. The actor balls her fists.]

'For the longest time they've made me feel ashamed of my own culture, my own language, my family and my home. I'm sorry I'm not a citizen, that I don't eat Vegemite obsessively and that my mum adds more than salt and pepper to my food [the actor begins to pace back and forth around the stage with a spotlight following her] but for the longest time I've felt like I've had to pick a side. That it wasn't right for me to call this land Down Under "home" [pause]. "Were you born here?", "Where are you REALLY from?" I had to rethink my existence on this earth because of these questions, but why does it matter? Does the colour of my passport or the gibberish I speak at home change the way you'll behave towards me? HA HA HA, they'd laugh and point. Schools preach how "bullying is bad" and we should "treat people how you want to be treated". Where were they when these sunburnt kids used slurs and made fun of my eyes?'

[Crescendo cymbal roll on a suspended cymbal, the lights brighten in a soft yellow

colour similar to that of a sunset. An orchestra plays Vivaldi's Allegro pastorale.]

'There was one teacher, though. This teacher was like me. She tanned in the sun (and didn't burn), she spoke my gibberish language and didn't look at me funny for bringing fragrant food to for lunch. She gave me a feeling of comfort [pause], a sense of belonging in a school where I felt like an outsider. Even though I was younger, and I don't remember much, those memories still play in my mind.'

[1 minute intermission; she changes into brown clothing and skips onto stage.]

'I go to my home country every year just to see my family and childhood friends. Did you know that high school kids ride motorcycles to school there? I thought that was really cool. In fact, it was one of my goals. [She looks up above the audience, reminiscing]. The wind running through my clothes and the shouting from other villagers telling me to "SLOW DOWN!" The bright green rice fields and coconut trees that look so perfect they could be photoshopped. Those were goooooood times.'

[The lighting dims again, it is dark, Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata begins to

play, and her face appears confused.]

'Villagers knew my name, but they were just ... familiar faces, no names attached. They'd ask, "do you like it better here or there?" Though it hurt to say it, my mother always told me not to lie, so I said, "there" because that's how I truly felt, you know? Those strangers would be taken aback, I saw it in their facial expressions.'

[1 minute intermission, an older actor now stands in the middle of the stage, posture straight and feet apart to appear more confident, the lights slowly turn brighter. Bach's Prelude in C Major plays.]

'As I've grown into a woman on this "red soil" I call home, it became clear that my identity shouldn't need the approval of anyone other than myself. That gibberish those white people judged me for [pause] that is MY language. That's the language of my parents, my grandparents and all the other old people that came before me. It doesn't make me less Australian if I hold up two flags instead of one, plus they both have the colour red and white, Australia's colours without the blue. I'm an Australian woman. We are such a diverse country, the least you could do is accept me, and while we do have many differences, we are all human.'