

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Eight Deliver Seven

Sylvie · Wednesday, December 4th, 2019

First, an explanation.

Seven is a documentary play that has “made the rounds.” It is highly political and has played all over this country in different productions. It is not possible to give individual credit for it even when such credit is due because, whether accidentally or by intent, it’s difficult to tell exactly which of the seven playwrights who created this text wrote which part — or parts — of it.

Much the same applies to the eight talented actor-members of the ÉLAN Ensemble who are currently breathing life into an adaptation of the documentary play that has added concerted movement to it at the Atwater Village Theatre. If the writing weaves in and out of the stories of an international mix of women tyrannized by custom, religion, superstition and men, so do the performances. The added movement is a good way of unifying and enlivening the message.



Elmira Rahim in *Seven* at Atwater Village Theatre.

Devised by Stephanie Shroyer, the physical choreography is not dance, but has a similar impact as the movement threads and stitches its way through the story-telling. Abstract in nature, it supports language and message as the eight adept women on stage deliver the words and secure the emotions.

Nicely staged by Natsuko Ohama, and based on interviews by the playwrights, the communal effort, with its separate tales told in fragments, is not hard to piece together once you grow accustomed to the broken-glass format. The effect serves to remind us that crimes perpetrated against women everywhere — a recitation of which is at the heart of the project — may differ from one religion, nationality, ritual or custom to the next, but never by much. Brutality is the constant, taking many forms, and each time delivering the same anguish and blunt emotional trauma.



t-r, Danielle Reynolds, Amaka Izuchi, DeeDee Stephens & Elmira Rahim in *Seven* at Atwater Village Theatre.

In a brief program note, ÉLAN’s Artistic Director Elmira Rahim (who also performs) explains the goals of the company’s modus operandi and the paths pursued by the characters and by the actors who portray them. Each hails (now or previously) from a society where women are under siege: Afghanistan Guatemala, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ireland (north and south). It’s a

small sampler. If I've omitted a country, chalk it up to the complexity of the script and the casting.

The incidents recounted, some even finding humor, are all about forced subservience and the absence of freedom. They range from simple lack of opportunity or access to basic healthcare to, at worst, being forced to suffer severe punishment for crimes perpetrated by male members of the family who are allowed to go scot-free — and, of course, all other manner of domestic violence.

Alphabetically, the writing is credited to Paula Cizmar, Catherine Filloux, Gail Kriegel, Carol K. Mack, Ruth Margraff, Anna Deveare Smith and Susan Yankowitz. The performers are Claudia Elmore, Ukamaka Izuchi, Wonjung Kim, Mehrnaz Mohammadi, Yelena Podkolzina, Tarah Pollock, Elmira Rahim and Danielle Reynolds. All are to be commended. The writing likewise.



Wonjung Kim in *Seven* at Atwater Village Theatre.

Movement, women and words deliver 75 minutes of often stark yet engrossing entertainment. The political message is abundantly clear, and the compounding effect at the conclusion is that women are warriors. They are built with resourcefulness, intelligence and stamina to spare, not only because they are chiefly responsible for perpetuating our human species, which is demanding enough, but also apparently to survive the barbaric legitimized and illegitimate violence to which they are too often subjected.

This default to second-class status, overtly or covertly still sanctioned in too many societies, has equipped them with an inner strength for fighting back that is uniquely female.

Is it time to give women a shot at running the world? That seems to be *Seven*'s underlying question. On the evidence, could they do any worse than what the men have done so far?

Top image: l-r, Wonjung Kim, Danielle Reynolds, Yelena Podkolzina in Seven, presented by ÉLAN at Atwater Village Theatre.

Photos by Meredith Adelaide

WHAT: *Seven*, a new adaptation of the documentary play of the same name.

WHERE: Atwater Village Theatre, 3269 Casitas Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90039.

WHEN: Fridays & Saturdays, 8pm; Sundays, 3pm. **ADDED SHOW:** Monday, Dec. 16, 8pm. Ends Dec 16.

HOW: Tickets, \$25-\$35, available at seven.brownpapertickets.com or by phone at 310.990.2023.

RUNNING TIME: 75 minutes, with no intermission.

PARKING: Street or free nearby lot.

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