

How much Native makes ya Native?

A Review of Tasha Faye Evans' play *She Stands Still*

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Sometimes the magical moments in theatre are captured on a visceral level and the images from the stagecraft are repeated in the mind's eye long after leaving the theatre. That is when the conventions of theatre and stage craft work.

After I saw Tasha Faye Evans' recent performance of *She Stands Still* at the Firehall theatre, I was haunted by three central images in the play: the image of an elder crying stones, a white shirt that embodied and raped the solo actress, a woman unpacking and scattering her "stuff": boxes full of wood chips emptied in a circle in an urban apartment setting.

The play is framed with mythical time through storytelling. The myth of the tree woman who grew legs and became entranced by her lover is woven throughout the performance.

The play evolves around the central narrative of a mixed race urban woman who cannot sleep and is also haunted by the past secrets and shame that bind her to her deceased great-grandmother. Throughout the performance Evans embodies her logger family members and comes to realize the irony implicit in her family story: her family is responsible for the very same land that her Native blood springs from. Evans uses a biracial autobiographical voice to bring these characters and their stories alive on stage.

The use of slides and sound enhanced the layers of the story and allowed her to use a simple set to tell this simple and evocative story. Like many contemporary reflections on "halfbreed" identity, Evans explores the dimensions of blood memory and the problematic situation when one's sense of identity is not in accordance with the external markings of race. We are left to wonder about her blood quantum and connection to the mythical story. This tension revolved around notions of authenticity, blood memory and shame. There was a consistent use of movement to represent the frenzied and unstill aspects of a biracial identity that has not been acknowledged in contrast to a deep stillness that represented the parts of

her that connected with the suppressed knowledge of her Native ancestry. These physical elements worked well throughout the play and were complimented by the soundscape as Evans shifted between her frenzied, searching, “unstill” self and the memory, clarity and stillness in a way that dramatized her quest for wholeness.

The racialized gaze is central in this play. This big topic is addressed when she encounters a Native youth who declares that **her people** are responsible for the destruction of the land because he views her as white. Here she articulates her need to be seen as native despite her light-skinned privilege. Evans also records her need to be seen as Native in a scene where a white boy from school refers to her as a “squaw.” Ironically, this derogatory term hurled at her gives her a sense of identity that has been lost amongst her shame-riddled family. Both of these scenes describe the irony and complexity of racial hybridity and the ways in which those of us who are mixed long for a sense of identity and a desire to be “seen” in all of our complexities at any expense.

Evans is a gifted actor and her embodiment of the men and women who are central to her character’s life story shows evident of her talent as an actor. Two elements of the performance bothered me: 1) the use of cheesy hippie songs that seemed superfluous to her story and 2) the use of slides on the performance space. I would have rather seen a noiseless power point presentation of the images or have had the technic offstage as her presence and the sound of the slides was distracting.

Overall, the play is one of the very few in Canadian theatre that chronicles one of the many troubling aspects of growing up biracial and Native. When the powerful imagery rattles around in our brain after the show we are left to ponder, in a Drew Hayden-Taylor-esque fashion, “How much Native makes ya Native?”