



THE STEW

A TASTE OF CHICAGO'S FOOD, WINE, AND DINING SCENE

BY CHICAGO TRIBUNE'S GOOD EATING AND DINING STAFFS

April 06, 2010

New food play called "Feast" serves up tasty food memories and stirring views on food policy

Share |

Posted by *Monica Eng*

Let's face it, food policy can be pretty boring.

But not in the hands of the teenagers at the Albany Park Theater Project, who opened their new show "Feast" last Friday at Eugene Field Park. The show, based on interviews and personal experiences Albany Park residents, offers three views of kids on food stamps as well as a diverse buffet of immigrant food memories.

I walked in as a curious local foodie but walked out as an astonished food policy journalist with a new perspective on her beat.

The six-course presentation, which runs 80 minutes without an intermission, opens with three kids from low-income homes sharing stirring monologues on their very different views about the LINK (food stamp) card.

Meena (Troi Strongspirit Valles) performs a daredevil dance with a shopping cart as she celebrates the arrival of her family's LINK card, fully loaded with more than \$700. The first day of the month always means a cart full of delectable processed foods from Aldi and a family trip to White Castle.

For 11 year-old Maia (Jancillin Chacko), LINK means trying to decipher a four-page food stamp application and looking up big words like "citizenship" and "mortgage" as other kids — who don't serve as the family translator — play hide-and-seek outside her window.



And finally there's Malcolm (Jalen Rios), an angry and secretive teenager, terrified that his friends will discover his family's food stamp use. The fear drives him to walk around holding a Starbuck's cup, wearing name brand clothing and imploring his mother to shop at "Jewel's not Aldi's" even if Jewel customers judge his purchases.

"The day I get my mother off LINK is a day I will celebrate," he says. "LINK is not my future."

The monologues, says artistic director David Feiner, come from a two-day discussion with the teenagers about their own experiences with public aid. "For some it was the first time they'd talked openly about being on food stamps," he said.

Most of the next five courses focus on the stories of Albany Park characters who come from Lebanon (a third-generation halal butcher), Mexico (a maker of tamales), the Phillipines (a boy tasked with raising a cow), Peru (a girl learning to make ceviche and aji), India (a young wife trying to please her husband with biryani) and Puerto Rico (a sugar cane worker who makes moonshine to support his family). Each blends costumes, movement, music, performance and sound to powerful effect.

The characters and their food stories will surely make you hungry (and luckily Albany Park hosts some of the city's best ethnic restaurants) but they will also move you deeply and linger with you for days.

"Feast," by the Albany Park Theater Project plays at the Laura Wiley Theater at Eugene Field Park field house, Fridays and Saturdays through May 8. Tickets are \$6-\$18. 773.866.0875

Photos of Jalen Rios (above, right) and Kimberly Mayo (above, left) as a young Indian woman by Scott C. Neale

Posted at 03:25:51 PM in Local food, Monica Eng, Review