

**Review: *Rice***

**By Sara Lamerton**

## ***Rice* at Theatre Royal Plymouth**

*Rice*, written by Michele Lee, directed by Matthew Xia, centres around Nisha, a “Made in Melbourne” Indian Executive Officer, set on becoming the first Indian female CEO in Australia, and Yvette, a Chinese migrant, failed business woman, exacerbated mother, turned office cleaner.

Nisha, played by Anya Jaya-Murphy, agitated, entitled and ambitious, spars with Yvette, Angela Yeoh, over who should clean up her mess. This initial tussle of wills sets the stage for the tense but ultimately touching dynamic that unfolds between them over 90 minutes.

With only Anya and Angela on stage, you’d be fooled into thinking a two-woman show would be just that, but it couldn’t be further from the truth. *Rice* demands a lot from the talented pair. Quite remarkably, and repeatedly, they switch between several characters each with dizzying accuracy; representing different genders, ethnicities, mannerisms and accents, underpinned with fast paced dialogue, spectacular timing, and increasingly sparkling chemistry between the central women. Initially it seems hard to follow, but their flow quickly settles into an enviable rhythm, with the audience swept up on an unexpected journey.

In writing *Rice*, Michele Lee intended to stay away from the tried and tested format of centering ethnic minorities, and particularly women of colour’s stories solely within the community or family unit. Yet despite this deliberate shift in focus, the unlikely pair form a familial bond by proxy. As their individual circumstances collide, *Rice* creates a maternal relationship desperately needed by both characters.

Multi-layered and complex, *Rice* explores themes of struggle, protest and rebellion through these two ambitious women. With immense pressure to succeed and prove themselves, yet to ultimately still please, and be accepted by, those people around them, they discover some hard hitting truths, and reveal long held secrets.

Deep diving into issues of migrancy, race, generational expectations, and the complexity of living in a place that’s not your native land, *Rice* highlights the inevitable conflicts and divides that occur between heritage and teetering on the outside of a tradition.

Nisha's storyline explores this perfectly. Caught between her traditional roots and Western lifestyle, *Rice* asks questions about her place and where she belongs through the introduction of Gretel Patel, Nisha's Indian arch-enemy, who's overt passive aggression prior to, and upon Nisha arriving in India, suggests that she's not really Indian. Disconnected with the land of her heritage, Nisha does not understand the needs and lives of the people her business deal will affect. Gretel implies she has no right to be there, leaving Nisha questioning her ambitions and future in a career she has dedicated her life to.

Michele Lee has created a sharply comedic, multi-dimensional play that showcases the actors immense talents, and leaves you wondering where Nisha and Yvette are headed beyond the brief encounter we share with them.

Compelling, wickedly humorous, and poignantly observational, *Rice* runs in The Drum until 12th February before heading off on the next leg of its UK tour.