

Television Review

Inside "Inside Stories"

By KAT MOTOTSUNE

One Monday evening at 7:00 p.m., when most other people were eating dinner or watching *Wheel of Fortune*, I sat down to watch an episode of *Inside Stories*. *Inside Stories* is a series of 30 minute television dramas designed to promote new talent, with often tidy little family dramas that showcase Toronto's ethnic neighbourhoods. I wasn't sure how Midi Onodera's "Then/Now" was going to fit into the pattern. There is no geographic Japanese-Canadian community in Toronto, no bilingual street signs announcing that you are in "Little Tokyo." And Onodera's previous documentary, *Displaced View*, revealed such suppressed anger and resentment that I was not expecting a cosy family story with a ribbon-bow ending.

But Onodera was turned away from the striking personal statement she made in her earlier film. "Then/Now" is a family drama that presents a story easily belonging to any family. The Japanese have not cornered the market on parental expectation and filial rebellion.

One wonders if the directorial vision overrode the script. Hints of a stronger voice come through: in Karen's implied lesbian relationship; in the verbal image of Karen as a bonsai — roots trimmed to determine the way she grows; in the snide depiction of the soulless literati. But the production relies too heavily on atmospheric "Japanese" music, on shots of Queen Street West and changes of hairstyle to signify Karen's growth of personality. Thirty

minutes minus time for commercials is just not long enough to dwell on the trite elements of the story, and to introduce radical ideas.

In the end, it was the detail that interested me, the little gestures and symbols that rang true and resonated. Kaz's peculiarly nisei stance (and silence) — controlled, contained — contrasted with Karen's stride and funky hairstyle in a way that made me feel as if I were looking at my family. Perhaps the most stirring and shocking detail was the need for Karen to explain the evacuation and internment to her reading group. That something looms so large in the Japanese-Canadian consciousness comes as an uncomfortable surprise to the general population.

Ultimately, Onodera's relevance is in her exploration of an important fact — that the split in the Japanese-Canadian community is a generational one. The barriers are not regional or class-based, but are rather set in the nisei silence and the sansei stridency. The nisei created lives for the sansei by burying wartime experiences far in the past; the sansei hope to create a sense of identity by digging them all up again. Whether Midi Onodera presents this struggle for harmony as a straightforward, personal documentary, or as detail in a familiar coming-of-age TV piece, her ability to see through to the healing makes her voice a valuable one within the Japanese-Canadian community and beyond.

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Photo: David Smiley

Denise Fujiwara and Art Irizawa as daughter and father