

[Fringe review: Sansei: The Storyteller](#)

August 2, 2014. 8:07 am • Section: [Entertainment](#), [On the Scene](#), [Performing Arts](#), [Stephen's Avenue](#)



Mark Ikeda in Sansei: The Storyteller

Sansei: The Storyteller

by Mark Ikeda

at Lantern Gym

Four stars

In *Sansei: The Storyteller*, Calgary's Mark Ikeda – dancer, artistic director of Mo Mo Theatre, and multi-disciplinary artist of many talents – gets personal.

That's because he's digging into the Japanese internment during the Second World War, a huge part of Canada's past just as much as it's a huge part of Ikeda's personal history.

He also manages to take the limitations of a fringe show – no props, almost no lights, and no other cast members – and play with them, so that he turns them into a positive.

That happens right from the start, when Ikeda describes to the audience the sheer curtain he would like to have in his shows' introduction, complete with a half-Japanese, half-English text, but that we're just going to have to imagine it instead.

To Ikeda's credit, I saw that sheer curtain shimmering overhead, just from the vivid, delightful way he described it.

He also insists he's not a very good storyteller, before announcing that he will be telling three quite different stories in Sansei.

There's Ito, a 15th century Japanese guy who marries a woman and tries to sire an heir.

There's the story of the internment, from the moment Pearl Harbour gets bombed in 1941, which Ikeda transforms into a violent, agonizing dance.

That internment is also experienced through the eyes of his aunt and uncle, who we hear on audio, talking about what it was like to be rounded up, given 48 hours notice, and shipped to live in small, crowded conditions with no privacy.

He also digs deeper into the history of the event itself, introducing us to British Columbia MP Ian McKenzie, the man who spearheaded the entire idea of the internment, and produces some genuinely stunning information.

Much the way he takes the production limitations of a fringe show and gives them a positive spin, Ikeda looks for the silver linings in a dark period of the country's, and his family's, past.

He's a terrific stage presence, and despite his protestations, a natural-born storyteller.

The agony and ambiguity of the Japanese internment comes out as much in his dance as it does in his words – his movements are filled with a sense of a man under pressure.

At the same time, the title (Sansei) refers to Ikeda's own distance from his Japanese roots.

He's third generation Canadian. His dad didn't speak Japanese.

And he comes at the experience as much from the perspective of a Canadian, trying to stitch together the details of Canada's not-so-pretty-and pastoral past, as someone from somewhere else.

Ikeda also has a playful way of incorporating the techies, and working the room – he and Richard Lee were the talented duo behind 2013's 8 Bit, The Video Game Dance that was one of the biggest hits of last year's Calgary Fringe.

Sansei's not 8 Bit. Super Mario has been shoved in a drawer, and Ikeda is going deeper, and darker with his first fringe solo show.

Check it out.

shunt@calgaryherald.com

twitter.com/halfstep