

Sansei: The Storyteller has taken on life of its own



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Mark Ikeda's solo show *Sansei: The Storyteller* © *MARC J CHALIFOUX PHOTOGRAPHY 2015 / CALGARY HERALD*

Mark Ikeda's solo show Sansei: The Storyteller seems to have a mind of its own.

Every time Ikeda thinks he's taken this highly personal dance and storytelling show as far as he can, something happens that propels the project in another direction.

In Sansei: The Storyteller, Ikeda explores that dark period in Canada's history when Japanese Canadians were forced to live in labour and interment camps.

Ikeda's grandparents, aunt and uncle were interred in New Denver in British Columbia, which today is a historical site and the home of the Nikkel Internment Memorial Centre.

Back in 2013, Ikeda was part of a Making Treaty 7 workshop in Banff.

"We were all asked to share personal stories and the internment of some of my family members was the one story I really could share with the table," recalls Ikeda who says he was inspired by the positive feedback he received.

Ikeda created a 15-minute movement piece based on this chapter of his family history and took it to the Edmonton Movement Festival later that year.

Once again the response he received was heartening so he expanded the show into a 50-minute piece which he premiered at the 2014 Calgary International Fringe Festival which garnered him a Calgary Theatre Critics' Critter nomination for best solo show.

Try as he may to put the show into hibernation, Ikeda keeps getting requests to bring it to festivals honouring Japanese culture including one in New Denver, another in Vancouver and a third in Ottawa and each time audience members tell him he needs to tell this story to as many

Canadians as possible.

Ikeda is bringing Sansei: The Storyteller back to Calgary March 10, 11 and 12 at the tiny Birds and Stone Theatre in the basement of the church at 1703 1st Street N.W.

It's a bit of a fundraiser to help him raise money for future tours of the show.

Shows are at 8 p.m. with an added matinee at 2 p.m. on March 12.

Tickets are cash only at the door and are \$25 general admission, \$10 for students, seniors, artists and people of low income.

If you wish to become a benefactor of the show and help Ikeda bring it to other cities, towns and venues, those tickets are \$50.

The theatre seats only 35 people so arrive early.

When Ikeda approached his father with the idea to ask his aunt and uncle who were children when they arrived at the camp where they spent five years about their experience, his dad cautioned that Mark was going to meet a brick wall.

Mark's father was born after the camps had been taken down so he could only supply some second-hand information.

"My dad said my aunt and uncle simply would not talk about that part of their life but I thought I'd give it a try anyway. I wanted my show to be as personal as possible."

To Ikeda's astonishment his aunt and uncle were most forthcoming.

"They wanted their story to be told and they wanted their nephew to tell it."

Ikeda's grandparents had a thriving fishing business in British Columbia which was taken away from them when they were interred.

“They went back to Vancouver eventually but were never able to revitalize the business.

“My grandfather did odd jobs and my grandmother became a seamstress.”

Ikeda admits performing in New Denver on the very ground where his family members lived for five years was surreal.

“Not many Japanese stayed behind to talk but many of the non-Japanese did and the show was so well received, they’ve asked me to come back again this summer.”

Ikeda performed at the Powell Street Japanese Festival in Vancouver the same night as David Suzuki but, try as he may, he couldn’t get Canada’s climate guru to attend his show.

When Ikeda performed at the Ottawa Storytelling Festival he was “genuinely amazed at the number of people who wanted to talk to me after the show.

“That experience is what has kick started this newest leg of the journey I’m on with Sansei.

“I would really like to be able to take it into schools and have these same kinds of conversations with students.

“I see how important it is not to forget this part of Canada’s history.”