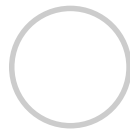


Review: Sansei masters storytelling through language and movement

LOUIS B. HOBSON ([HTTPS://CALGARYHERALD.COM/AUTHOR/LOUISHOBSON](https://calgaryherald.com/author/louishobson)) Updated: January 16, 2019



How to Travel in Other Countries When You Don't Speak the Language

FEATURED BY 

With his show, *Sansei: The Storyteller*, Mark Kunji Ikeda pulls what I like to call a little ‘Othello’ on his audiences.

In Shakespeare’s tragedy *Othello*, the Moor of Venice is called before the Senate to justify some of his actions. He begins by apologizing, saying he is rude in speech and can do little to grace his cause and then goes on to deliver a most eloquent speech that moves the whole assembly.

Ikeda opens his show explaining he wants to tell three stories, but apologizes because he

is not a very good storyteller and repeats this claim several times during the next 55 minutes.

It's a most clever ruse because Ikeda is a master storyteller whose dance and movement background helps him speak with his entire body. There are times during the performance he dances his emotions and says more with the movement of his fingers than many actors do with reams of dialogue.

With another apology, Ikeda says he wishes he had the money to create a set with a gossamer curtain on which he'd paint English and Japanese script. If he could afford a screen, he would project images to help the audience see a feudal Japanese village, his grandmother's strawberry garden and the squalid makeshift houses of Canada's infamous internment camps where 22,000 Japanese Canadians were forcefully housed from 1941 to 1949.

No fear, because Ikeda does it all with his heartfelt words and movement.

Ikeda is a third-generation Japanese-Canadian who only recently learned about this dark period in Canada's history and it is through this powerful and genuinely moving piece of theatre that he is trying to understand how it could have happened to his grandparents, aunt and uncle.

The remarkable thing about *Sensei: The Storyteller* is that Ikeda laces it with genuine humour and compassion. He is definitely an angry young man as is evident in some of his dance sequences but he is willing to forgive because he is proud of how his family and thousands of Japanese were able to reclaim their lives.

Throughout history and in various cultures, storytellers were often called tricksters and Ikeda wears that cap especially when he talks about the feudal lord he claims is one of his ancestors. He portrays the man in a culturally insensitive manner often used in books and films only to have stage manager Emma Brager stop Ikeda's ramblings to point out he's talking about Henry VIII, not a Japanese warlord.

The real villains of Ikeda's story are not some of his distant relatives but Ian Alistair Mackenzie, MP for Vancouver, and Prime Minister Mackenzie King — the politicians who justified the internment camps with their slogan "No Japs from the Rockies to the Seas."

Sensei: The Storyteller is a joint presentation of Lunchbox Theatre and One Yellow Rabbit's 2019 High Performance Rodeo.

SANSEI: THE STORYTELLER

Written and performed by Mark Kunji Ikeda

Lunchbox Theatre until Jan. 26

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