

Arts

Backstage

'Citizen 13559' Takes Kids to Camp, But Child's Play Isn't on the Agenda

By JANE HORWITZ
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The play is for young people, but director Chay Yew says he won't soft-pedal the tale told in "Citizen 13559: The Journal of Ben Uchida," about the World War II internment of Japanese Americans. "I'm of the old school, where I believe sometimes, in storytelling, it shouldn't be Disneyfied," Yew says.

The play will run at the Kennedy Center's Family Theater Friday through March 19 and is recommended for ages 9 and older.

Dramatist Naomi Iizuka adapted "Citizen 13559" from Barry Denenberg's novel in Scholastic's "My Name Is America" series. In lean, poetic language and short, cinematic scenes, she tells the story of Ben Uchida, whose family was forced into an internment camp in the desert when he was 12. Recalling the events with the help of his journal, Ben comes to understand why his dad, a kindly optometrist, lost his self-respect there.

The journal was a gift from his father. "The gifts parents give their children are immeasurable," says Yew, who hopes kids will come away knowing "to be American is most invaluable. For example, when your rights are infringed, fight for them. . . . The promise is there. It's written on paper. We should never forget."

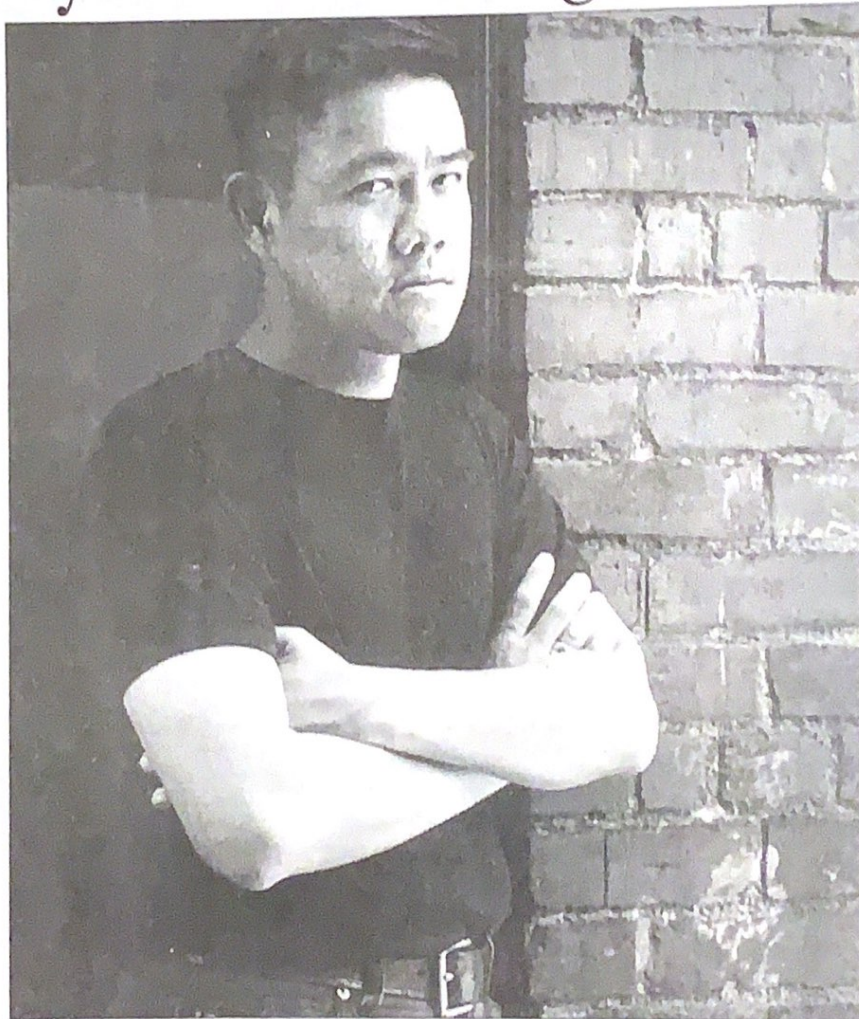
Iizuka wants kids to glean a sense of the value of keeping a journal. "The idea of trying to make sense of your life and the experiences of your life through writing is really important, and I hope that would be communicated to an audience of young people — that you have the ability to *be* history, to *make* history, to *write* history, to *be* the person that determines what history is and what gets remembered."

They'll understand then, she says, that "yes, there is this tragedy and there are deaths, but people are remembered."

After Friday's opening performance, Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta, whose family was among the 120,000 Japanese Americans interned, will join a panel discussion with the director and playwright.

Celebrating Ibsen

The Shakespeare Theatre Company will open its 2006-07 season with two non-Shakespearean classics. In this centennial year of ever-more-relevant playwright Henrik Ibsen's



"Sometimes, in storytelling, it shouldn't be Disneyfied," says director Chay Yew of the message for children in "Citizen 13559: The Journal of Ben Uchida," about the internment of Japanese Americans.

the Sea of Stories," at Theater Alliance's H Street Playhouse through April 2, and at Round House Theatre in Silver Spring April 6-9.

Rashid, a great storyteller, grows sad and loses his gift of gab when his wife walks out in the fable, adapted from Salman Rushdie's 1990 book. Rashid's child, Haroun (a girl in this production), sets off on a dreamlike journey to lands beyond the Earth to reclaim her father's gift. At the core of the story, Parsley says, is

and acted at Woolly Mammoth in the mid-1990s. Recently he was artistic director of Stage Door Acting Ensemble in New York.

Howard Community College, where the Equity troupe is in residence, hired him, Stebbins says, to reshape the theater's seasons and goals, pull it back from recent budget overruns and prepare the company to move into the college's new \$22 million performing arts center. He hopes to do more classics, as a natural tie-in to the college's cur-