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Author Interview with Kiki Rivera

Kiki Rivera is a performer based in Hawai'i. She has acted in several plays written by New Zealand playwright, Victor Rodger. Her latest work involves a play titled *Puzzy*, which she wrote with Victor Rodger. *Puzzy* is a coming-out story that gives an important perspective to Pacific Island Theatre. In October 2016, Kiki Rivera visited UH Hilo and put on a staged playreading of *Puzzy*. As a UH Hilo student, I was able to attend the playreading and thoroughly enjoyed the play and its message. It is about a girl accepting her sexuality, along with elements of religion. I think this play offers an interesting and important perspective not only on topics of sexuality and religion, but it is also something that people can relate to in real life on a deeper level. In my interview with Kiki Rivera regarding her work, one thing she said really resonated with me: "Everyone has a story to tell and I hope they find the strength to tell it." This is the message I interpreted from hearing the play -- that ultimately there is strength in being able to tell your story and embrace every part of what makes you who you are.

What was your writing process like?

It was a lot of back and forth with Victor and I. It started with a first draft to get everything out and see what kind of story we had. It was generating the clay that would eventually be grafted into *Puzzy*; or gathering flowers to make a lei. Victor would send me prompts for scenes he thought were important. And I would just write and send it to him. For a while I didn't know how this lei was going to be sewn. I would send Victor flowers and he'd sew the lei.

What was your inspiration behind *Puzzy*?

Life and the desire to expand the Pacific Theatre canon - if I can call it that - the repertoire of plays *by* Pacific Islanders *for* Pacific Islanders.

Did you have any apprehensions about telling your story?

Yes, very much so. It's a bold move to come out with work like this because it confronts so many of my personal fears head-on.

What I liked most about the storyline behind the play is that it was very relatable and you were able to tell your story in a way that reaches many people. Is this what you were hoping to accomplish by writing *Puzzy*? How do you hope to inspire others with your play?

Being relatable is very important otherwise [it] would defeat the purpose of the work. Theatre *should* be relatable, I think. I get bored if I can't relate to a play or film. It's a human necessity to connect. The more people can connect with the play, the bigger the audience, the wider the message and hopefully the greater the impact. I would absolutely love and hope and pray my play inspires people. Everyone has a story to tell and I hope they find the strength to tell it. There is so much healing in communication.

You mentioned that it confronts many of your personal fears. Is this in regards to the story being personal, or is it in regards to the anxieties about putting your work out -- would you be willing to expand on that?

There's a big religious component that when brought to light affects myself as well as the organization. Everything we do always seems to reflect on our families as well, so there's conflict there. It's a coming out story. It's never easy.

How have you as a writer learned to cope with, or overcome those fears?

I cope by talking things out with professionals, writing, performing. I've also learned to submit to my fears. Once things are out, I really have no choice but to submit.

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Kiki Rivera's play *Puzzy* will receive its United States premiere at Honolulu's Kumu Kahua Theatre in a double-bill with Victor Rodger's *Black Faggot*. The two one-act plays will run March 30-April 30, 2017. For more information, visit the Kumu Kahua website at: www.kumukahua.org or call their box-office at (808) 536-4441.