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*The Adoption Project is Taking Flight
While Beauty has a Beastly night.*

THREE'S COMPANY

THE SHOW: *The Adoption Project: Triad*, written by Mo'olelo's new associate director, Kimber Lee

THE BACKSTORY/THE STORY: Lee, a Korean-American adoptee, spent three years researching and interviewing those involved in the adoption process. A reading and community workshops were held last year to help hone the piece.

The play views adoption through women's eyes, from three perspectives: an adult female adoptee, her adoptive mother and her birth mother. Each is dealing with a sense of loss, loneliness, emptiness, and honest communication. When the daughter, Aggie, gets pregnant, she's unable to answer any of the family history questions, so she hesitantly, fearfully, decides to try to track down her birth mother, with the help of her tech-savvy lesbian friend. Telling her adoptive mother is another story. So is making the fateful phonecall. In the interim, we meet a host of ancillary characters, from a nutty adoption judge to Barbara Walters, to a soap opera mother and daughter. The tone swings from dramatic and intense to funny and silly, which tempers the emotional depth that surrounds the issue of adoption on all sides.

THE PLAYERS: The cast is outstanding, some of San Diego's best: Jo Anne Glover continues her run of wonderful, heart-ful performances. As Aggie, she reveals the many faces of a smart, witty

and truly confused young woman. She's also very funny in the overwrought mother-daughter soap opera scenes. Sandy Campbell reveals her considerable acting chops, which are impressive. Best known for her sparkling soprano, she's proven that she can capably handle both comedy and drama. As Aggie's adoptive mother, she may not be quite as tight-assed and status-conscious as the text describes her, but the awkward moments of mis-communication with her daughter are heartrending. And Campbell is a hoot as Barbara Walters (sans 'r' and everything!), herself an adoptive mother, asking annoying questions in a series of fantasy TV interviews. Linda Libby, as always, is a comic marvel and a chameleon. She's hilarious as Blue, Aggie's dykey techno-nerd friend, who helps with all the online research for finding a parent. And Glover goes at her with comic vengeance as an array of Blue's ridiculously inappropriate girlfriends. Libby also takes a whacked-out adoption judge way over the top, to great effect. They make a marvelous trio, each handing the other the bits of costume that define the various characters, under Seema Sueko's ever-more-confident direction. They aren't dancers, and though they handle the moves of Eveoke's Erika Malone a tad stiffly, the evocative actions, flowing chiffon and all, convey the links and similarities, the distances and longing, among the characters. Because Lee is trying to capture so many elements of a highly complex topic, she doesn't get to really go deep into the issues or characters but within those confines, the actors do a fine job of fleshing out the details.

THE PRODUCTION: The production values are simple. Basic set pieces and costumes (Paloma H. Young), and a backdrop on which the characters intermittently scribble and scrawl, expressing their passionate emotions: GUILT, FEAR, etc. This idea is mirrored in a public art installation within the Centro Cultural gallery, curated by community artist Jodi Tucci Brisebois, who's also credited with scenic design. The audience is invited to add its own thoughts, feelings, pictures, memories and mementoes on the subject of adoption. Meanwhile, back onstage, the cavernous space provides echoes and difficulty hearing during overlapping dialogue. Those pillars are killers; they really interrupt sightlines. But these are quibbles. The production is engaging, dramatic and informative, and this project certainly fulfills the mission of Mo'olelo – to create new works based on research within various communities. The company continues to do impressive and socially responsible work.

THE LOCATION: Mo'olelo at Centro Cultural de la Raza, through April 1