



Wendy Taylor and Oscar Davila star in "Far From Springer."

Giving voice to 9/11 victims

By Robert Hurwitz
CHRONICLE THEATER CRITIC

Amid all the timely memorials to the Sept. 11 tragedy, it's often forgotten that there were a number of Muslims among the dead at the World Trade Center. Just as it may be convenient for many to overlook the harassment and violence directed at Arab and South Asian Americans ever since.

Few of us may want to face the fact that some families had to endure such overwhelming personal tragedy and disgraceful injustice at the same time. That's what

REVIEWS makes Rehana Mirza's "Barriers" such an important play. The underdeveloped script is clearly the work of a beginner, but Mirza succeeds in embodying important, under-discussed issues in complicated human form.

A telephone rings almost incessantly (harassment calls) in director (and "Crossing Jordan" regular) Ravi Kapoor's simple, efficient staging in the tiny Noh Space. The show is built to travel. A co-production of the Asian American Theater Company and New York's Desipina & Company — which produced an earlier version in New York a year ago — it moves on to Los Angeles after its brief run here.

Mirza spins off from Pakistani American Sunima's (an affecting Meera Simhan) inability to tell her family she's engaged to a white man (Tyler Pierce as an intriguingly complex Roger). Between the ringing phone, "terrorist" bulletins and a confusing visit by Christian missionaries, Mirza exposes the family's problems since an adored eldest son died in the Twin Towers: the father's loss of faith; the mother's isolation (she's Chinese); the teenage son's dropping out of school after attacks on Asians; the cruel defacement of the "Missing" flyers they'd posted after Sept. 11.

Many elements could be better explored and the spiritual interventions of the dead Nabhil (a smooth Sunkrish Bala) are formulaic. But there are genuinely touching moments between Sunima and Roger, and the mother's distress is compellingly portrayed by Diana Tanaka. Mirza's attempt to dramatize important and neglected topics is impressive in itself. With luck, "Barriers" could



Barriers: Drama. By Rehana Mirza. Directed by Ravi Kapoor. (Through Sept. 14, Asian American Theater and Desipina & Company at Noh Space, 2840 Mariposa St., San Francisco. One hour, 55 minutes. Tickets \$20. Call (415) 543-5738 or visit www.asianamericantheater.org.)



Far From Springer: Drama. Written and directed by Craig Fox. (Through Sept. 14, Hauser Honey Productions at Gallery Spanganga, 3376 19th St., San Francisco. One hour, 45 minutes. Tickets \$8. Call (415) 931-1094 or visit www.sf fringe.org.)

bode well for the once prolific, too-long under-achieving Asian American Theater, now under the new artistic direction of Sean Lim.

Fox hunting in America: The planned transfer of "Bat Boy" to the Marines Memorial Theatre didn't go very well, but that hasn't fazed co-author Brian Flemming. His newest play, "Fair & Balanced," has just come out — not onstage but in print.

It's about characters named Fair and Balanced taking revenge on a news anchor called Bill O'Reilly. If you're wondering whether this has anything to do with a recent court case about a book by Al Franken, the publisher's name is a tip-off. "Fair & Balanced" is available from Fair Use Press (www.fair-use.info).

Return to the Fringe: Some shows move up from the Fringe to the big time (think "Urinetown"). For Hauser Honey Productions' "Far From Springer," the move from a living room — where it was a mild underground sensation last year — to the Gallery Spanganga is the big time. Comic and oddly touching, it's the most intriguing show I've seen at the San Francisco Fringe Festival this year.

Written and directed by Craig Fox, "Springer" is a look at an ordinary expectant non-couple — a lesbian and the gay friend who impregnated her — who turn out to have more than they'd think in common with the folks they ridicule on Jerry Springer and "Survivor." It meanders too much in the first act, but Fox's clever script and the low-key performances of Wendy Taylor and Oscar Davila pay comic and compelling dividends after intermission. It turns