



EAST MEETS WEST: (left to right) Stephen Pucci, Gary Wilmes, Angela Lin, and Larry Lei Zhang in *Chinglish*. Photo: Michael McCabe



Theater Review

***Chinglish*: language barrier mined for laughs**

CHINGLISH

By David Henry Hwang

Directed by Leigh Silverman

Open run

Longacre Theatre

220 West 48h Street, (212-239-6200)

www.chinglishbroadway.com

By David NouNou

Handsomely mounted and deftly directed by Leigh Silverman, David Henry Hwang's *Chinglish* is one of those enigmatic plays that can combine comedy and serious matters in proper doses and we can still learn a thing or two about the clash of cultures.

Set in the present in the city of Guiyang, China, Daniel Cavanaugh (Gary Wilmes) has come from Cleveland, Ohio to help his ailing signage company resuscitate itself by selling this Chinese province signs for its new cultural center. In order to sell his product, he is being tutored by Peter Timms (Stephen Pucci) on the proper Chinese business diplomacy and protocol. He has to make his pitch to the minister of the province Cai Guoliang (Larry Lei Zhang) and his aid the vice minister Xi Yan, played by the lovely Jennifer Lim.

Meetings appear to be going well but there have to be twists and turns. The fun is in the translations; not just mere translating but when the word or phrase is translated in the literal sense. Since a huge portion of the dialogue is in Mandarin, the translations are projected on a wall, and more often than not they take on a different meaning from the one intended. It would not be fair to cite any of them out of context since that would take away from the fun.

Amidst the chaos that ensues, playwright David Henry Hwang, best known for the brilliant *M. Butterfly*, here again strikes a chord in the interpersonal relationship of the two protagonists, Daniel and Xi. Although both married, they do form a relationship based on love by the West and commerce by the East. One does what one has to do to obtain an end.

Leigh Silverman keeps things moving at a brisk pace, as do the beautiful sets provided by scenic designer David Korins. The evening really belongs to Daniel and Xi. Jennifer Lim is beautiful and hits the proper notes to her complex character. She is simultaneously both hard and charming. However, Mr. Wilmes lacks the presence that should make his Daniel both clumsy and charismatic. His portrayal is tantamount to just getting through with the performance, thus creating a huge lack of tension between the two involved parties.

Published November 3, 2011

Reviewed at press performance on November 2, 2011

Copyright © November 3, 2011, StageZine.com