



Fish Head Soup and Other Plays

Philip Gotanda, Michael Omi

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Like many other immigrants who have come to melting-pot America, Japanese Americans have experienced radical shifts in fortune. From the farms and small businesses founded by the first arrivals in the early years of this century, to the trauma of the relocation camps during World War II, to the search for new values in a heterogeneous society, each generation of Japanese Americans has had to confront its own challenges.

Exploring the relationships among the Issei (first generation), Nisei (second generation), and Sansei (third generation), playwright Philip Kan Gotanda has crafted four powerful dramas. Japanese American family life is at the heart of the plays, from elder traditionalists and Nisei still troubled by the message of the wartime camps, to women seeking new roles and brash youth seizing opportunities in a larger society. The four plays included are “Song for a Nisei Fisherman”, “Fish Head Soup”, “The Wash”, and “Yankee Dawg You Die.”

Throughout these dramas, many facets of Japanese American life are revealed as compelling characters interact. Gotanda understands and sensitively depicts the stresses this traditional culture endures, not only in its relation to the heterogeneous society that surrounds it but also among the generations that comprise it. An introduction by Michael Omi, assistant professor of Asian American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, considers the sources of the plays in Gotanda’s personal history.

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