

# FRONT & CENTER

■ MINNEAPOLIS AND COLUMBUS, OHIO

## White Flight



Jennifer Lim, above, and  
Becky Yamamoto in Young Jean Lee's  
*Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven* at  
HERE Arts Center in New York City.

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## IT'S TRUE THAT ARTISTS TEND TO

create work that mirrors their obsessions, and writer/director Young Jean Lee is no exception—but in her case the obsession thing is considerably more complicated. As the publicity materials for *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven* (billed as “a show about white people in love”) say, Lee’s “worst nightmare was to make anything as predictable as a confessional, Korean-American identity play with a flowery Asian-sounding title—so she decided to do just that.”

Lee’s counterintuitive play is provocative, offensive, smart and very funny. It also displays a sophistication far beyond the anti-P.C. hijinks of cable-TV comedy. “The inspiration for *Songs* was that I felt pressure to write ‘ethnic’ plays and resented the hell out of it,” Lee declares. “So the spirit behind the piece was, ‘You want me to write an ethnic play? Okay, I’ll write the most politically incorrect, horrible ethnic play I can come up with.’ But of course the play ended up being much more complicated than that, since race is an issue I actually care about a lot, and I’m as critical of political incorrectness as I am of political correctness.”

*Songs of the Dragons* is in fact an unflinching depiction of race in America, rife with stereotypes, anger and ambivalence—along with a deadpan literalizing of its tagline. As Lee puts it, “It ended up being a real ethnic play in that it honestly depicted all my contradictory and confused feelings about race. It was also by far my most successful show, so I guess that makes me a sellout.”

After an initial presentation at the Prelude '05 Festival hosted by CUNY and a run this past fall at New York City’s **HERE Arts Center** (where Lee is a resident artist), the show will play at **Walker Art Center** in Minneapolis Jan. 18–20 and at **Wexner Center for the Arts** in Columbus, Ohio, Jan. 26–28. —Jason Grote