

SCENES FROM

A YELLOW PERIL

BY NATHAN JOE



CAST

Uhyoung Choi 최우영
Amanda Grace Leo 梁宿嫻
Louise Jiang 江欣玥
Nathan Joe 周潤豪
Angela Zhang 張摯

BAND

Kenji Iwamitsu-Holdaway 岩滿 健司
Rohil Kishore
J.Y Lee 이종윤
Daniel Mitsuru McKenzie 石本 完

PRODUCTION

Co-producers —
Sums Selvarajan, SquareSums&Co,
and Ankita Singh, Oriental Maidens
Stage Manager — Lucie Camp
Photographers — Abhi Chinniah,
Julie Zhu & Andi Crown
Videographer — Julie Zhu
Editor — Calvin Sang,
Eyes and Ears Video Production

CREATIVE

Director — Jane Yonge
Playwright — Nathan Joe 周潤豪
Production Designer —
Filament Eleven 11 – Rachel Marlow
& Brad Gledhill
Sound Designer & Composer —
Kenji Iwamitsu-Holdaway 岩滿 健司
Costume Designer —
Steven Junil Park 박준일
Dramaturg & Production Uncle —
Ahi Karunaharan

HOSTS

Micheal McCabe
Rosabel Tan 陳娟娟
Jenna Wee 黃心怡
Jane Yonge

SHOW CREW

Sound Operator — Paul Jeffery
Lighting Operator — Peter Davison
Fly Mechanist — T.J. Haunui

Education Pack Contributions — Seluvaia 'Iloahefaiva and Sam Phillips

Scenes from a Yellow Peril's first draft was written in 2018. It had its first public reading at Proudly Asian Theatre's *Fresh off the Page* in December 2018 at Basement Theatre. It went on to be developed through Playmarket's Asian Ink Workshop 2018. Excerpts from the play were performed at TEDxAuckland 2019 and the 2019 New Zealand Young Writers Festival. It was part of Auckland Arts Festival 2021 as a staged play reading. Thursday 23 June 2022 marks its world premiere as part of Auckland Theatre Company's 2022 season at ASB Waterfront Theatre.

Scenes from a Yellow Peril received development assistance from the Wallace Foundation and the Playmarket Playfellows Programme.

This show contains content that can be upsetting. If you are feeling vulnerable or would like to talk to someone, please reach out to: 1737 – free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor. Lifeline – 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP).

The production is 1 hour, 20 minutes long, without an interval. It contains strobe lighting, descriptions of domestic violence, murder, pornography, racial hate crimes and offensive language. Recommended for ages 18+.



Haere Mai. Welcome.

Welcome to the world premiere production of *Scenes from a Yellow Peril: Scenarios for the Assimilated Asian* by Nathan Joe in a co-production between Auckland Theatre Company, SquareSums&Co and Oriental Maidens.

In this text, Nathan Joe expresses rage; he is playful and he deftly deploys humour. The experiences he shares can be hard to hear. Race and identity are complex enough matters without the exoticisation, prejudice and exclusion that Nathan relates. That any person would have their life's journey made harder should make us all angry. Through this play, Nathan gives voice to the experience of all who are othered.

This partnership between the three producers has meant this brilliant work is placed centre stage, in a full-throated presentation that demands attention. For Auckland Theatre Company, this represents a form-challenging way to tell urgent stories. It is a deep partnership where we walk alongside the artists.

We mihi to director Jane Yonge and her creative team who have brilliantly theatricalised this poetic cycle, bringing power and intensity with their outstanding vision. Nathan and his fellow performers do not have the protective veneer of character; instead, they play versions of themselves or, more accurately, versions of Nathan Joe. It is an extraordinary act of vulnerability. We ask you to awhi them with aroha (embrace them with love).

Sums Selvarajan
SquareSums&Co

Ankita Singh
Oriental Maidens

Jonathan Bielski
Auckland Theatre Company





About the Play

Scenes from a Yellow Peril is a contemporary theatre piece mixing poetry, Q&As and live music. Director Jane Yonge's production presents Nathan Joe's original poems, observations, and experiences in an episodic form. As a theatre experience, it's both deeply personal, and furiously political. Here's how Nathan describes the show:

"It's a kind of epic poem about the East-Asian New Zealand experience. Its form isn't so much people playing characters as it is people embodying voices and states of mind, and embodying pieces history at times."

Nathan Joe, interview with Lynn Freeman on RNZ, 2021

For Jane, the production asks, "how do you make post-modern theatre now?". It's a complicated kaleidoscopic minefield of contemporary identity politics through an east-Asian lens. Jane describes the form as using a fragmented structure that dissolves and slips as it progress to make an urgent war cry against everyday racism and systems of abuse.

This is 17 scenarios for the assimilated Asians.
This is *Scenes from a Yellow Peril*.



Note from the Director

Jane Yonge

The evolution of Nathan Joe's *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* has spanned the last four years. Over these years, we have lived through a pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, the Government apology for the dawn raids, and the Christchurch terror attack. The status quo has been questioned, and the need for systemic change has become clear.

Throughout, Nathan has been watching, listening, and responding. *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* has evolved from asserting one's right to be angry and rageful to incorporating questions of home and belonging.

To be tauiwi in Aotearoa and part of the Asian diaspora can mean to exist in an in-between space, never quite belonging anywhere and contending with potential loss of culture. As a Fiji-Chinese-

Pākehā pregnant woman nearing third trimester I sit in that space too, outside the stereotype of a 'traditional theatre director'.

Scenes from a Yellow Peril also exists in the in-between: it is part panel discussion, concert, poetry slam and music video. It invites us into a conversation about how we see one another and how we live together. It talks to the power of language to impel us to action and to heal us.

A massive thank you to Auckland Theatre Company for giving us permission to make a work that holds more questions than answers, to our incredible producers, cast, musicians, and production and design team. To our production uncle, Ahi Karunaharan. And of course to our writer, Nathan Joe.







Note from the Playwright

Nathan Joe

When I first started making theatre in 2013, I never thought an Asian playwright could ever be truly respected for writing an Asian play - at least not in Aotearoa. I always felt it was deemed as lesser. I felt it was perceived as easy or lacking in craft to do so. So, for a while, I avoided it entirely.

I didn't want to be an Asian playwright. I just wanted to be a playwright. At least that's what I told myself. My plays displayed a respect and reverence for the classics. My plays were about things like horny ancient Greek stepmothers and horny (ethnically unspecified) teenagers.

But the very fact that I was avoiding writing about being Asian revealed how badly I needed to. *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* is a result of that

need. The result of all those feelings of internalised racism slowly being corrected. The result of finally being given permission to speak freely. All of these things.

I never imagined Auckland Theatre Company would ever stage one of my plays, especially not this one.

But here we are.

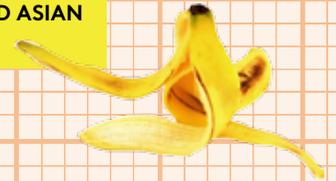
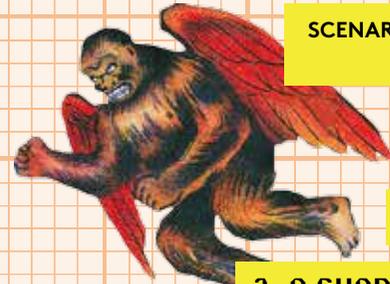
Now I'm finally writing about horny Asians. Just kidding (mostly).

Thank you to all the many other Asian creatives who helped prove my original assumptions about Asian playwrights wrong. I'm here because of you.

I acknowledge the real victims of racially motivated hate crimes mentioned in *Scenes from a Yellow Peril*: Joe Kum Yung, Jae Hyeon Kim and Mei Fan.

SCENES FROM A YELLOW PERIL

SCENARIOS FOR THE ASSIMILATED ASIAN
BY NATHAN JOE



1. INTRODUCTION

2. A SHORT HISTORY OF HUMILIATIONS

3. LOVE IN A TIME OF COLONISATION

4. YOU OFTEN MASTURBATE

5. WRITE A MANIFESTO. PLAY BY NEW RULES

6. HOW TO END RACISM

7. WRITE A MANIFESTO. PLAY BY NEW RULES. REDUX

8. MY ANCESTORS CROSSED OCEANS TO BE HERE AND ALL I HAVE TO SHOW FOR IT IS THIS BUBBLE TEA

9. THEY SHOOT CHINAMEN, DON'T THEY?

10. DECOLONISE THE BODY. WE ARE ALL MEATSACKS

11. AFFIRMATIONS AT THE END OF THE WORLD

12. I CANNOT INVITE MY PARENTS TO MY PLAY

13. FAIL AGAIN; FAIL BETTER

14. AFTERWORD



Design Notes

Q&A SCENE: *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* opens with a Q&A, featuring a red theatre curtain layered behind the actors, two well-arranged pot plants, and a screen projecting the title; "Q & A" in different languages. It's a simple layout referencing a conference or a presentation, a space where audiences expect direct address.

An instantaneous lighting state transitions into "RAGE", engulfing the stage with an array of intense footlights. The bodies in space are enhanced, setting an imposing tone, and reinforcing the magnitude of the themes.

A SHORT HISTORY OF HUMILIATIONS

is performed against a black gauze with projection coming from directly behind the actors. This set up is similar to the Q&A design, and the actors present a "heightened" version of themselves as they share their personal humiliation stories.

During **LOVE IN THE TIME OF COLONISATION**, the black gauze flies out, revealing two white frames dominating the space, creating two different zones for the performers. The upstage frame is for the musicians and the downstage frame is where the performance takes place. This space has a white gauze between the white frames.

In **YOU OFTEN MASTURBATE**, video static is projected as the actors are narrating, adding to the awkward comedy.

WRITE A MANIFESTO. PLAY BY NEW RULES

creates the illusion of a big city with apartment buildings: a bigger more expansive world.

HOW TO END RACISM

starts with the actors and musicians staring directly at the audience. The bodies in space hold the energy in the room, without any text, creating the impression of formality and accusation.



MY ANCESTORS CROSSED OCEANS TO BE HERE AND ALL I HAVE TO SHOW FOR IT IS THIS BUBBLE TEA sees the roof panels slightly angled towards the audience's face. Surtitles are projected onto the panels above the actors in a variety of languages to signify a metaphoric sense of languages floating by and a loss of language in a broken space.

In **THEY SHOOT CHINAMEN, DON'T THEY?**, the two roof panels open up to make a large frame. Here the set intends to meet the three layers of history, where three New Zealand murders have occurred; the murder of Joe Kum Yung, Joe Hyeon Kim, and Mei Fan. The three performers are positioned in the order of the year these incidents happened: upstage being the earliest encounter. Three lamps hang next to each performer as they perform the poem.

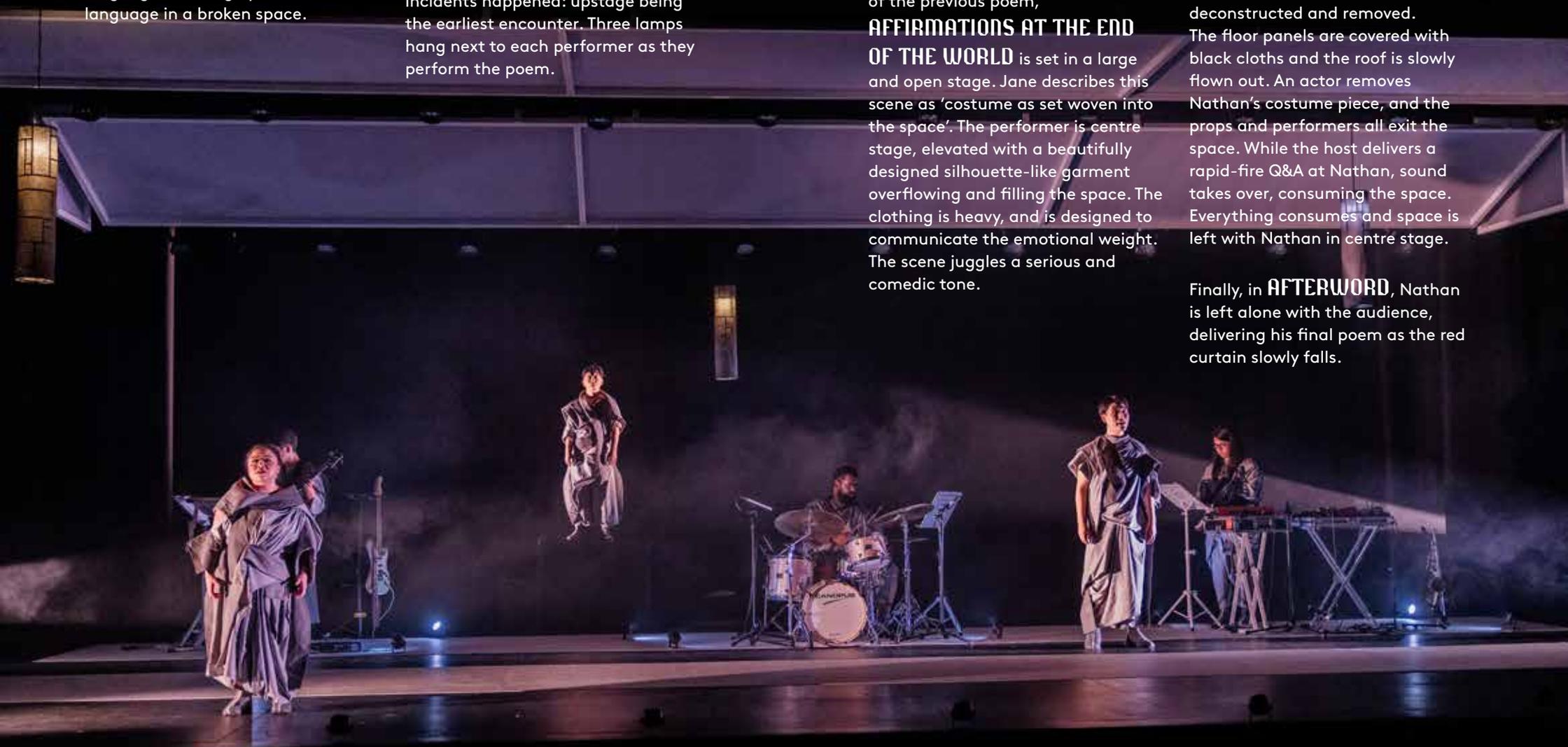
During **DECOLONISE THE BODY. WE ARE ALL MEATSACKS** the roof compresses down on the space, conveying extreme pressure. The pressure is supported by strong lights upstage. This solo piece hones into the breakdown of language and ends with an abstract dance piece.

To counterpoint the compression of the previous poem, **AFFIRMATIONS AT THE END OF THE WORLD** is set in a large and open stage. Jane describes this scene as 'costume as set woven into the space'. The performer is centre stage, elevated with a beautifully designed silhouette-like garment overflowing and filling the space. The clothing is heavy, and is designed to communicate the emotional weight. The scene juggles a serious and comedic tone.

I CANNOT INVITE MY PARENTS TO MY PLAY borrows from the conventions of a karaoke room. A glittery microphone and 90s-style dance moves complete the scene, contrasting the serious tone of the poem.

During **FAIL AGAIN; FAIL BETTER** the entire set is deconstructed and removed. The floor panels are covered with black cloths and the roof is slowly flown out. An actor removes Nathan's costume piece, and the props and performers all exit the space. While the host delivers a rapid-fire Q&A at Nathan, sound takes over, consuming the space. Everything consumes and space is left with Nathan in centre stage.

Finally, in **AFTERWORD**, Nathan is left alone with the audience, delivering his final poem as the red curtain slowly falls.



Theatre insights

An interview with Sound Designer and Composer
Kenji Iwamitsu-Holdaway

Please tell us about yourself and your background.

I always wanted to pursue music. I played piano from the age of five and guitar from the age of eleven. I went to jazz school and made a lot of contacts there through my guitar teacher, Dixon Nacey. This led me into doing tours opening for SIX60 with Mitch James for a while. I am part of a band, Yoko-Zuna, and we have been playing together for about eight years.

I grew up in Avondale. It is a really multicultural place compared to a lot of places in the world. If you have a room with five people, most likely they're all from different parts of the world. So, I grew up listening to all kinds of music. You'd be thrown into situations, like a Bengali friend's function, and you'd just go with the flow, adapt as fast as you could, depending on the culture or occasion.

What is your role in *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* and how did this come about?

My role is the Music Composer and part of the live band. I have never thought about working in theatre, it just kind of happened by chance. Nathan is really good at dissecting themes from the work and making good comments about the characters. He is super lowkey about it, but he's a genius when it comes to that stuff. I'd also watch him play video games, like *Zelda*. I thought he seemed cool. When Jane was making '48 Nights' in 2020, he linked us up and the rest is history.

Talk to us about the creative process of developing the music for the show. What part of the process was the most challenging and what part was the most fun?

This show is quite a challenge for me specifically the form it takes. But the content and themes are something that hits home for me.

I also find it difficult to play against it, to make things sound lighter or to contrast with the text. For instance, when the poem talks about racism, I am tempted to make the music loud and angry, but that would overpower the performers. So, it has been a challenge figuring out how to play under the emotions but still amplifying it. I think it takes a lot more restraint than a usual music performance where you can be as loud as you want.

So that has been the game with Nathan, Jane, and me. A lot of back and forth to figure out the right balance.

Having a live band on stage is quite complex. We must allow room for improv, but also keep to a structure and hit the right cues. Everything has to be well planned in live theatre. There are some parts in the production when I can really let loose and just go crazy, which is the fun part.

Who inspires you as an artist? Were there any genres of music composers or artists that you drew inspiration from while you were developing the music for the show?

I have been listening to a lot of free improv stuff and to the Swedish composer, Ludwig Göransson, who composed the soundtrack for the film, *Tenet*. His soundtrack is like the apex level of film composing. Really experimental but fully realised and fire.

Can you talk more about, your bandmates? How do you know each other and what usually happens in the rehearsal room?

I met both my bandmates in jazz school. So far in rehearsals, we have been bouncing ideas off one another, like devising in theatre, but for musicians. We play the recording of the performers and see what happens next. There has been some cool stuff and some wild, hairy stuff.

Once we make the music, we send it to the performers for rehearsal and then when we all get together to practise. It is a matter of adjusting, rather than learning.



In reference to the strong themes in the play, what is your opinion on politics and music?

In terms of my own music, I am very focused on music and sound theory as opposed to creating political music. You can be a lot more pointed in your message when you are writing the lyrics.

Historically, things that are hard to say upfront become more acceptable in the context of music or a song. I think it has to do with its enhanced emotion, it's able to enhance the core of the message.

In terms of the instrumental form, especially in jazz, in the 1950s and 1960s people wanted to break down the forms. - A lot of free form jazz came from wanting to completely deconstruct this oppressive system that African American people were subjected to. Even if they could not do it politically, they were able to break it through their music. Music affects people. - it can change people's feelings about, well, anything really.

I think it is super-valuable to have a medium where you can just deconstruct and not worry about the rules and not worry about offending people. A medium where it's acceptable to do anything so that you can experiment and find out what we should be doing to feel good.

Would you say that there's something about music that transcends culture and language and just gets to people's actual emotions?

Just about anyone from any language or culture can feel something in music, especially if it's instrumental music.

I didn't feel the need to make the music in the show sound "traditionally Japanese". A lot of diaspora kids aren't necessarily culturally Asian, so why try to force it in if it doesn't fit your experience? I have been experimenting a lot with electronic and experimental sounds for this show. I think the deconstructed nature of it fits with the themes.

Is there any particular emotion you want the audience to feel during or after the show?

Catharsis. But it has to be resolved. Like, leave them with a good feeling. When you rip open a scar, you want to make sure it will heal properly afterwards.

What other projects are you working on currently?

My band, Yoko-Zuna, is back together, so we'll be doing some stuff and playing some shows. I am also playing some shows with Mitch James, Niko Walters and CHAI. This show is my main thing at the moment.





Theatre insights

An interview with Costume Designer
Steven Junil Park

Please tell us about yourself and your background.

I was born in Korea and moved to Otautahi, Christchurch with my family when I was six months old. That is where I grew up and am still based.

Growing up I was always interested in making stuff; - drawing, painting and printmaking in particular during high school. I ended up moving to Auckland to attend art school, where I quickly realised that I didn't really want to pursue artmaking and was much more interested in making functional objects.

I grew up sewing, opshopping and altering clothes, so when I became disillusioned with art, I gravitated toward creating clothing, furniture and anything that was functional and could be used. In my third year at Elam, I started my clothing label 6x4. That's when I started my label 6x4, in my third year at Elam.

Initially, 6x4 was purely a conceptual label. It was a way for me to experiment with materials to explore the storytelling capabilities of human object culture within an art context. I liked how functional objects didn't have to justify themselves the way that art objects

do, their inherent function gives them purpose and talks about human life in a very simple way. I never thought it would become my livelihood but I'm very glad that it has.

After university, I continued to work with clothing. Eventually, I moved to Paris, to experience see first-hand what the real fashion industry was like and see if I wanted to be part of it. I had some amazing opportunities working at some big fashion houses and for smaller labels as a couturier. I knew that going into it, socially, and environmentally, there's so much wrong with the

textile industry. In the end, I had to choose between staying and working for Chanel or moving back to Christchurch.

But I wanted to see first-hand if there was any progress towards addressing these issues at the top level - there wasn't, which was not surprising to be honest. After seeing it for myself, I was confidently able to say it wasn't for me. I just wanted to make my own work on my own terms.

So I moved back to Christchurch and kept making my own work, and I've been lucky enough to continue doing it till now.

What is your role in *Scenes from a Yellow Peril*?

My role in the play is as Costume Designer, I am designing and creating everything from scratch.

Nathan and I have been wanting to work together for a long time now. We first met in primary school, then later reconnected by chance as adults. We work in quite different creative mediums, so it has been hard to find the right opportunity, but this production has provided the perfect space for us to collaborate.

Please describe the creative process of developing the costumes for the show. What does a typical day involve in the few weeks prior to the show opening?

The creative process was quite intense. Not physically hard, but mentally and emotionally difficult which I think is quite normal.

The way that I'm working is very abstract. It's not straightforward like conventional garment-making where you go from design, to patternmaking, to cutting and sewing. It requires me to be very present while working, going back and forth from the machine to the mannequin. The design is happening as the garment slowly takes shape so often starting is the hardest part because I have nothing to respond

to. It feels like the pieces are already there, buried in the dunes, and my job is just to brush away the sand to reveal them. This can be quite a hard process because if something isn't working there is no real solution, I just have to keep trying different things until it feels right.

Practically, before we started conceptualising, Jane facilitated a two-day workshop for the production's creatives (design team, writer, and dramaturg). We got together in a room and for two days just talked: negotiating and trying to understand for each other and for ourselves what this project actually is. What it is, why it's being made, what it means, and all the really nebulous, difficult to understand stuff.

It was hugely helpful because it was something I didn't have to do alone. We established a common ground and common language to move forward with our designs.

Once the casting was complete, I started designing their costumes. My initial designs were quite traditional in the sense that they were recognisable as garments. I referenced the traditional garments of each cast member's cultural heritage and combined pattern making techniques from those cultures with western pattern making to create hybrid looks - a bridge which was supposed to reflect the experience of the cast members existing between different modes of being.



I had designed the costumes, had everything mapped out and was ready to start making them - but then - I don't know what happened, but it just didn't feel right. I knew they were well designed and everything, but it wasn't what I needed to make.

I think this is where instinct comes into play, for a lot of creatives, you can just tell when something isn't right. For me, it's really important to be in touch with that - that feeling of "this is what I need to be making right now".

Looking at the costumes I had designed in that first round, I thought, this isn't it. So, I started from scratch and decided to approach it in a very different way; by draping. I started working on the mannequin, to create these garments that are fully abstracted. I was using certain reference points - like conventions of East Asian pattern making, which include using only straight lines and right angles in the patterns.

This means the garments are constructed of pieces of rectangular or square pieces of fabric, manipulated into place so that they fit together to create these draped garments. I also used strips of stiff interfaced fabric and padded areas to create different textural qualities and strong shapes.

Conceptually, it's like taking visual cues from what we've seen before in East Asian clothing - then abstracting them out and re-assembling them - creating lines which look like paint in motion. I think of them as abstract paintings, using textile as brushstrokes to create compositions that are visually dynamic from all angles. It has been a lot of feeling it out from the heart, relying on my instincts to figure out the compositions.

I believe this approach speaks directly to the way that Nathan has talked about his play and how a lot of it is to do with how language fails, where it breaks apart and then is built up together again.



I thought this approach, of incorporating those elements of deconstruction within the work into the costume design was a much better approach. As long as the audience is able to have an emotional response to the designs, I think they would be achieving their purpose.

A day in my current process looks like, arriving in the studio around 9 am, putting some music on and working non-stop, usually alone. It's quite a slow process because if something isn't working it just isn't working. It takes time to resolve things.

I'd say it's like putting myself into a state where I am putting myself in the material. You're not thinking a lot, you're trying to think through the material. I'm just sort of trying to inhabit it and then make it. I am pretty much in the studio all day!

How often do your designs change from first sketches to finished product?

It's very rare that I do sketches.

For me, there's a lot of magic that happens in clothing when there is spontaneity. The costumes for Scenes are made from bedsheets recycled from a huge bedding company (Canterbury Linen Services). If the sheets have any small imperfections, they can't be used so they put them aside to donate. They provided me

with 60 kilograms of this fabric which I have used to create the costumes. I dyed them in Christchurch and sent them up to Auckland to sew at the Auckland Theatre Company studios.

For 6x4 I pretty much only use recycled, second hand or repurposed fabric.

I love working with this type of fabric because that material has a story, it has a memory and all these little, weird idiosyncrasies, like a tear or a stain or a repair - marks of its previous life and these are all elements you can respond to, as a designer.

Rather than forcing my intentions onto the fabric, I prefer a process that is more of a conversation between the material and the maker.

To achieve this, you have to design as you go rather than having a set idea of what you want from the very beginning. That mindset leaves no room for spontaneity, no room for conversation or discoveries.

Why do you use to choose like repurpose fabric?

There are a few reasons, the most obvious is that the garment and textile industry is the second-worst pollutant in the world, - right behind the petroleum industry. It is also the cause of so many problems environmentally, socially ethically. At that same time, it employs one out of six people globally, so it is a huge industry.

So, it's a huge, huge industry. But the reality is, there is enough textile in the world, we really do not need to be creating more - billions of tonnes of textile waste goes into landfills every year. It's almost unfathomable.

I'm not exempt from it; I'm not going to stand on my soapbox and talk about how I'm not doing that. Of course, I am like everyone else - we have to engage with textiles on a day-to-day basis, we're constantly having to engage with an industry that is destroying the planet and destroying people's lives as well.

At the same time, textiles and clothing is one of the things that define us as a species. It's a really beautiful and amazing human phenomenon. The fraught ethics around textiles is quite overwhelming and intense to constantly think about - but I think it's good to try and work in a different way that doesn't just perpetuate that cycle.

I can manage using repurposed fabric in my own work because I make everything myself and it's just one-offs. But to scale that up is quite difficult. I wanted to see if I could do it for a larger production like this. It has been difficult, but it's just a different design challenge. Even if it doesn't look obviously "recycled" I am hoping that it brings a different energy and hopefully offer a different conversation about how we look at textiles and their stories

What do you think are the main differences between designing for the everyday and designing for the theatre?

I think the differences are to do with the psychology of dress and the space we perceive it in.

On a day-to-day basis, clothing is very codified. - I think most of us reading this agree that that way of thinking is quite antiquated, but that is the reality.

The people who claim, "I don't really care about what I wear," are the people who understand the subtleties of a language of dress more than anyone because they are understanding the subtleties of the code so well that they can just blend in. This 'normal' of dress is never neutral and often any sort of divergence from accepted conventional dress is immediately shamed or called out or othered.

If you go into any clothing shop the 'normal' that you see there comes from a very specific history. It's all coming from Western histories of dress, there is no representation for other histories. To have had this become a 'global' standard of dress speaks directly to the history of colonisation and the huge ethical problems with the fashion industry.

This sort of codified way of dressing, no matter how subtle, is

something that you are conscious of and dealing with when you're making ready to wear clothing,

Of course, there are people who will put on whatever and go out there, which is amazing, but the reality is you still have to go to work and deal with people's reactions. It's hard work.

It's a bummer because clothing can be so expressive and interesting. But I think as a designer who makes ready to wear clothing stuff, you are conscious of it, these invisible rules, even when making extravagant pieces that will be for sale.

That's what's exciting about working in theatre, these norms and rules aren't there. People are willing to leave their expectations at the door when they come into a theatre, they are ready to see and experience something that is in a different space to the strict social norms.

I think that's why it was exciting for me to break away from what was expected, make something new and transcend into the abstract.

Nathan's text really allows for it too. We did a lot of dreaming around space, and costume acting as the set and props - that has been quite an exciting prompt, how can we amplify the words, without adding unnecessary elements - like set pieces and props. We decided to experiment and see how far we could push it with the costumes.



Who or what inspires you as an artist? Is there any genre of music, art or artists that you drew inspiration from as you developed the costumes?

I am inspired by a lot of designers but more than anything, I'm interested in what drives them and what it means to be a designer.

That's what interests me, rather than visuals. When I see someone who's really just giving it their all for no other reason than their inner desire to do so for themselves, that's exciting for me.

I'm interested in why humans do things. The human experience is deeply confusing and strange - now more so than ever perhaps. Maybe because there are just so many things constantly bombarding us - it's a confusing time to be human.

Being queer and Asian and growing up in Christchurch, from a young age I've constantly been aware of the fact that I'm somehow different. I wanted to

try and understand what those differences are and why different people consider different things to be normal. I just ended up feeling at home in having no sense of place.

Clothing is quite strange and beautiful - really, it's such a weird thing for a species to do. I am very interested in pre-history, the very beginnings of human-object culture.

I don't know if you'd call it inspiration, but it's what I am drawn to and think about a lot. Not just in terms of the clothing they made, but in the whole context of how this culture developed.

So, for me, looking at theatre, I'm sort of thinking in the same way. Human storytelling is such a long-established tradition, it's in the roots of who we are. It's so fascinating to me and that feeds into all of the things that I am interested in exploring while making.



What is the one element of the costumes you would like audiences to pay extra attention to?

What other projects are you working on currently?

I want them to pay attention to what they feel like rather than any one particular element of the costumes.

Usually, you can immediately make judgments about someone based on what they wear. It's impossible not to, because clothing is such a codified language. But I'm hoping with the costumes in the production we can go beyond that. Within the magic of theatre and the suspension of disbelief, if we can get people to feel something and ask themselves "Woah, what is that feeling that I'm experiencing through seeing someone dressed in a certain way?"

It's not about fashion, it's about getting to understand that thing which is at the core of what it means to be human. What does it mean to engage in textiles and dress as a species?

I want people to recognize that garments often have this emotional impact on us, most of the time people aren't conscious of it, or don't have the space to unpack those feelings. I am hoping they will be able to sit with their feelings after seeing this production. What does it mean to engage in textiles and dress as a species?

What other projects are you working on? At the moment?

I'm doing a photoshoot in August with some other designers from Christchurch: Brooke Georgia (Being.), Paige Jansen, Ella Van Beynen (Future Idyll), and Emma Wallbanks (F.B.P.D). We haven't really had the chance to collaborate before, so I am excited to see what we will come up with. I'm also going to be collaborating with a glass artist, Jane Park, to get some bottles made for a new perfume I'll be working on.

But mostly I think I will just want a long break after this!



Making Room for Rage

Where have we come from? Where to next?

K. Emma Ng traces the path of East-Asian theatre in Aotearoa, from Lynda Chanwai-Earle to *Scenes from a Yellow Peril*.

When the chorus in *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* delivers the lines, “we are massive / growing / and growing”, it reminds me of the octopus. The sneering octopus, with the head of a Chinaman, inked in newsprint when fear of the Yellow Peril was at its height in white settler nations. *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* brings the octopus to life — not as a nebulous racial threat but as a swelling articulation of rage and accumulated resentments that answer back.

The rage is important. Along with the humour that tempers it, it's part of a shift in posture for East-Asian theatre in Aotearoa. After all, it was a more earnest approach to storytelling that paved the way. The first big milestone came in 1996 from Lynda Chanwai-Earle, who, like Nathan Joe, is both a poet and a playwright. Her break-out play, *Ka-Shue (Letters Home)*, was inspired by her family's migration stories and premiered at Circa Theatre as part of the Aotearoa New Zealand Festival of the Arts

Wellington. Local Asian communities were already sharing their stories through customary art forms such as dance and music. But it wasn't until *Ka-Shue*, and Jacob Rajan's play *Krishnan's Dairy* the following year, that these East and South-Asian New Zealand stories broke into professional theatre settings.

It took a few years for other East-Asian playwrights to follow with productions of their own. Fair enough. It was a tough time to be Asian, let alone make art about being Asian. Changes to immigration policy in 1987 had had a huge impact, with the Asian population (and the diversity within it) increasing through the 1990s, particularly in Auckland. This hauled up a great deal of anti-Asian sentiment. It's in this context that *Ka-Shue* humanised the experiences of Chinese immigrants for (largely non-Asian) theatre audiences at that time.

Momentum began to build in the late 2000s, with shows like *Lantern* (2009), by Renee Liang, and



Asian Tales™: Native Alienz (2009), which was presented by the newly formed Oryza Foundation. We began to see contemporary stories alongside historical ones, and bundles of young Asian talent emerge, bringing us shows that spanned the spectrum of Asian and Asian New Zealand experiences.

Throughout the 2010s, local East-Asian theatremakers continued to contribute to the growth of a denser and more diverse scene. In 2017, two long-developing productions came to fruition: *The Mooncake and the Kumara* by Mei-Lin Hansen and the opera *The Bone Feeder* by Renee Liang and Gareth Farr. Both explored relationships between Chinese tauwi and tangata whenua, signalling evolving conceptions of identity in relation to place. At Q Theatre that same year, Alice Canton presented *OTHER [chinese]*, a show whose use of non-actor voices gave space to the complexity of the imperfect diaspora and, yes, the driving force of rage.

Scenes from a Yellow Peril joins this lineage: the first contemporary work by local East-Asian talent to be co-produced with Auckland Theatre Company. It's an example of what's been made possible through the formation of artist-driven collectives and production companies, through which Asian theatremakers create opportunities for themselves. Make no mistake, they are the ones who have made space for rage and humour on these stages — and they are the ones who have made space for the audiences who are ready to give and receive these ambivalent emotions, because these stories are also their own.

K. Emma Ng

K. Emma Ng is a writer, curator, and public programmer. She's worked on design and arts projects for organisations big and small, and contributes to online publications and book projects as a writer and editor. She is a former Curator/Manager of Enjoy Contemporary Art Space and the author of Old Asian, New Asian, published by BWB Texts.



Playwright and Performer



NATHAN JOE 周润豪

Nathan Joe is an award-winning playwright and performance poet, based between Tāmaki Makaurau and Ōtautahi. Nathan is the curator of BIPOC spoken word event *Dirty Passports*, which had sold-out premiere and return seasons at Basement Theatre in 2021. In 2019, he directed *I am Rachel Chu*, which won Auckland Live: Free Your Mind and Best Newcomer (Ensemble) awards at Auckland Fringe 2019. In 2021, Nathan co-created *Slay the Dragon* or *Save the Dragon* or *Neither* with *A Slightly Isolated Dog*, directed

Yang/Young/杨 for Auckland Theatre Company and was awarded the prestigious 2022 Grimshaw Sargeson Fellowship. His poetry short film, *Nathan Joe: Homecoming Poems*, commissioned by Going West Writers Festival, premiered internationally at the Toronto Queer Film Festival 2022.

Other career highlights include winning the 2020 New Zealand National Poetry Slam and receiving the 2021 Bruce Mason Playwriting Award.

Image credit: Todd Karehana and Julie Zhu

Director



JANE YONGE

Jane Yonge graduated in 2015 with a Master of Theatre Arts (MTA) degree in Directing from Victoria University of Wellington and Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. In 2019, she graduated with a Masters in Arts Politics from New York University: Tisch School of the Arts on a Fulbright scholarship.

Jane's directing work includes: *The Basement Tapes*, which won Best Director at the 2017 Wellington Theatre Awards and Scotsman Fringe First Award at the 2018 Edinburgh

Festival Fringe; *At the Wake* by Victor Rodger for Circa Theatre; Basement Theatre's 2019 Christmas show, *A Frickin Dangerous Space-mas*; *48 Nights on Hope Street* for Auckland Theatre Company; *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* by Nathan Joe for Auckland Arts Festival 2021; and *Another Mammal* by Jo Randerson.

Jane is an International Society for the Performing Arts (ISPA) Fellow and the Creative Catalyst at Te Taumata Toi-a-Iwi (Arts Regional Trust).

Performers



UHYOUNG CHOI 최우영

Uhyoung Choi is a Korean New Zealander actor, playwright and lawyer. He graduated from the University of Auckland with majors in Law, Politics and Philosophy, and now studies acting with Michael Saccente.

Theatre highlights:

Scenes from a Yellow Peril reading for Proudly Asian Theatre's *Fresh off the Page* series at Basement Theatre, *Between Fathers and their Sons* for Q Theatre, *The Mooncake and the Kumara* for Stray Theatre Company and *The Potential for Rain* for Navi Collaborative.

Television highlights:

Power Rangers, *Ahikāroa*, *Question of Justice* and *Shortland Street*.

In his spare time, Uhyoung competes in the Pro Tour of New Zealand trading card game, *Flesh and Blood*, and plays *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Warhammer 40k*.



AMANDA GRACE HSU HSIEN LEO 梁宿嫻

Amanda Grace Hsu Hsien Leo is a Chinese Singaporean Peranakan actor, jazz singer and face-painter. Amanda spent her intermediate school years training in devising in Singapore under Noorlinah Mohamed, and training in clown under Master Clown Dr Ira Seidenstein at the University of Auckland.

Theatre highlights: *Call of the Sparrows* for Proudly Asian Theatre in 2016, and the 2018 Auckland Fringe one-woman multilingual debut of Oliver Chong's *ROOTS*. Amanda has worked closely with Oriental Maidens and Yellow Peril Productions, including during the two seasons of Nathan Joe's *I Am Rachel Chu* and the reading of *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* at Auckland Arts Festival 2021. Her voice credits include the role of Nai Nai (Grandma) in Becky Kuek's *Tales of Nai Nai*.

By day, Amanda is a tarot reader under her brand Grace&Tarot and runs a face-painting company called Face Fatale Ltd. Amanda is proudly represented by Gail Cowan Management.



LOUISE JIANG 江欣玥

Louise Jiang is a Chinese New Zealander who acts for stage and screen. Louise is a recent graduate of Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School on the Bill Guest Scholarship and has trained in Le Jeu and in physical theatre with Massive Theatre Company since 2016.

Theatre highlights:

Scenes from a Yellow Peril by Nathan Joe for Auckland Arts Festival 2021, Tupua Tigafua's *Ciggy Butts in the Sand* and *Clean Up in Aisle Three* for Barbarian Productions.

Television highlights:

Wellington Paranormal, *Good Grief* and web series *Self Help*.

Louise is also an emerging theatremaker and director with a passion for devising. Most recently, Louise directed the development showing of *(W)Asian*, a comedic solo show by Sean Rivera as part of the Rotorua Arts Village Residency. Louise also wrote and performed in *TOKYO 2020*, a short mockumentary film on artistic rock climbing. *Actor//Android*, her solo show, was presented in Tahi Festival 2021 and will debut in Auckland in 2023.



ANGELA ZHANG 张挚

Angela Zhang is a writer and performer based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, whose work explores migrant and queer experiences. A geotechnical engineer by trade, they are interested in the connection people have with the land and the built environment, as well as the supernatural and uncanny in the constructed world.

Theatre highlights:

OTHER [chinese] and *I Am Rachel Chu*. Most recently, Angela performed their poetry at the 2021 Going West Writers Festival and appeared in the 2021 Auckland Arts Festival iteration of *Scenes from a Yellow Peril*.

Angela's work has been published in *Mayhem Literary Journal*, *Oscen Magazine*, *Gen M*, and a range of independent zines.

Band



RHOIHIL KISHORE

Rhoihil Kishore has worked alongside New Zealand's foremost actors, directors and musicians, and played across the country's leading venues. He is a multi-faceted musician who is well versed in all aspects of the music industry, including studio session work, theatrical and musical improvisation, commercial pop music and jazz performance. Rhoihil's sensitivity to dialogue and integration into dramatic performance has garnered critical acclaim, especially during his 171 performances at the Pop-Up Globe.

J.Y LEE 이종윤

J.Y Lee is a saxophonist, flautist and multi-instrumentalist based in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. J.Y has recorded and performed with a variety of artists and bands, such as: Yoko-Zuna, Avantdale Bowling Club, Sir Dave Dobbyn, CHAll, The Saxobros, and other various jazz and music groups around Aotearoa. With Yoko-Zuna, he has worked and collaborated with artists such as David Dallas, P Digsss (Shapeshifter), Melodownz, SWIDT, JessB, Noah Slee, Bailey Wiley and Tom Scott (Avantdale Bowling Club, @Peace, Home Brew). Avantdale Bowling Club was the winner for Album of the Year at the Aotearoa Music Awards in 2019.

DANIEL MITSURU MCKENZIE 石本完

Daniel Mitsuru McKenzie is an Auckland-based musician and educator with a Bachelor of Music from the University of Auckland jazz performance programme. Daniel recently set forth in the music industry and has since played sold-out shows and festivals throughout New Zealand with Molly & The Chromatics, performed in studio sessions and jazz performances, and performed for Pop-Up Globe. He is currently studying visual arts.



Hosts



MICHEAL McCABE

Micheal McCabe is a Filipino Pākehā designer and educator based in Tāmaki Makaurau. Micheal lectures at AUT Huri Te Ao Hoahoanga and collaborates with public arts organisations, galleries and theatre companies to create dynamic and socially engaged work.

His most recent work includes: *A Fine Balance* (Auckland Theatre Company, 2019), *The Blind Date Project* (Silo Theatre 2019), *Queer Pavilion* (collaborative project, 2020), *Deadweight Loss* (Objectspace, 2020), *Upu* (Silo Theatre, 2020), *Te Whare Kapua* (Massive Theatre Company, 2021), *Hinātore: A Love Story: Ron Te Kawa* (Objectspace and CoCA, 2021) and *Toro Whakaara* (Objectspace and CoCA, 2021–2022).

Born a Capricorn Sun, Mercury Moon, Venus and Mars, Micheal feels a unique affinity to calendars and Excel spreadsheets.



ROSABEL TAN 陳娟娟

Rosabel Tan is a writer, researcher, strategist and creative producer of Peranakan Chinese descent. Rosabel is the founding editor of *The Pantograph Punch* and director of Satellites, a programme showcasing contemporary Asian artists in Tāmaki Makaurau.

Her writing has appeared in *Sport*, *The Spinoff*, and *Metro* and she was a contributor to the food anthology, *Dirt*.

As a producer, she has programmed a talks series for Auckland Arts Festival in 2019 and 2020, and has worked with Prayas Theatre, Auckland Council, Artspace Aotearoa, Auckland Art Gallery and Extended Whānau.

Rosabel is a trustee for Silo Theatre and *The Pantograph Punch*, and is a member of the Auckland Council's Public Art Advisory Panel.



JENNA WEE 黄心怡

Jenna Wee was born and raised in Tāmaki Makaurau and is of Malaysian, Chinese, Japanese, Pākehā and Melanau descent. At the end of 2020, Jenna launched *Asian in Aotearoa*, a podcast that explores the lives and work of young Asian creatives, one uncensored conversation at a time. Jenna made the intentional move from a decade-long career in marketing and, today, is also a certified coach and works in collaboration with Play Contemporary Leadership CoLab as operations manager, mentor and facilitator of cohorts in their 20s and 30s.

Creative



FILAMENT ELEVEN 11 – RACHEL MARLOW & BRAD GLEDHILL
Production Designer

Rachel Marlow and Brad Gledhill are production designers and co-founders of design company, Filament Eleven 11.

Filament Eleven 11 works collaboratively, with designers, directors and companies, to create dynamic production designs and lighting environments for live experiences and to produce work that puts design and technology at the centre of storytelling in an inventive and unique way.

Design highlights: *Single Asian Female*, *Black Lover*, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, and *Red Speedo* for Auckland Theatre Company; *Every Brilliant Thing*, *Boys Will Be Boys*,



Mr Burns, *Here Lies Love* and *Peter and the Wolf* for Silo Theatre; *Dakota of the White Flats*, *Owls Do Cry*, *Kororāreka* and *Dust Pilgrim* for Red Leap Theatre; and a vast array of independent artists.

Recent career highlights: Production design for *Tropical Love Birds* (Auckland Arts Festival 2021); an off-Broadway production at the SOHO Playhouse, New York of FCC's *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* (also seen at Aotearoa New Zealand Festival of the Arts 2018 and Auckland Arts Festival 2019), and a 2019 Auckland Theatre Award for the design team of *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*.



KENJI IWAMITSU-HOLDAWAY 岩満 健司
Sound Designer & Composer

Kenji Iwamitsu-Holdaway is a Kiwi Japanese Pākehā musical director, guitarist and guitar teacher. He graduated from the University of Auckland jazz performance programme. He has worked with platinum-selling artists, such as SIX60, Mitch James, Jake Gosling, Nico & Vinz and Annie Crummer. Kenji has recorded and performed nationally and internationally, performing at some of New Zealand's largest shows and festivals, including the record-setting SIX60 Western Springs show with Mitch James.

Creative



STEVEN JUNIL PARK
박준일
Costume Designer

Steven Junil Park is a multidisciplinary artist living and working in Ōtautahi, New Zealand. He works under the name 6x4, producing everything under the label himself: clothing, shoes and accessories. Most of his pieces are one-offs and often feature recycled, natural-dyed or vintage textiles. For him, the history of the materials and the making processes involved are just as important as is the final outcome. Steven creates his work by being resourceful and using previously existing materials in a world of excess: conscious of the devastating environmental and social impacts of the textile industry. As a Korean-born New Zealander, Steven examines ideas of identity, exploring his own feeling of belonging to neither culture, through clothing.



AHI KARUNAHARAN
Dramaturg and Production Uncle

Born in the UK and bred in Aotearoa, Ahi Karunaharan is an actor, writer, director and producer. He has worked in the arts sector for various shows, venues, production companies and festivals, both nationally and internationally, since graduating from Victoria University of Wellington and Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. Ahi is a winner of the 2018 Bruce Mason Playwriting Award; his writing credits for stage and radio include *The Mourning After*, *Anchorite* and *Melodic Maladies*. Ahi's play *TEA*, which he wrote and directed, premiered at the Auckland Arts Festival 2018 and was

awarded Excellence for Overall Production at the Auckland Theatre Awards.

Directing highlights: *Swabhoomi: Borrowed Earth* for Prayas Theatre; *Shoulda Woulda Coulda*, *Light Vs Dark: The Adventures of Rama* for Auckland Theatre Company; and the recent immersive participatory experience *Kollywood Extra* for Satellites.

Ahi has worked with the internationally acclaimed theatre company Tara Arts, Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney Festival, Adelaide Festival and Silo Theatre, and is currently the Artistic Director of Agaram Productions.



About the co-producers

SQUARESUMS&CO

SquareSums&Co is an Auckland-based arts/artist management and creative producing firm that represents a bespoke roster of world-class storytellers, entertainers and works. Led by co-founding partners Square and Sums, it is especially interested in crossover, cross-cultural and cross-genre work and talent. It is passionate about empowerment, community-building and change-making. True, meaningful and borderless collaboration is a fundamental tenet of this ethos.

ORIENTAL MAIDENS

Oriental Maidens (OM) is a screen and live arts production company, founded by Ankita Singh and co-led with Nathan Joe.

OM facilitates and supports creatives of difference, encouraging intercultural discourse and breaking the boundaries of what it means to be an Asian diaspora creative in contemporary Aotearoa.



Accessibility

PRESENTED BY  **DENTONS** KENSINGTON SWAN

Audio-Described Performance and Touch Tour *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* Sun 3 Jul, 4:00pm

The audio-described performance is open to all and includes a live audio commentary relayed to blind and low-vision patrons in the audience via an earpiece. Patrons with accessibility tickets can also attend a touch tour 90 minutes before the performance.

NZSL-Interpreted Performance *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* Sat 25 Jun, 8:00pm

The NZSL-interpreted performance is open to all and features an interpreter on stage signing the show for Deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons in the audience.

Supported by  **Four Winds**
FOUNDATION

How to Book

\$20 tickets for Deaf/hard-of-hearing and blind/low-vision patrons. One \$20 companion ticket per theatre-goer is also available.

Please contact the box office to book accessible performance tickets or if you have any special requirements.

Wheelchair Access

ASB Waterfront Theatre has eight seats and three wheelchair spaces in the auditorium, reserved for customers with special access requirements. There is step-free, level access to all tiers of the building and to seating in the stalls. Wheelchair-accessible toilets are located on the ground floor; accessible parking is available on Madden Street.

Hearing Assistance

The theatre has a T-Loop radio frequency system to amplify the sound of the performance. If you don't use a hearing aid or your hearing aid does not have a T setting, there is a listener unit available on request from the box office.

Assistance Dogs

Assistance dogs are welcome at ASB Waterfront Theatre. We can find a seat that's comfortable for you and your dog or arrange for the theatre staff to look after your dog during the show.

NZSL Interpreting and Signing —
Platform Interpreting NZ

Audio Description — **Nicola Owen and Carol Wang, Audio Described Aotearoa Ltd**
Accessibility Videographer —
Rebecca Stringer

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Creative Learning: Scenes From a Yellow Peril Schools' Audience Survey

Thank you for being part of our Creative Learning programme and attending our performance of *Scenes from a Yellow Peril* by Nathan Joe. We'd like to know what your thought.





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