



PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MICHAEL DONALD EDWARDS
MANAGING DIRECTOR LINDA DIGABRIELE

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****
February 25, 2020

ASOLO REP PRESENTS LAUREN YEE'S *THE GREAT LEAP*

BASKETBALL, FAMILY AND TIANANMEN SQUARE INTERSECT IN THIS WITTY AND FAST-PACED COMEDIC DRAMA

“An exhilarating, deeply satisfying piece of work, full of bright, inquisitive, humorous life. Yee has crafted a moving fiction around pieces of real history — her own and that of China in the years after the Cultural Revolution.”

— *New York Magazine*

(SARASOTA, February 25, 2020) — Asolo Rep, in conjunction with Miami New Drama, proudly presents ***THE GREAT LEAP***, a sharp-witted new drama by award-winning playwright **Lauren Yee**. Directed by **Vanessa Stalling**, ***THE GREAT LEAP*** previews March 18 and 19, opens March 20 and runs through April 11 in the Cook Theatre, located in the FSU Center for the Performing Arts.

San Francisco, spring 1989. Manford Lum is a sparky kid, renowned on the sidewalk basketball courts of Chinatown – vertically challenged but with undeniable ball skills. He talks his way onto an American college team traveling to Beijing for a “friendship” game where finds himself in the middle of China’s post-Cultural Revolution. As the story bounces between 1989 and 1971, past relationships collide with present day revelations and Manford discovers that the trip is about much more than basketball. Inspired by events from the life of playwright Lauren Yee’s own father, ***THE GREAT LEAP*** is a fast-paced and hilarious play that explores the cultural collision of identity and politics through the game of basketball.

The play’s title refers to both the athleticism of basketball and the Communist Party of China’s Great Leap Forward campaign in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Yee sees

basketball as an apt metaphor for politics and diplomacy. According to her stage directions in the script, “This is a play about basketball, but it is also a basketball play. The game is reflected not just in the subject matter but the rhythm, structure, language and how the characters move through space.”

Yee’s plays often have a familial tie to her personal experience. “Growing up, my father dominated the basketball courts of San Francisco’s Chinatown,” said Yee, “and in the 1980s, his legendary game won him a spot on a friendship team headed to a newly open China to play a series of exhibition games against the best teams in the People’s Republic. That nugget of his history formed the inspiration for my play **THE GREAT LEAP** nearly 40 years later. The play is about my father, but I wrote it for my younger brothers,” shares Yee. “In **THE GREAT LEAP**, Manford is a Chinese-American kid who keeps bumping up against people who don’t believe in him or see limitations when they look at him. That’s not what I want for my brothers. My wish is that they move through the world unencumbered and be whatever they want to be.”

“Thanks to Lauren Yee's driving and bitingly funny dialogue, **THE GREAT LEAP** is a thrilling theatrical experience whether you are a fan of basketball or don't follow the sport at all,” said Asolo Rep Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards. “The ideas competing in her work: how where we come from shapes what we become, how it is possible to overcome seemingly impossible obstacles, and how family is one of our most powerful and complicated resources, are ideas that speak to us all. She is one of the most exciting playwrights writing today and her skill is on full display in **THE GREAT LEAP**. Director Vanessa Stalling brings a brilliant physical life to the play, infusing it with energy that will have audiences leaning in from start to finish.”

The cast features **Fenton Li** (Wen Chang), whose Off-Broadway credits include *Death in Boulder* (La Mama), and *A Dream of Red Pavilion* (Pan Asian Repertory Theatre). TV & film credits include *Tommy*, *Blacklist*, *The Carrie Diaries*, and *In a New York Minute*. **Glenn Obrero** (Manford) also performed the role of Manford at Steppenwolf Theatre’s production of **THE GREAT LEAP**. Other credits include the national tour of *In to America* (Griffin Theatre); and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (Lookingglass Theatre). TV credits include *Chicago Fire* and *NeXT*.

Helen Joo Lee made her Asolo Rep debut this season as Mary Debenham in *Murder on the Orient Express*. Based in Chicago, she has been seen in *Kentucky*, *In the Canyon*, *You For Me For You* and *American Hwangap* and was the permanent replacement in The Second City’s 41st revue *Fantastic Super Great Nation Numero Uno*. TV and film credits include *Chicago Med*, *Empire*, *Teacher* and *Canal Street*.

Gregg Weiner (Saul) was seen previously this season as Michel the Conductor in *Murder on the Orient Express*. He appeared in *Speed-the-Plow* (Gablestage) and the one-man show *Every Brilliant Thing* (Zoetic Stage) in Miami. Greg is a multiple Carbonell Silver Palm, Best of New Times, and Theatre Tampa Bay acting honors

recipient. TV and film credits include *War Dogs*, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* and *Transporter 2*.

With two plays recently named on American Theatre's list of the ten most-produced plays in 2019-2020, **Lauren Yee** (Playwright) is only the second playwright to have two different plays appear on the same list: *Cambodian Rock Band* and *The Great Leap*, with eight productions each. Honors include the Doris Duke Artists Award, Steinberg Playwright Award, Whiting Award, Steinberg/ATCA Award, American Academy of Arts and Letters literature award, Horton Foote Prize, Kesselring Prize, Primus Prize, a Hodder Fellowship at Princeton, and the #1 and #2 plays on the 2017 Kilroy's List.

VANESSA STALLING (Director) is the director and adaptor of the 2016 Jeff Award winning play *United Flight 232*. She was the Associate Artistic Director of Redmoon Theater in Chicago, the 2016 Michael Maggio Fellow at The Goodman Theatre, named as one of "The Fifty People Who Really Perform for Chicago" in 2018 and 2019 by Newcity Stage.

"**THE GREAT LEAP** is about being bigger than you're told you can be," said director Vanessa Stalling. "There are two protagonists, Manford and Wen Chang, and both have been told they must limit themselves; but their arcs are discovering that they have the capacity to be bigger than expected. America loves a story like that, we love stories about underdogs. Lauren Yee is also a part of this amazing golden age of new playwrights when, finally, we are beginning to get access to new and underrepresented voices as institutions listen to the cultural desire for equity, diversity, and inclusion."

CAST

(In Order of Appearance)

FENTON LI*	.....	Wen Chang
GLENN OBRERO	.....	Manford
HELEN JOO LEE*	.....	Connie
GREGG WEINER*	.....	Saul

*Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

SELECTED CREATIVE TEAM MEMBERS

Director	.....	Vanessa Stalling
Scenic Designer	.....	Arnel Sancianco
Costume Designer	.....	Theresa Ham
Lighting Designer	.....	Keith Parham

Projection Designer.....Paul Deziel
Sound Designer / Composer..... Jeffrey Levin
Hair/Wig & Make-up Designer.....Michelle Hart

SELECTED ARTISTIC BIOS

LAUREN YEE (Playwright) was born and raised in San Francisco, and she currently lives in New York City. She received her BA from Yale University and her MFA in playwriting from University of California, San Diego, where she studied under Naomi Iizuka. **THE GREAT LEAP** has been produced at Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Seattle Repertory Theatre and Atlantic Theater Company, Arts Club, InterAct Theatre, and Steppenwolf, with future productions at Long Wharf and Miami New Drama. Yee's *Cambodian Rock Band*, with music by Dengue Fever, premiered at South Coast Repertory with subsequent productions at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, La Jolla Playhouse, City Theatre, Merrimack Rep, Signature Theatre, Portland Center Stage, and Jungle Theatre. Also upcoming is Yee's play *The Song of Summer* at Trinity Repertory Company. Her honors include the Horton Foote Prize, Kesselring Prize, Francesca Primus Prize, a Hodder Fellowship at Princeton and the top two plays on the 2017 Kilroys List. She is a New Dramatists member, Ma-Yi Writers Lab member and an alumni playwright at The Playwrights Realm. She has written for *Mixtape* (Netflix). Current commissions include Geffen Playhouse, La Jolla Playhouse, Lincoln Center Theater/LCT3, Portland Center Stage, Second Stage Theater, South Coast Repertory and Trinity Repertory Company. Learn more at www.laurenyee.com.

VANESSA STALLING FIRST SEASON (Director) is the director and adaptor of the 2016 Jeff Award winning play *United Flight 232*. She was the Associate Artistic Director of Redmoon Theater in Chicago, the 2016 Michael Maggio Fellow at The Goodman Theatre, named as one of "The Fifty People who Really Perform for Chicago" in 2018 and 2019 by Newcity Stage, was a 2019 honored finalist of the Women in the Arts & Media Coalition Collaboration Award, and is a company member of The House Theater of Chicago. Recent productions include Lisa Loomer's *Roe* at The Goodman Theatre and Anna Ziegler's *Photography 51* at The Court Theatre, for which she won a Jeff Award for Best Direction. Vanessa is also an Assistant Professor of Directing at UC San Diego.

FENTON LI* FIRST SEASON (Wen Chang) is thrilled to make his Asolo Rep debut with this amazing and generous cast/crew. Off-Broadway: *Death in Boulder* (La Mama), *A Dream of Red Pavilion* (Pan Asian Repertory Theatre), *June is the First Fall* (Yangtze Repertory Theatre). Regional: *Mary Stuart* (Pioneer Theatre Company); *Salt Pepper Ketchup* (InterACT, Barrymore-nominated); *Issei, He Says* (NJ Rep). TV & Film: *Tommy*, *Awkafina is Nora from Queens*, *Blacklist*, *Startup*, *Bull*, *The Carrie Diaries*, *50*

Central, The Chinese Exclusion Act, In a New York Minute, and others.
Eternal thanks to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, for opening the heavens to him. "It's full of stars." www.fentonli.weebly.com

GLENN OBRERO FIRST SEASON (Manford) is stoked to be making his Asolo Rep debut. Recent credits include: *The Great Leap* (Steppenwolf Theatre); national tour of *In to America* (Griffin Theatre); *Scientific Method* (Rivendell Theatre); and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (Lookingglass Theatre). TV credits: *Chicago Fire* (NBC) and *NeXT* (FOX). Glenn is a graduate of Savannah College of Art and Design with a BFA in Acting and is represented by Gray Talent Group. Currently based in Chicago, but grew up in Tampa, he's very happy to work professionally in his home state. Endless love and gratitude to his family and friends. Instagram: @glennlaces

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

Inside Asolo Rep: *THE GREAT LEAP* combined with *INTO THE BREECHES!*

Wednesday, February 26

Cook Theatre

10:30am: Enjoy coffee and light bites by Muse at the Ringling, and visit the Designing Women Boutique Pop-Up Shop

11am: Panel discussion Tickets are \$5; and free for all donors at the Cherubim Angels level and higher and Asolo Rep Guild Members

Get rare insights into the artistic process, hear directly from the people responsible for producing *THE GREAP LEAP* and engage in stimulating discussion inspired by the play's themes and issues.

Inside Asolo Rep is sponsored by Muse at the Ringling, Designing Women Boutique and *The Observer*.

Tuesday Talkbacks

March 24, 31, April 7, 14

Cook Theatre

Join us for an intimate post-show discussion with featured actors following every Tuesday performance of *THE GREAT LEAP*.

Sunday Salon Sunday

March 29, following the performance

Reflect on your experience through a lively and informative post-show discussion following select Sunday matinees in the Mertz and Cook Theatres. Featuring members of Asolo Rep's Artistic Department and special guests.

THE GREAT LEAP IllumiNation Event

Wednesday, April 1

6:30pm pre-show reception

7:30pm performance

Pre-show reception and a post-show community conversation held on the Mezzanine after the performance in the Cook Theatre

A stimulating series of theatre and conversation exploring the topical and social themes threaded throughout our season. IllumiNation events begin one hour prior to curtain with a reception on the mezzanine, continue with the performance, and conclude with a conversation.

The IllumiNation series is made possible, in part, with support from the Koski Family Foundation and Morton's Gourmet Market & Catering.

TICKETS

Tickets for **THE GREAT LEAP** and the entire 2019-20 Asolo Repertory Theatre season are on sale now. Tickets for **THE GREAT LEAP** start at \$28. To purchase tickets, call 941.351.8000 or 800.361.8388, visit www.asolorep.org, or visit the Asolo Repertory Theatre Box Office, located in the lobby of the theatre. Asolo Repertory Theatre is located at 5555 North Tamiami Trail in the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts.

The Box Office is open Monday 10am – 5pm, Tuesday – Thursday 10am - 7:30pm, Friday – Saturday 10am – 8pm, and Sunday 10am – 2pm. The box office closes at 5pm when there are no evening performances and phone lines close one hour prior to the start of any performance. Season subscription packages are also available online and by visiting or calling the box office.

SPONSORS

Asolo Rep is able to present THE GREAT LEAP because of the generosity of its sponsors. The corporate sponsors for THE GREAT LEAP are Hampton Inn & Suites and Mattison's Restaurants & Catering. Asolo Rep 2019-20 Major Season Sponsors are Florida State University, the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, Charles & Margery

Barancik Foundation, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Sarasota County, The Shubert Foundation, Designing Women Boutique, The Exchange, the Huisking Foundation, and Sunset Cadillac of Bradenton. Asolo Rep's artistic programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues.

ABOUT ASOLO REP

Now in its 61st season, Asolo Repertory Theatre is recognized as one of the premier professional theatres in America and one of the largest in the Southeastern United States. One of the few select theatres in the nation that performs in true rotating repertory, Asolo Rep's highly skilled acting company and extensive craftsmanship bring to life this unique performance method that gives audiences the opportunity to see multiple productions in the span of a few days. Asolo Rep presents up to 10 productions each season including contemporary and classic works and provocative musical theatre experiences. A theatre district in and of itself, Asolo Rep is committed to expanding its reach into the community, furthering its collaboration with the best theatre artists working in the industry today and cultivating new artists through its affiliation with the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training. Under the leadership of Producing Artistic Director Michael Donald Edwards and Managing Director Linda DiGabriele, Asolo Rep's ambitious theatrical offerings and ground-breaking education and community programming engage audiences and ensure its lasting legacy for future generations.
www.asolorep.org

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Thank you for supporting Asolo Repertory Theatre!
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