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THEATER MU’S NEW EYES FESTIVAL RETURNS

Theater Mu’s longest running tradition is in person Apr 9-10, featuring three new works.

(Minneapolis/Saint Paul) – Theater Mu’s New Eyes Festival is returning Apr 9 and 10 with new works by Mu’s Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Playwright-in-Residence Saymoukda Duangphouxay Vongsay, longtime Mu artist and playwright Katie Ka Vang and composer Melissa Li, and recent Mu Tang Clan member Keiko Green.

“New Eyes Festival is a core part of Theater Mu’s mission to make space for Asian American stories, so it’s wonderful having both longtime and newer Mu playwrights involved this year,” says Artistic Director Lily Tung Crystal, noting that Duangphouxay Vongsay and Vang have been involved with the theater for about a decade. “During this time, we fight hate and racism by telling our stories and giving voice to our communities. Each of these stories is so unique, representing the depth and breadth of the Asian American experience. What other event allows us to present a zombie apocalpyse and a heartfelt musical together on the same day?”

Theater Mu first began New Eyes Festival in 1993 as a way to nurture new, full-length Asian American theater works, with many becoming mainstage Theater Mu productions, such as The Brothers Paranormal (Prince Gomolvilas, 2019), The Korean Drama Addict’s Guide to Losing Your Virginity (May Lee-Yang, 2018), and Two Mile Hollow (Leah Nanako Winkler, 2018). (Mu’s 2021 New Eyes Festival, (Un)scene, broke from tradition with short plays responding to rising anti-Asian violence in America.)

Since the festival’s goal is to help the playwrights develop their work and get a sense of flow and dialogue, each staged reading is performed without sets or costumes. After each presentation, it’s not uncommon for the playwrights to chat with the audience about their reactions to the work thus far.

This year’s festival takes place at Mu’s studio in Saint Paul. While each reading is free, Mu requests that audience members RSVP to each session, as seating is limited.
Saturday consists of Duangphouxay Vongsay’s hilarious sci-fi thriller Kung Fu Zombies Vs. Shaman Warrior, followed by Vang and Li’s new musical Again. In between the readings is a 90-minute supper break where Mu invites audience members to go to KCM EggRolls food truck, parked nearby at BlackStack Brewing—those who mention “New Eyes” will receive a 20% discount.

On Sunday evening, people can enjoy a presentation of Green’s coming-of-age story about Asia’s favorite seasoning with Exotic Deadly: or the MSG Play.

**COMPLETE SCHEDULE:**

**Saturday, Apr 9, at 4 p.m. CT**
*Kung Fu Zombies Vs. Shaman Warrior*
written by Saymoukda Duangphouxay Vongsay

In the post-apocalyptic mountains of northern Laos, Arun must rescue her sister, Khwan, from an unpredictable cult leader. With Hanuman as her spiritual guide, she battles zombies in the jungle, demons from the underworld, and her own personal monsters. As the prequel to Mu’s 2013 hit show Kung Fu Zombies Vs. Cannibals, Shaman Warrior highlights Akha spiritual practices and interrogates foreign colonization and hegemony with plenty of “easter eggs” for fans of pop culture.

**Saturday, Apr 9, at 7:30 p.m. CT**
*Again*
written by Katie Ka Vang
composed by Melissa Li

Memoirist and cancer survivor Mai See meets a young filmmaker named Quest, who is inspired by her story despite suffering from her own chronic cancer. When Mai See relapses, their unlikely friendship helps her understand her own life—things that are worth keeping and things that are worth letting go. Again is an irreverent, moving, heartbreaking new musical about what to do when shit gets real.

**Sunday, Apr 10, at 5 p.m. CT**
*Exotic Deadly: or the MSG Play*
written by Keiko Green

It’s 1999, and Ami is an awkward, Japanese American high school girl, just trying to stay as invisible as possible. But her world comes crashing down with a terrible discovery: Her family is responsible for manufacturing MSG, the poison spice getting all the kids hooked. Meanwhile, a mysterious new girl arrives from Japan. Her name? Exotic Deadly. She’s loud, she smokes, and she’s not playing by the rules. In this time-traveling adventure, Ami vows to save the world from MSG and realizes what she’s capable of, if she would just stop being invisible.

Contact Lianna McLernon (lianna@theatermu.org) with any requests such as photos or interviews. No press tickets are needed for this free event.
TICKET INFORMATION: New Eyes Festival is free to attend, but Mu asks audience members to RSVP ahead of time on its website to reserve their seats.

COVID-19 POLICY: Guests must show proof of COVID-19 vaccination or lab-confirmed negative PCR test results received within 72 hours. Masks, preferably KN95s, must be covering the nose and mouth at all times.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS

SAYMOUKDA DUANGPHOUXAY VONGSAY (she/her) is an award-winning Lao American poet, playwright, public artist, and cultural producer. She’s a recipient of a Sally Award for Initiative from the Ordway Center for Performing Arts, which "recognizes bold new steps and strategic leadership undertaken by an individual … in creating projects or artistic programs never before seen in Minnesota that will have a significant impact on strengthening Minnesota’s artistic/cultural community." She’s the author of the children’s book When Everything Was Everything and is best known for her award-winning play Kung Fu Zombies Vs. Cannibals. She’s currently the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Playwright-in-Residence at Theater Mu, a McKnight Foundation fellow in community engaged practice art, a Jerome Hill Artist fellow in playwriting, a Minnesota State Arts Board and Forecast public art grantee, and serves as a member at large on the City of Saint Paul Cultural STAR board. | @refugenius

KATIE KA VANG and MELISSA LI began working on Again in 2018.

Vang (she/her) is a playwright and theatre artist. Her work explores the complexities of culture, identity, dis-ease, survivorship, and the familial. Her plays and works include WTF; Hmong Bollywood; 5:1 Meaning of Freedom, 6:2 Use of Sharpening; Fast FWD Motions; In Quarantine; Final Round; and Spirit Trust. Her work has been developed and presented at Pangea World Theater, Pillsbury House Theatre, Theater Mu, Leviathan Lab, Bushwick Starr, Brown University, the Royal Court Theatre (London), the Walker Art Center, Out North Art House, and more. She has received support from the Jerome Foundation, Knight Foundation, NPN, MRAC, MSAB, and Coalition of Asian American Leaders. She was selected to be a member of East West Players’ 21/22 playwright’s group in Los Angeles, California. She received a 20/21 Many Voices Fellowship at the Playwrights’ Center. She has an MFA in playwriting from Brown University.

Li (she/her) is a composer, lyricist, performer, and writer based in New York City. She is a 2021 Kleban prize recipient, Jonathan Larson award winner, Dramatists Guild Foundation fellow, Lincoln Center Theater writer-in-residence, 2019 Musical Theatre Factory maker, MacDowell fellow, Company One Pao Arts fellow, and former Queer|Art|Mentorship fellow. Musicals include Interstate (Mixed Blood ‘20, NAMT ‘19 Selection, New York Musical Festival ‘18 winner for outstanding lyrics), Surviving the Nian (the Theater Offensive ‘07, IRNE Award Winner for best new play), and 99% Stone (the Theater Offensive). Her works have received support from the 5th Avenue Theatre, the Village Theater, Musical Theater Factory, National Performance Network, New England Foundation for the Arts, Dixon Place, and others.

KEIKO GREEN (she/her) is in her third and final year in the MFA playwriting program at UC San Diego, after which she will be relocating to Los Angeles with her husband MJ and
very handsome basset hound Gus. She is an award-winning playwright, screenwriter, performer, and proud core company member at ACT Theatre in Seattle. Her plays have been developed and/or produced by the O’Neill National Playwrights Conference, Playwrights Realm, ACT Theatre, the Kennedy Center, National New Play Network, Seattle Repertory Theatre, and Actors Express. As an actor, Green has performed at the Denver Center of Performing Arts, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Cygnet Theatre, ACT Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, and the National Asian American Theatre Company, among others. She is currently working on commissions from the Old Globe Theatre and ACT Theatre, as well as consulting on a television series for Amazon Japan.

THEATER MU is the second largest Asian American theater company in the nation. Founded in 1992, Mu tells stories from the heart of the Asian American experience, presenting a fusion of traditional and contemporary artistic influences, which range from classics to up-and-coming voices in our community. Theater Mu’s continuing goal to celebrate and empower the Asian American community through theater is achieved through mainstage productions, emerging artist support, and educational outreach programs. Theater Mu is a member of the Consortium of Asian American Theaters & Artists as well as a member of the Twin Cities Theatres of Color Coalition, proudly standing alongside New Native Theatre, Pangea World Theater, Penumbra Theatre, and Teatro Del Pueblo. www.theatermu.org

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