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Kory Kelly - Director of Marketing at Pasadena Playhouse:

# A Center Court Culture Clash

Pasadena Playhouse in association with East West Players  
presents

The Los Angeles Premiere of  
***The Great Leap***  
By Lauren Yee  
Directed by BD Wong

Now through December 1, 2019

Tickets at [www.pasadenaplayhouse.org](http://www.pasadenaplayhouse.org) or by calling  
**626-356-7529**

PASADENA, CA (November 10, 2019) - Pasadena Playhouse, the State Theater of California, in association with East West Players, presents the Los Angeles premiere of Lauren Yee's *The Great Leap*.

Urgent, sharp-witted and fast-paced, *The Great Leap* is an unforgettable night of theater. As two men from different cultures reunite and find themselves at a crossroads - one man struggling to keep his career alive and an old friend flourishing in a career he never wanted - a young Chinese-American gets lost in the Tiananmen Square Protest and finds himself at the accidental center of international attention. All three men must face their past and struggle to find their own personal victories in this compelling drama directed by Tony Award winner BD Wong.

*The Great Leap* stars Justin Chien as "Manford;" Christine Lin as "Connie;" Grant Chang as "Wen Chang;" and James Eckhouse as "Saul."

The production plays now through Sunday December 1. Tickets are available at [pasadenaplayhouse.org](http://pasadenaplayhouse.org), by phone at 626-356-7529, and at the box office at 39 South El Molino Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91101.

BD Wong, who starred in the New York off-Broadway Atlantic Theatre and San Francisco American Conservatory Theatre productions of this play, now directs. He is most known to audiences from his roles in the *Jurassic Park* films and on NBC's *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, and most recently, on USA Network's *Mr. Robot* (Emmy and Critic's Choice nominations). Wong is the only actor ever to have received all five

major New York Theater awards for a single role - in *M. Butterfly* -- his Broadway debut: the Drama Desk Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award, the Theater World Award, the Clarence Derwent Award, and the Tony Award.

Lauren Yee is already known to area theatregoers from the Center Theatre Group production of *King of the Yees*, and *Cambodian Rock Band* at South Coast Rep.

For *The Great Leap*, Sara Holdren of *New York Magazine* said “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, leading up to the protests in Tiananmen Square that turned deadly.”

Director BD Wong says, “As an Asian American director I am always looking for a brand of representation that transcends our difficult history in the media. This play is important as it presents Asian American characters in a contemporary American play that are not trading on racial tropes of past plays and are written in an authentically three-dimensional way.

The collaboration between East West Players and Pasadena Playhouse is also vitally important to me, and on a personal level there is a deep coincidence for me of these two theatres coming together. I came to L.A. in 1984 and in 1986 was in the East West Players production of *A Chorus Line*. I then auditioned for *Mail* at Pasadena Playhouse and was hired to do this wildly popular musical, which transferred to Broadway. While I was in *Mail*, I auditioned for *M. Butterfly*, and was replaced in *Mail* by Alan Maroka, who had been in *A Chorus Line* with me at East West Players. So, it means so much for me to come full circle and be working with these two theatres again for two generations of audiences who are still so invested as we move forward.”

Pasadena Playhouse Producing Artistic Director Danny Feldman says, “I am absolutely thrilled over the outstanding cast and incredible creative team we have assembled for the Los Angeles premiere of *The Great Leap*. Lauren Yee is one of our most important new playwrights, and it is an honor to have Tony winner BD Wong, who starred in *The Great Leap* off-Broadway, direct our production. I am also grateful to be presenting *The Great Leap* in partnership with East West Players, which is vital to our mission at the Playhouse.”

East West Players Producing Artistic Director Snehal Desai says “Our 54th season at East West Players is one of laughter and change, often in the face of loss. We started with the question: *To whom do we the look to in these troubling times?* And our response is a season where we discover that we are the ones we are waiting for. With *The Great Leap* we are able to illustrate this -both through this incredible play and company led by BD as well as this historic partnership with Pasadena Playhouse.”

The creative team for *The Great Leap* features set and costume design by Lex Liang; assistant set and costume design by Rodrigo Hernandez; lighting design by Rebecca Bonebrake; sound design by Leon Rothenberg; projection design by Hana Sooyeon Kim; and stage management by Brandon Cheng.

## ABOUT THE PASADENA PLAYHOUSE

The Pasadena Playhouse is a place where people have gathered for 100 years to experience bold and important theater. It is one of the most prolific theaters in American history with a legacy of profound theatrical impact and courageous new work. In 1937, the Playhouse was officially recognized as the State Theater of California for its contribution and commitment to the dramatic arts. Today it continues that tradition of excellence under the helm of producing artistic director Danny Feldman. Dedicated to enriching lives through theater, community programs and learning initiatives, Pasadena Playhouse is a living force in the community.

### **ABOUT EAST WEST PLAYERS**

Established in 1965, East West Players is the nation's leading Asian American theatre company for our award-winning productions that blend Eastern and Western movements and culture. In over 50 years of history, East West Players has since premiered more than 228 plays and musicals, along with over 1,000 diverse readings and workshops for actors, writers, and directors. By building bridges between East and West, we have cultivated a loyal audience of over 70% people of color. Our company continues to build platforms for artists of color while advocating for multi-faceted representations of the Asian Pacific American experience in the performing arts.

### **Calendar Listing for *The Great Leap***

By Lauren Yee

Directed by BD Wong

Venue: Pasadena Playhouse, 39 South El Molino Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91101

Dates: Now through Sunday, December 1  
Press opening Sunday, November 10 at 5:00 p.m.

#### Performance Schedule:

Tuesday-Friday evenings at 8:00 p.m.

Saturday at 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.; Sunday at 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Tickets: Prices start at \$25  
Online -- [PasadenaPlayhouse.org](http://PasadenaPlayhouse.org)  
By phone at 626-356-7529  
In person -- Pasadena Playhouse Box Office, located at 39 South El Molino Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91101

Information: For more information on all productions at Pasadena Playhouse visit [PasadenaPlayhouse.org](http://PasadenaPlayhouse.org).

Description: Urgent, sharp-witted and fast-paced, *The Great Leap* is an unforgettable night of theater. As two men from different cultures reunite and find themselves at a crossroads - one man struggling to keep his career alive and an old friend flourishing in a career he never wanted - a young Chinese-American gets lost in the Tiananmen Square Protest and finds himself at the accidental center of international attention. All three men must face their past and struggle to find their own personal

victories in this compelling drama directed by Tony Award winner BD Wong.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Justin Chien** (Manford) is an actor from Taiwan. He has a BFA in Acting from USC. He recently appeared in *Valley of the Heart* at the Mark Taper Forum. As co-founder of Rogue Shore Pictures, he has variously written, acted in, and directed the award-winning short films *Tiger of the White Sun*, *Reverallium*, and *Continuum*, which won Outstanding Short Film at the 2019 Chinese American Film Festival. [www.justin-chien.com](http://www.justin-chien.com)

**Christine Lin** (Connie) Lin is honored to make her Pasadena Playhouse debut with this beautiful production and especially grateful to BD for coaching our team. A Chicago suburb native, Lin originated the role of “Miss Zhao” in David Henry Hwang's *Chinglish* on Broadway and at the Goodman Theatre. She has also worked with CalArts CNP at the Huntington Library, Cincinnati Playhouse, Nashville Rep, Firefly Theater & Films, InFusion Theatre, Halcyon Theatre and Stir-Friday Night! Television: *The Blacklist*, *Limitless*, *Gossip Girl*, *The Following*, *Alpha House*, *Nicky, Ricky, Dicky & Dawn*. Film: *Big Words*, *Blowtorch*, *Listen Up Philip*. Education: Steppenwolf West, Second City Chicago Conservatory, UCB NYC/LA, BSE degree in electrical and biomedical engineering, Duke University. | @Christine2Lin

**Grant Chang** (Wen Chang) is thrilled to make his West Coast debut at the Pasadena Playhouse. A native New Yorker, Chang minored in educational theater at New York University and studied acting at HB Studios. He's most recently known for his recurring guest star role as “Grant” in *Mr. Robot*. Theater: *Marian Jean* (NYTW), *The Nanjing Race* (Abingdon Theatre Company), *A Shot Away* (Red Fern Theatre), *Mame* with Sandy Duncan (Barrington Stage Co). Television: *Mr. Robot*, *Deception*, *The Knick*, *House of Cards*, *Daredevil*, *Law and Order*, *Law and Order Criminal Intent*. Film: *Off Jackson Avenue*, *The Cut Runs Deep*, *Finding You*, *Dark Horse*, *Feel*. Represented by Vanguard Management Group. | @hipcatg

**James Eckhouse** (Saul) Most recently James starred on Broadway opposite Bryan Cranston in the Tony Award-winning drama *All The Way* and as ‘Don Knotts’ in the HBO series *High and Mighty*. This fall he appears opposite Rita Wilson in *Simple Wedding* and in *Pencil Town*. James directed last season's highly acclaimed comedy, *American Hero*, a co-production with IAMA Theatre in the Carrie Hamilton. Other theater credits include: *Red Line* - IAMA, *The Escort* - The Geffen, *The Goat* - Mark Taper, *Mother Courage* - La Jolla, *Six Degrees of Separation* - Old Globe, and *The Downside* - Pasadena Playhouse. James has appeared in dozens of TV shows and films; he is perhaps most well-known to TV audiences playing ‘Jim Walsh’ on the original *Beverly Hills 90210*. He has a BFA in drama from the Juilliard School.

**BD Wong** (Director) Born and raised in San Francisco, Wong is the only actor ever to have received all five major New York Theater awards for a single role - namely his performance in *M. Butterfly* (his Broadway debut): the Drama Desk Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award, the Theater World Award, the Clarence Derwent Award, and the Tony Award.

Wong gained notice on HBO's critically acclaimed series *Oz* as the resilient prison priest (Father Ray) for the show's six-season run. Then, for eleven seasons on the top-rated NBC series *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* he played George Huang, FBI forensic psychiatrist and expert on the criminal mind.

Other television credits include ABC's *All-American Girl* (as Margaret Cho's brother Stuart) and HBO's telefilms *And the Band Played On* and *The Normal Heart*, as well as guest-starring roles on *Sesame Street*, *The X-Files*, *Madam Secretary*, *Nurse Jackie*, *NCIS: New Orleans* and *American Horror Story: Apocalypse*. He co-stars in *Awkwafina is Nora from Queens*, airing in January 2020 on Comedy Central. He recently has been seen in two drastically different television roles simultaneously: as the nefarious Hugo Strange on *Gotham* and as the mysterious transgender hacker "whiterose" on *Mr. Robot*. For his work on the latter, he received an Emmy, Gold Derby and a Critic's Choice Award nominations. Wong has appeared in more than twenty feature films, including *Bird Box*, *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*, *Jurassic World*, *Focus*, *The Space Between Us*, *Stay*, *The Salton Sea*, *Executive Decision*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, *Jurassic Park*, *Father of the Bride (1 & 2)*, and *The Freshman*. He can also be heard as the voice of Shang in the Disney animated films *Mulan* and *Mulan II*.

Wong's additional New York theater credits include *The Great Leap* at The Atlantic Theatre Company, *The Tempest*, *A Language of Their Own*, *As Thousands Cheer*, *Shanghai Moon*, and the Broadway revivals of the musicals *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* and Sondheim's *Pacific Overtures* (the latter for which he received a Drama League nomination for distinguished performance). He produced and directed *The Yellow Wood* for NYMF and Cindy Cheung's *Speak Up Connie* for the All For One Festival, and co-wrote and directed *Alice Chan* for the La Jolla Playhouse POP Tour. He recently starred regionally in *The Orphan of Zhao* at La Jolla Playhouse and San Francisco's A.C.T. In addition, he has starred in five productions of the one-man musical *Herringbone*.

Wong published his first book, *Following Foo: the electronic adventures of the Chestnut Man* (Harper Entertainment), a memoir about the premature birth of his son, in 2003.

Community service recognitions include those from the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Asian AIDS Project, GLAAD, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Asian Arts Alliance, Association of Asian-Pacific American Artists, East/West Players, Second Generation, Organization of Chinese Americans and APICHA. He sits on the boards of both the Actors Fund of America and Rosie's Theater Kids. | Instagram: @wongbd

**Lauren Yee (Playwright)** was born and raised in San Francisco and currently lives in New York City. Her plays include *Ching Chong Chinaman* (Pan Asian, Mu Performing Arts, SIS Productions, Impact Theatre), *Crevice* (Impact), *The Hatmaker's Wife* (The Playwrights Realm, The Hub, Moxie Theatre, AlterTheater, PlayPenn), *Hookman* (Encore Theatre, Company One), *In a Word* (SF Playhouse, Cleveland Public, upcoming at Strawdog and Mo'olelo), *King of the Yees* (The Goodman Theatre's New Stages Festival), *Samsara* (Victory Gardens, O'Neill Conference, Bay Area Playwrights Festival), and *The Tiger Among Us* (MAP Fund, Mu, Lark Playwrights Week).

Her work has been developed at Lincoln Center/LCT3, The Goodman, The Public, Second Stage, Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre, Centerstage, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Kitchen Dog, the Magic Theatre, and others. Former Dramatists Guild fellow, MacDowell Colony fellow, Public Theater Emerging Writers Group member, Women's Project Lab playwright, Second Stage Shank playwright-in-residence, and The Playwrights Realm Page One resident playwright. Her plays have been nominated for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the L. Arnold Weissberger Award, and the Outer Critics Circle's John Gassner Award.

Lauren Yee's *Cambodian Rock Band*, with music by Dengue Fever, premiered at South Coast Rep, subsequent productions at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, La Jolla Playhouse, City Theatre, Merrimack Rep, Signature Theatre, and Portland Center Stage.

Her play *The Great Leap* has been produced at the Denver Center, Seattle Repertory, Atlantic Theatre, the Guthrie Theatre, American Conservatory Theatre, and Arts Club, with future productions at InterAct Theatre, Long Wharf, and Asolo Rep. Honors include the Whiting Award, Horton Foote Prize, Kesselring Prize, Primus Prize, a Hodder Fellowship at Princeton, and the #1 and #2 plays on the 2017 Kilroys List. She's a member of New Dramatists, Ma-Yi Writers' Lab member, and Playwrights Realm alumni playwright. TV credits: *Pachinko* (Apple), *Mixtape* (Netflix). Current commissions include Geffen Playhouse, La Jolla Playhouse, Portland Center Stage, Second Stage, South Coast Rep. BA: Yale. MFA: UCSD. [www.laurenyee.com](http://www.laurenyee.com)