The Call Is Places
Jan 12 – Feb 10
2018–2019 SUBSCRIBER NEWSLETTER

The Great Leap
Jan 12 – Feb 10
McGuire Proscenium Stage
Much like theater, there’s something about sports that brings us together. The grit and glory of the game unearths intense emotions that allow us to bond with fellow fans and fiercely oppose the competition. So it’s no surprise that playwright Lauren Yee maneuvers this deeply personal and moving story within the game of basketball — the very sport her own father grew up playing on the neighborhood courts of San Francisco’s Chinatown.

Although the play centers on a 1989 basketball game in Beijing with players, coaches and a victory to claim, what happens on the court isn’t what matters most. The things that demand our attention happen off the court: the coming-of-age moments, the family secrets and the radical differences between Eastern and Western culture that the characters must navigate.

As the game clock counts down, the tension only builds as each character faces a pivotal moment of truth that will forever change their future. Thankfully, their fate is in the expert hands of Desdemona Chiang, a visionary director I’ve had the pleasure of working with in the past. She and this dynamic company of actors will move you to the core and reveal the risks of raising your voice — a freedom that so many of us take for granted.

I’m thrilled to begin 2019 with this groundbreaking work that illuminates history and the human spirit with wit, heart and bravery. I hope you enjoy every edge-of-your-seat moment.

Yours,

Joseph Haj
The Great Leap
by Lauren Yee

The Guthrie gratefully recognizes Jennifer Melin Miller & David Miller as Leading Producers; Robert Rosenbaum & Maggie Gilbert as Producers; and Iris & Jay Kiedrowski and Dr. Tadashi & Susan Allen as Associate Producers.

Setting
San Francisco, California (May 1989)
Beijing, China (summer/fall 1971 and June 1989)

Run Time
Approximately 1 hour, 45 minutes (including intermission)

Acknowledgments
The Great Leap was originally developed and produced by Denver Center for the Performing Arts Theatre Company (Chris Coleman, artistic director).

The New York premiere was presented by Atlantic Theater Company (2018).

The Great Leap was developed with the support of the Playwrights' Center and in the New Strands Residency, a program of the American Conservatory Theater (Carey Perloff, artistic director; Peter Pastreich, executive director).

A workshop production of The Great Leap was presented by New York Stage and Film and Vassar College at the Powerhouse Theater (2017).

Cast
in alphabetical order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Actor</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONNIE</td>
<td>Leah Anderson*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANFORD</td>
<td>Lawrence Kao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEN CHANG</td>
<td>Kurt Kwan*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAUL</td>
<td>Lee Sellars*</td>
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Creative Team

DIRECTOR: Desdemona Chiang
SCENIC DESIGNER: Sara Ryung Clement
COSTUME DESIGNER: Helen Huang
LIGHTING DESIGNER: Paul P. Whitaker
SOUND DESIGNER: Sarah Pickett
PROJECTION DESIGNER: Tom Mays
DRAMATURG: Jo Holcomb
VOICE AND DIALECT COACH: Keely Wolter
STAGE MANAGER: Jason Clusman*
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER: Tierra K. Anderson*
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Sun Mee Chomet
NYC CASTING CONSULTANT: McCorkle Casting, Ltd.
DESIGN ASSISTANTS: Ryan Connealy (lighting) Katharine Horowitz (sound) Lisa Jones (costumes)

*Member of Actors’ Equity Association
Not everyone in San Francisco’s Chinatown may think that Manford is the best point guard to play the game of basketball, but Manford does. And he is relentless. Not everyone may realize that Saul, the men’s basketball coach at the University of San Francisco, is washed up. But Saul can see the writing on the wall, and coaching his team to victory in a rematch of a 1971 game against Beijing University is his last chance to prove himself.

Not everyone in China knows that Wen Chang, a former translator and current coach of the Beijing basketball team, doesn’t really want the apartment, the air conditioner or any of the perks associated with a Chinese man of his stature. But Wen Chang knows, and it makes him afraid. And then there’s Connie, Manford’s pseudo-cousin, who knows enough about the three men’s secrets and dreams to tell the whole story.

When Manford, Saul and Wen Chang head to Beijing for the big game in 1989, they discover their meeting is about far more than basketball. As they uncover truths about their past and the magic those revelations conjure, one finds a mother, one finds a son and all of them find courage.

CHARACTERS

Manford, a scrappy, shorter-than-average Chinese-American point guard
Connie, Manford’s level-headed, Chinese-American “cousin” and a grad student at UC Berkeley
Wen Chang, the observant Chinese coach of Beijing University’s men’s basketball team
Saul, the foul-mouthed Jewish coach of the University of San Francisco’s men’s basketball team

Synopsis

PHOTO: LEAH ANDERSON, LAWRENCE KAO, LEE SELLAARS AND KURT KWAN (COURTESY OF LAWRENCE KAO)
THE PLAY

“every game is a second chance.”

– Connie to Manford in *The Great Leap*

### Five Things to Know About *The Great Leap*

1. **This play is (and isn’t) about basketball.**

2. Lauren Yee is one of the most produced playwrights in the country and has collaborated with director Desdemona Chiang for more than a decade.

3. It explores how family, identity and survival shape each character and bring them to a pivotal moment of truth.

4. The title refers to the game of basketball and the Communist Party of China’s Great Leap Forward campaign in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

5. You don’t have to be a history or basketball buff to engage with the story.

### Places in the Play

#### BEIJING
Located in northern China, the capital of the People’s Republic of China is the nation’s political, economic and cultural center. It is China’s most important transportation hub and port of entry, and its population was estimated to be 21.7 million at the beginning of 2016.

#### THE BRONX
The northernmost borough of New York City is still the poorest of the five boroughs, but it has been experiencing renewal in recent years. Like Beijing, the Bronx is densely populated and a cultural hub, serving as the birthplace of hip hop music and home to the historic Edgar Allan Poe Cottage.

#### CHINATOWN
Many cities around the world have neighborhoods known as Chinatown, but the one referenced in *The Great Leap* is in San Francisco, California — the largest Chinatown outside of Asia, originally developed by Chinese immigrants fleeing political oppression.
Playwright Lauren Yee

Lauren Yee was born and raised in San Francisco, and she currently lives in New York City. She received her B.A. from Yale University and her M.F.A. 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, with future productions coming to Arts Club Theatre Company and InterAct Theatre. Yee’s Cambodian Rock Band, with music by Dengue Fever, premiered at South Coast Repertory and is currently running at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, followed by La Jolla Playhouse and Victory Gardens Theater. Also upcoming is Yee’s play The Song of Summer at Trinity Repertory Company.

Her honors include the Horton Foote 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.

Director Desdemona Chiang

Desdemona Chiang is a stage director based in Seattle and the San Francisco Bay Area. She is the co-founder and co-artistic director of Azeotrope in Seattle. Her directing credits include Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Baltimore Center Stage, Pittsburgh Public Theater, California Shakespeare Theater, Seattle Repertory Theatre, PlayMakers Repertory Company, Long Wharf Theatre, Seattle Children’s Theatre, A Contemporary Theatre, American Shakespeare Center, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Heritage Theatre Festival, Book-It Repertory Theatre, Aurora Theatre Company, Seattle Public Theater, Shotgun Players, Crowded Fire Theater, Azeotrope, Impact Theatre, Playwrights Foundation, Golden Thread Productions, Washington Ensemble Theatre, One-Minute Play Festival, Ohio Northern University, University of Washington and Cornish College of the Arts, among others.

Chiang’s awards and affiliations include the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Theatre, SDCF Sir John Gielgud Directing Fellowship, Drama League Directing Fellowship, TCG Young Leader of Color, Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab and Directors Lab West and Gregory Award for Outstanding Direction. Chiang received her B.A. from University of California, Berkeley, and her M.F.A. in directing from University of Washington School of Drama.

“The play is about my father, but I wrote it for my younger brothers. 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.”

- Lauren Yee, on why she wrote The Great Leap

“Lauren [created] an incredible play about the historical tensions between East and West and the unexpected journey from being an invisible part of a collective to realizing one’s power as an individual — all within the frame of basketball, a beloved sport fraught with complex negotiations between the self and the group.”

- Desdemona Chiang, on the key themes in The Great Leap
China’s Great Leap Forward

By Jo Holcomb
Dramaturg

By the end of World War II, China was almost bankrupt. Civil war broke out, and by the fall of 1949, Communist leader Mao Zedong declared victory and announced the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. The Communist Party was the republic’s only political party, and they intended to defeat the foreign corruption that had plagued China by creating a classless, egalitarian society.

There were countless attempts to reorganize, and five-year plans abounded. In 1958, Mao launched his largest and most disastrous five-year plan to date: the Great Leap Forward. It would cause up to 46 million deaths from coercion, forced labor and the worst human-made famine in history. Politically and socially, it would threaten to bring down the whole revolution.

Rural collectivization was at the heart of the plan and viewed as a solution to the country’s economic woes. Collectivized farms were created to better organize peasant labor, eliminate waste and inefficiency and greatly increase production. People’s communes became official government policy, and steel production doubled.

As the need for industrial and agricultural output increased, so did the pressure on the people’s communes. Commune leaders inflated production figures to keep pace with other communes, and they experimented with radical agricultural practices, most of which proved disastrous. Crop production was greatly affected by the deployment of farmers to steel production and mass labor projects, such as the construction of roads, large-scale irrigation projects, dams and Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. By 1959, harvests were insufficient, and the resulting famine devastated the peasant population.

Many efforts that followed tried to right the floundering ship that China had become, which led to Mao’s 1966 Cultural Revolution. The people were forced to denounce bourgeois values. China’s schools and universities closed, and millions of students devoted themselves to this new revolution. Thousands were “re-educated” to carry the banner of a new life unmarred by Western influence.

Mao’s death in 1976 left China in political and economic turmoil. After an internal power struggle in 1978, the Communist Party appointed Deng Xiaoping as chairman. While Deng still opposed democracy, he implemented reforms that brought greater freedom to the people. For the first time in years, discourse among dissatisfied segments of Chinese society was allowed, which led to protests, demonstrations, hunger strikes and mass rallies.

By April 1989, discontent had grown out of control. In May 1989, nearly a million Chinese people, mostly students, crowded into central Beijing to protest for greater democracy and call for the resignations of Communist Party leaders deemed too repressive. On May 19, 1989, the leadership notified military units that martial law would be declared in Beijing. On June 3 and 4, the government sent thousands
of armed troops and hundreds of armored military vehicles into the city center to forcibly clear the streets of demonstrators.

On June 5, 1989, a column of military tanks rolled near Tiananmen Square. Suddenly, a young man stepped off the curb and stopped directly in front of the tanks. He was unarmed, wore a light-colored shirt and carried a shopping bag. Instead of running over the man, the first tank shuddered to a halt a few feet away. When the man refused to move, the tank tried to go around him. But the man again jumped in its path. Then he climbed onto the tank and pounded on its hatch door. When he finally jumped down, bystanders rushed him away.

Foreign photographers watching from nearby hotels snapped photos of the scene, and the film had to be smuggled past security police. Soon the image would become one of the most iconic photos of the 20th century, as the young man became a symbol of individual courage. No one knew who he was. News sources called him the Unknown Rebel and Tank Man.

The Tiananmen Square protests and 1989 crackdown remain taboo topics in China. There is no official death toll, and attempts to discuss, commemorate and demand justice for what occurred have been forcefully curtailed. In a 2007 informal survey at Beijing University, students were asked if they recognized the above photo of Tank Man that, for the rest of the world, is an immediately familiar symbol. Only 15 out of 100 students could identify the image.
Questions for Consideration

*The Great Leap* explores political tensions, cultural differences and personal histories that influence each character’s identity — themes that are bound to ignite reflection, discussion and questions like the ones below.

- How are current events shaped by history?
- What moment in history is most impactful to you and why?
- During political or cultural unrest, should we stay invisible to survive or rise up and speak out?
- Are talents and abilities developed through individual effort or inherited genetically?
- Why do we allow differences to divide us? How can we find common ground?
- What defines a courageous person?

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**As You Like It**

Feb 9 – March 17

by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

directed by LAVINA JADHWANI

A charming romantic comedy with gender-bending guises, one forest and four weddings between some of the Bard’s most beloved characters.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

- *As You Like It* is the most musical of Shakespeare’s plays.
- Rosalind is the largest female role in the Bard’s canon.
- It’s set in the here and now with the same great Shakespeare text.
- The clown is actually funny.