

PAN·ASIAN·REPERTORY

T · H · E · A · T · R · E

SENIOR ARTISTS

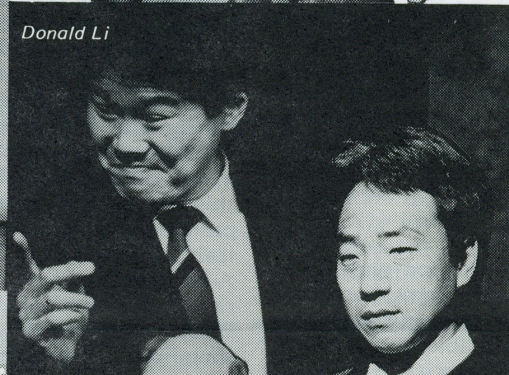
Volume III, No. 1
September 1986



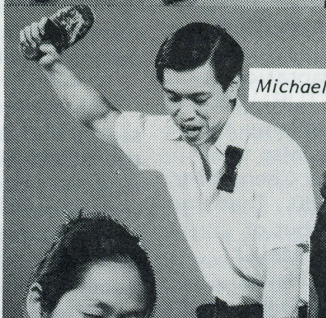
Mel Duane Gionson



Raul Aranas



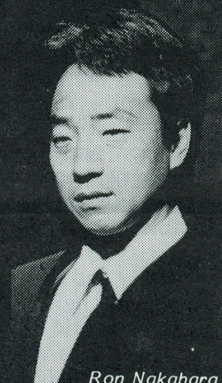
Donald Li



Michael G. Chin



Ernest Abuba



Ron Nakahara



Natsuko Ohama



Kati Kuroda



Lynette Chun

"Screw your courage to
the sticking place...,"
says Lady Macbeth.

DISCOVER

SENIOR ARTISTS

Pan Asian Rep has plucked up courage to take on our greatest challenge to date, that of designating Senior Artists who are the beginning core of a permanent resident ensemble. This year, from among the scores of actors who have worked with us these last dozen years, nine actors, of exceptional talent and versatility, have been selected. With long track records of Pan Asian Rep mainstage productions (a total of 80-Mainstage shows under their belts), they share in the goals of and commitment to the company. Most importantly, they have elected to pursue theatre in the purest and most exacting terms known in the industry. These are artists who welcome an environment that will stimulate their growth into becoming the finest stage actors possible.

By working on non-typical roles, by developing new projects, by having plays commissioned for them, by being able to make acting a primary priority in their existence, financially and spiritually, they will help set new standards of dedication and artistic risk-taking. These nine will serve as role models for younger artists. Each year we plan to enlarge the core group and to improve weekly salaries.

For the Asian American actor it will be especially fulfilling to be able to work regularly on non-typical roles, *tout ensemble*, from plays in the classical repertoire of world class drama in addition to our regular premieres of Asian and Asian American works.

Way back in 1975, Senior Artist Ernest Abuba proved his mettle as Boniface in Feydeau's *HOTEL PARADISO* directed by me at LaMama. Unlike the previous year's bilingual *A MID-SUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, set in 1000 BC China, *HOTEL PARADISO* was performed as written, a French farce set in late 19th century Paris. Again in 1975,

THE NEW YORK TIMES, in its review of *THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS* for the Equity Library Theatre to celebrate the bicentennial of the American Revolution, noted the non-typical casting of a Black actor as a southern colonel and a Japanese American actor as the runaway slave. Mel Gussow wrote, "Miss Chang comments on the play through her casting, freely mixing white, black and Oriental actors...As the colonel bosses Moses around, snapping 'nigger' at him, we see not only the underside of 'Southern gentility,' but also the racism that existed in the American theatre and movies in the 1930's." Two and one-half years later, Senior Artist Raul Aranas set new benchmarks with his portrayal of Trufaldino in Goldoni's *A SERVANT OF TWO MASTERS*. Again this was costumed and set in the period as written, 16th century Italy. Another first for Asian American actors was my interracial version of *APOLLO OF BELLAC* for the SSD&C Workshop Foundation in 1976.

Senior Artist Lynette Chun was the original mischievous sister, Yen, in my adaptation of the Peking Opera *RETURN OF THE PHOENIX* for LaMama and CBS in 1973. She was also the unforgettable heroine, Chen Bai-Lu, in *SUNRISE* in 1980. That production saw the debut of another Senior Artist, Mel D. Gionson...direct from Hawaii. Senior Artist Michael G. Chin can trace his Pan Asian beginnings as a Panderer and River in *THE LEGEND OF WU CHANG* in 1977.

1981's *FLOWERS AND HOUSEHOLD GODS* was a turning point for Pan Asian Rep, for it was after that production that Ellen Stewart threw us out of her 4th Street theatre. In hindsight, it was the best thing she could have done for us (of the many marvelous opportunities she gave us and of the support she still gives us) as it strengthened our independence, and we set up shop

to perform the next four years at 28th Street Theatre. That production of *FLOWERS* saw the debut of three Senior Artists, Ron Nakahara, Natsuko Ohama and, in a walk-on role, Donald Li, better known now as Sam Shikaze. Lastly, the notable impact and value of Kati Kuroda, who will have acted in four shows in a row from *MEDEA* through *SHOGUN MACBETH*, makes her our ninth Senior Artist.

Even before the formal incorporation of Pan Asian Rep in 1977, work with Asian American actors breaking new ground in the American theatre was going on. It is therefore high time and long overdue--13 years and 40 productions later--that we can proudly say Pan Asian Rep is a professional Asian American resident ensemble, the only one in the nation.

The company will continue to embrace the many guest appearances of other seasoned actors as well as insure an entree for newer actors, but the "die is cast" to "go for broke," to invest in and to commit to our most serious and deserving actors.

As we embark on our 10th season and as we rise to fulfill the Advancement Grant challenge of raising \$225,000, I reflect on the blood shed in the past battles and the awesome sacrifices made in order for Pan Asian Rep's work to endure, and I affirm not to regret one iota nor one moment. As one sage said, "To be an artist is to be blessed!"

- Tisa Chang



In July 1979, a short farce written by students of Fudan University called **SON OF THE 'ARTILLERY COMMANDER'** was staged in Shanghai. Although basically a comedy of errors, there was one element of the play that assured its immediate popular success and even earned it first prize in a Shanghai drama competition: the story hinged on a lowly youth impersonating the son of a high level army official.

The play holds an old party cadre up to ridicule and much is made of the obsequious fawning he displays in front of the 'commander's son'. The story would have appeared forced and unlikely if it had not been for the arrest of a youth by the name of Zhang Longquan for fraud some time earlier. Zhang had impersonated the son of Li Da, Deputy Chief of Staff of the PLA, for some months, and by the time this play was produced the impostor had taken on the aspect of a minor folk hero. Zhang had originally struck on the idea of pretending to be the son of an official after being frustrated in his attempts to get a ticket to see a highly popular production of Shakespeare's **MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING**. The ease with which the 'back door' of the theatre and Shanghai high society opened for him as a result of this simple ruse emboldened him to continue the deception. Starting off in late 1978 as a mere farmhand, an 'unreturned' countryside youth from Chongming Island, by the Spring Festival of 1979 Zhang had been accepted by the upper crust of Shanghai society and had the run of the city.

His slick and winsome ways won him fame and widespread popular credence; stories of this luminary from the north even took precedence over other local gossip for a time. It was only when his neighbors reported him, suspicious of his comings and goings at all hours of the day and night in a chauffeured limousine, that an investigation was finally undertaken and the deception uncovered.

Zhang Longquan had unwittingly become the son of Li Da, the PLA commander; following his arrest he went on to receive popular fame and recognition as the protagonist in a number of short stories and plays. Shanghai audiences seemed to have an insatiable appetite for new plays in 1979, and not long after **SON OF THE 'ARTILLERY COMMANDER'** was staged, another play with a similar theme appeared. It was called **IF I WERE REAL** (referred to by its other name **THE IMPOSTOR** hereafter). Written by three young Shanghai-ese--Sha Yexin, Li Shoucheng and Yao Mingde--from the Shanghai Drama Company, the play was only allowed restricted exhibition due to its controversial representation of the impostor, Li Xiaozhang, and the various cadres who appear. By the end of the year it was something of a *cause celebre*, and the question of whether it should be performed publicly or not eventually required the intervention of the then Director of Propaganda of the CPC, Hu Yaobang.

During the Fourth All-China Congress of Writers and Artists

held in Peking at the end of that year, **THE IMPOSTOR**, along with a number of similar works that were construed as being critical of older cadres and sympathetic towards youthful criminals, became the object of heated debate. **THE IMPOSTOR** was staged a number of times during the congress for the convenience of the delegates, but no overall consensus as to just how the questions it raised should be

treated in the arts was reached. Concerned by the lack of unanimity in what was the first major cultural gathering since before the Cultural Revolution, another meeting was organized for January 1980, when the play was again the object of considerable attention. Although organized in the name of the Dramatists', Film-makers' and Writers' Associations, the meeting reached a climax when Hu Yaobang directed a number of fairly withering comments at **THE IMPOSTOR** and the play's authors:

As I see it, IF I WERE REAL is not a mature work; it contains some serious defects. I might be wrong, however. Now, what do I mean when I say it is not a mature work? First and most importantly, I feel that the characters that form the human scenery of the work give a [collective] impression [of the society] since the Third Plenum that is neither sufficiently real nor typical. At the end [of the play], a positive character, Lao Zhang, does make an appearance, and that is laudable, to be sure; but he's still an outsider. He appears as a liberator, and definitely has something of the saviour about him. Furthermore, characters that deserve no sympathy at all are unabashedly indulged. Do people like Li Xiaozhang actually exist? Of course they do. But what we've got in this play is countryside youth being represented as willing to resort to any means of deception to get back to the

city. The character is a morally low being with an equally low awareness. His sole motivation in life is to get back to the city, and he is prepared to do anything to achieve this goal. By creating such a character the authors have failed to reflect the true spirit and moral perception of Chinese youth during the New Period. The broad masses of young people surely would, on reflection, feel affronted by this misrepresentation. What could have produced such a cheat? The play lays the onus of responsibility on the corrupt cadres, and by so doing treats the cheat with even greater sympathy. These are faults of the play.

This play has been staged for quite some time, and I believe there's been a mixed reaction to it. These reactions must be seen in context. Some young people, in particular, those who want to return to the cities, or parents with children in the country side, may well react to this play positively. Another group is convinced that there will be trouble if certain special privileges enjoyed by leading cadres go unchecked, and they are in favour of exposing them. Insofar as the play works toward this end, it has performed a positive service. However, if it is permitted to be staged as it is, we must ask ourselves: what other social effects will it have? This question deserves reflection.

The question of 'social effect' dominated the cultural world throughout 1980; and, in fact, it continues to do so today. Ba Jin, a famed veteran writer and long time resident of Shanghai, and the most publicly outspoken writer of his age, in his 'defense' for **THE IMPOSTOR** in "More on the Little Impostor", says:

I wrote one of my 'random thoughts' in late September last year in which I talked about a little impostor. At the time he had already been arrested and a play based on him was being staged. There

*were all sorts of reactions to that play, and it was even condemned on the grounds that it showed the impostor in a sympathetic light, and attempted to excuse his crimes. Accordingly it was declared that this type of play had a negative social effect and that showing it would encourage juvenile criminality, and so on and so forth. Therefore the play was not to be performed or published, 'a domestic shame should not be made public'. I haven't seen the play, but I have read it. I sympathize with those people who were cheated as well as with the little impostor. In my view, it is the social environment that we should be condemning. Rough and flawed the play may certainly be—it is like a comic skit in street theatre—but it lashes out at unhealthy social tendencies, and attacks attitudes towards social privilege. It is like a bucket of cold water thrown in the face of a person in a swoon. To my mind, the staging of the play had a very salutary effect. The play I'm talking about is called **IF I WERE REAL**.*

I have been asked whether by using the word 'little' when referring to the impostor I mean to absolve him of some guilt. Most certainly not! However, there are little impostors and big impostors. People like Zhang and Wu are only little impostors. Then, there are the big impostors; and there are a lot of them. Those people who created a god and conjured up hosts of demons, with their trumped up charges and accusations, false statistics and forced 'suicides'... All of those big impostors have been out of reach of the law for long enough. Everyone is waiting for news of their trial. So am I.

-Taken from Geremie Barne's preface of **THE IMPOSTOR** published by **RENDITIONS MAGAZINE**

SHOGUN MACBETH ADVANCEMENT GALA



On November 20, 1986 at 7 pm, the **SHOGUN MACBETH** Benefit Committee, chaired by Board Trustee Joan Lebold Cohen, will host the **SHOGUN MACBETH ADVANCEMENT GALA** at Playhouse 46, 423 West 46th Street.

The benefit includes a pre-show champagne reception, a special performance of **SHOGUN MACBETH**, and a post-performance gala supper at the theatre.

A limited number of tickets, at \$150 each, are still available. All funds from this event will be used towards matching our National Endowment for the Arts Advancement Grant, which will provide the company with \$75,000 when we raise \$225,000 by the end of 1988.

The funds from this prestigious grant will be used for Institutional Development and will enable the company to eliminate its deficit, purchase computer equipment, and expand our professional marketing efforts.

If you would like to purchase tickets for this exciting event and help Pan Asian Rep "advance," call the office at (212) 505-5655.

SHEDDING LIGHT ON VICTOR EN YU TAN

The *Village Voice*, on deadline for the presses with its review of Pan Asian Rep's *A SONG FOR A NISEI FISHERMAN*, called the office for photos. What they wanted was very specific: "Send us shots that show Victor En Yu Tan's lighting." Victor's work receives positive notice in the press often, and Pan Asian Rep is delighted to include eight of its productions in his portfolio. With *THE IMPOSTOR*, Victor will mark his ninth collaboration with the company.

Victor's first show with Pan Asian Rep was *STATION J* in 1982. That was the internment camp epic, which included 24 scenes, 50 characters and a slide show. As Tisa Chang remembers, "When Victor finally sent me a resume in 1982, I engaged him on the spot. I had been wondering why he had never contacted us before, as Pan Asian Rep had been producing for 5 years, but Victor was worth waiting for. He never quibbled about money, and if designers think budgets and fees are below par now, you can imagine the constraints we all had to work under then."

Born in Hong Kong in 1950, Victor is the son of a Presbyterian minister, another "P.K." (Priest's kid) to journey into show business. The trip was an illuminating one, beginning with eight years of growing up in Occupied



Japan. "We were going through old documents, and I noticed that our entry papers were signed by General Douglas MacArthur himself. I remember the bombed out blocks and the re-building. And when we arrived in the United States in 1958 ... well, the size. We traveled by train from San Francisco to Boston. Our home was so large. Everything in Japan is much smaller."

Victor attended the Boston Latin School, the oldest high school in the United States ("it beats out Harvard by one year"), then on to Columbia University where he started in Engineering, moved on to East Asian Studies and, with a serendipitous twist of events, fell into theatre. "I got a work study job as a technical assistant for the Drama Department. All the students had their projects, so I was the one to build the sets and hang the lights." This led to a summer position with the New York Shakespeare Festival's mobile unit. At the end of the summer, Victor was offered a permanent tech job with



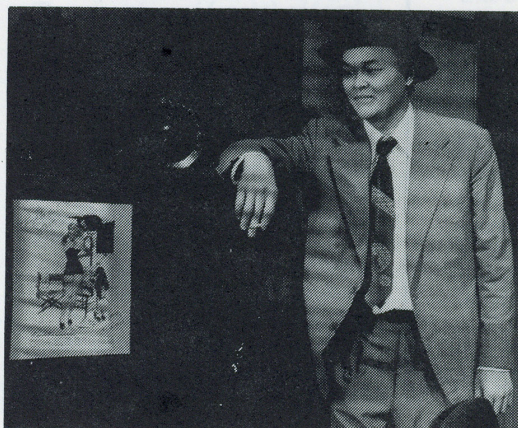
NYSF and left school, unaware that he would one day be the recipient of an Obie Award for sustained excellence in Lighting Design.

How did Victor become a designer? "I was dropped on my head," he says. "As a master electrician, I decided I could do my job better if I assisted a designer on a project." Soon Victor was doing more than assisting and, as a result, made his debut as Lighting Designer with the American Place Theatre production of Frank Chin's *THE YEAR OF THE DRAGON*. This led to innumerable regional and Off Broadway assignments, including the original *FOR COLORED GIRLS ONLY* ... --and his Obie.

Victor designs lighting equipment for theatre, movies and television and is the creator of the low voltage mini-striplight, an indispensable addition to the tools of the lighting designer. But to create the lighting for a new play is Victor's passion. "I like to work with a playwright as he gives birth to a new piece. My lighting can help to evolve, to change, to frame the work, and that's exciting and fulfilling."

As you read this, Victor is off on his honeymoon, wed to Julie Nessen, whom he met last year at Musical Theatre Works. But what about *THE IMPOSTOR*? Tan smiles broadly and responds, "I'll be back at the board in time" ... and we suspect Pan Asian Rep will get more than a few calls for photos that show Victor En Yu Tan's lighting.

- G. Theodore Killmer



HELP PAN ASIAN REP
"ADVANCE"
Pan Asian Rep has been selected as a recipient
of a National Endowment for the Arts
3 Year Advancement Grant.
For every \$3 that you contribute, the NEA will match
it with \$1. As we enter our 10th Anniversary Season,
please support us as we "advance" to greater heights!

PAN·ASIAN·REPERTORY T·H·E·A·T·R·E

47 Great Jones Street • New York, NY 10012

Pan Asian Rep is the professional Asian American theatre company producing--under the highest artistic standards--new plays from the Asian American experience, adaptations of World classics, and American premieres of Asian masterworks.

We mount our mainstage productions in Playhouse 46, 423 West 46th Street, between 9th and 10th Avenues.

We are a Primary Organization of the New York State Council on the Arts and a participant in the National Endowment for the Arts Advancement Program.

