



Presented by Artists at Play  
and Latino Theater Company

AN EXPERIENCE L.A. EVENT

Friday, September 22, 2023  
Los Angeles Theatre Center  
Downtown Los Angeles

#### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

*This Is Not a True Story* is a new play by Preston Choi, presented by Artists at Play in partnership with the Latino Theater Company.

#### THIS IS NOT A TRUE STORY

*This Is Not a True Story* is a play by Preston Choi in which CioCio from *Madama Butterfly* and Kim from *Miss Saigon* are trapped in their respective stories.

Playwright **PRESTON CHOI** is a recent MFA graduate from UC San Diego whose work focuses on Asian American/mixed race/queer lives, social science fiction, and the horrors of being alive. His plays include *Happy Birthday Mars Rover*, *performing class*, and *A Great Migration*.

Director **REENA DUTT** is a theatre and film director whose current projects include *Guards at the Taj* by Rajiv Joseph at Chester Theatre Company and *Accidental Feminist* by Alaudin Ullah at The Public.



Madama Butterfly poster by Adolfo Hohenstein, 1904



Miss Saigon poster, 1989



Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter poster, 2015

## MADAMA BUTTERFLY

*Madama Butterfly* is an opera by Giacomo Puccini that premiered at La Scala in 1904 and remains one of the most frequently performed operas. The story is a tragedy involving the marriage of a U.S. Navy officer and a teenage geisha in Japan at the turn of the 20th century. It is a canonical western opera that thoroughly exemplifies Orientalist stereotypes and tropes.

The origin of the story can be traced to the one-act play *Madame Butterfly: The Tragedy of Japan* (1900) by American writer David Belasco, based on the short story “Madame Butterfly” (1898) by another American writer, John Luther Long, which itself was adapted from the 1887 French novel *Madame Chrysanthème* by Pierre Loti.

*Madama Butterfly* has been adapted for film, musical theatre, television, and other forms, including as the 1989 musical *Miss Saigon* (set in 1970s Vietnam), David Henry Hwang’s 1988 play *M. Butterfly*, and Weezer’s 1996 album *Pinkerton*, named after the U.S. Navy officer character.

## MISS SAIGON

*Miss Saigon* is a musical that recasts *Madama Butterfly* in Vietnam in the 1970s. The story is about a white American GI, Chris, and a seventeen-year-old Vietnamese prostitute, Kim, who fall in love in Saigon in the last days of the Vietnam War. *Miss Saigon* was written by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg (both French), who also wrote *Les Misérables*. *Miss Saigon* premiered on London’s West End in 1989 and ran on Broadway for a decade and more than 4,000 performances. The original Broadway production was nominated for 10 Tony Awards in 1991. At the same time, the production was criticized and protested for casting white actors as Asian characters and for its Orientalism and misogyny.

## KUMIKO, THE TREASURE HUNTER

*Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter* is a 2014 film by white American brothers David and Nathan Zellner. The brothers had read on message boards an “urban legend” about the mysterious death of a Japanese woman in Minnesota, and “to satiate our curiosity,” David Zellner said in an interview for *IndieWire*, “we started coming up with a backstory about what would lead someone to this point.” As they learned more about the real story, they found “there were all these different versions of the truth, so many layers and blurred lines between truth and fiction.” Their fiction film is somewhat based on the life, and death, of a real person, Takako Konishi, who was born in Japan in 1973 and died in America in 2001. There is a lot that remains unknown about Takako Konishi’s death and the days leading up to it; the film *Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter* imagines one story. Her death was also the subject of a 2003 short documentary film entitled *This Is a True Story*.

## ORIENTALISM

In the 1978 book *Orientalism*, Palestinian American cultural critic, academic, and activist Edward Said identified Orientalism as a discourse and a “systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and even imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.” Orientalism is a colonial, racist construct of the western gaze that Said explains is inextricably tied to relationships of power and domination. While Orientalism is made up of lies and myths, Said points out the ways those lies and myths are tied to socioeconomic and political institutions, and how art, culture, politics, and power are intertwined.



Los Angeles Theatre Center (LATC), Downtown Los Angeles



LA Opera: *El Último Sueño de Frida y Diego*

## ARTISTS AT PLAY

Artists at Play produces theatrical programming that explores the Asian American experience. One of their core values is to “respect and observe the cultural nuances and contexts of the stories we tell.”

## LATINO THEATER COMPANY AND THE LOS ANGELES THEATRE CENTER

Latino Theater Company (LTC) operates the Los Angeles Theatre Center (LATC), a five-theater performing arts venue in downtown Los Angeles. LTC was founded in 1985 with a goal of contributing new stories and novel methods of expression for the American theater repertoire and increasing artistic opportunities for underserved communities. They program work by local playwrights that speaks to important issues and highlights new voices within Latina/o/x, Black, Asian American, Jewish American, and LGBTQ+ communities.

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- ⦿ How do you interpret the title of the play, *This Is Not a True Story*?
- ⦿ What are the narratives the characters are trapped in?
- ⦿ How do the characters find agency?
- ⦿ How does representation in literature or popular culture relate to culture, politics, and power more broadly?
- ⦿ Does it matter who writes a story or who plays a role? Why?

## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- ⦿ Artists at Play  
[artistsatplay.org](http://artistsatplay.org)
- ⦿ Latino Theater Company at the Los Angeles Theatre Center  
[latinotheaterco.org](http://latinotheaterco.org)
- ⦿ Upcoming Visions and Voices events:
  - 10/9** LA SKINS FEST: *Lakota Nation vs. United States*
  - 10/26 through 10/29** *Ghosts of USC: A Historical Immersive Haunt*
  - 11/19** *The Met in HD—X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*
  - 11/30** Experience L.A.—LA Opera: *El Último Sueño de Frida y Diego*
- ⦿ Classes and events at the USC School of Dramatic Arts  
[dramaticarts.usc.edu](http://dramaticarts.usc.edu)
- ⦿ Classes at the Department of American Studies and Ethnicity  
[dornsife.usc.edu/ase](http://dornsife.usc.edu/ase)



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## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

**JAVIER GARIBAY** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about themes explored in *This Is Not a True Story*. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](https://libraries.usc.edu) but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

### BOOKS

- ⦿ Rena M. Heinrich, [\*Race and Role: The Mixed-Race Asian Experience in American Drama\*](#) (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2023).
- ⦿ Josephine Lee, [\*Milestones in Asian American Theatre\*](#) (London: Routledge, 2022).
- ⦿ Josephine Lee, [\*Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage\*](#) (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1997).
- ⦿ R. A. Shiomi, Don Eitel, and Josephine Lee, [\*Asian American Plays for a New Generation\*](#) (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 2011).

### DATABASES

- ⦿ [Asian American Drama](#)
- ⦿ [Drama Online](#)

### JOURNALS

- ⦿ [\*The Journal of American Drama and Theatre\*](#)  
A widely acclaimed journal devoted solely to drama and theater in the USA—past and present.
- ⦿ [\*Theatre Journal\*](#)  
This journal's broad array of scholarly articles and reviews has earned it an international reputation as one of the most authoritative and useful publications of theatre studies available today. Drawing contributions from noted practitioners and scholars, *Theatre Journal* features social and historical studies, production reviews, and theoretical inquiries that analyze dramatic texts and production.

