



EXPERIENCE L.A.

Artists at Play: ***Two Mile Hollow*** by Leah Nanako Winkler

Thursday, November 1, 2018
The Lounge Theatre, Los Angeles

KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW

- *Two Mile Hollow* is a new play by Leah Nanako Winkler, a rising star in playwrighting.
- Its L.A. premiere is presented by the Asian American theatre collective Artists at Play.
- The play upends and critiques racist tropes and practices in theatre and entertainment, including yellowface and the “white people by the water” genre.

TWO MILE HOLLOW

Two Mile Hollow tells of the Donnelly family’s last gathering at Two Mile Hollow, a century-old house near the beach in East Hampton, New York, that has long been the family’s summer home. As the Donnellys reunite there for a weekend to divvy up the furnishings and pack before the movers arrive, secrets are revealed and longstanding rifts erupt.

The play has had simultaneous world premieres in Chicago, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and L.A. in the 2017–18 season. It made the 2017 Kilroys List, a list of excellent un- or underproduced new plays by female and trans playwrights.

LEAH NANAKO WINKLER

Leah Nanako Winkler is a Japanese American playwright from Kamakura, Japan, and Lexington, Kentucky. In addition to *Two Mile Hollow*, her plays include *Kentucky* (2015 Kilroys List), *Death for Sydney Black*, *Diversity Awareness Picnic*, *Double Suicide At Ueno Park*, and *Linus and Murray*. Her new play, *God Said This*, premiered at the 42nd Humana Festival of New American Plays in 2018, received the 2018 Yale Drama Series Prize, and will premiere Off-Broadway at Primary Stages in 2019.

THE “WHITE PEOPLE BY THE WATER” GENRE

Two Mile Hollow is a riff on the “white people by the water” genre, a popular genre in theatre and film in which affluent white people tackle their problems and uncover family secrets in a big house by the water (often while drinking white wine). The genre is employed to take the veneer off the often polite, seemingly frictionless surface of white wealthy culture as it is presented publicly.

Some famous examples of “white people by the water” stories, many of which are classic works of theatre or recipients of major awards like Pulitzer Prizes and Oscars, include:

- The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov (1895)
- On Golden Pond* by Ernest Thompson (1981)
- Dinner with Friends* by Donald Margulies (1988)
- August: Osage County* by Tracy Letts (2007)
- Elemeno Pea* by Molly Smith Metzler (2014)
- Of Good Stock* by Melissa Ross (2015)
- Big Little Lies* (2017)

YELLOWFACE IN ENTERTAINMENT

Two Mile Hollow is also a response to the commonality of yellowface in entertainment, especially in movies and theatre. Yellowface is the practice of non-Asian actors playing Asian characters, sometimes involving the use of makeup and often involving heavy stereotyping and a Eurocentric portrayal of Asian characters. Egregious examples in theatre history include Gilbert & Sullivan’s *The Mikado* (1885), an operetta set in Japan, with Japanese characters, that has frequently been produced with an all-white cast, and many productions of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s classic musical *The King and I* (1951). Far from being a thing of the past, yellowface persists even in contemporary Hollywood. Recent examples include the casting of Emma Stone to play a character of Hawaiian and Chinese heritage in the film *Aloha* (2015), Tilda Swinton as a character of Tibetan descent in *Doctor Strange* (2016), and Scarlett Johansson as a Japanese manga character in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017).



The Mikado (1885)



Tilda Swinton in *Doctor Strange* (2016)

ASIAN AMERICANS IN AMERICAN THEATRE

According to a 2018 report by the Asian American Performers Action Coalition, while racial and ethnic diversity is increasing on the stages of New York City (the U.S. theatre capital), there is still scant representation of Asian Americans. The 10-year average for the hiring of Asian American actors on Broadway is 3.1 percent, the report found. As of the 2010 Census, the population of New York City was 12.7 percent Asian. While Broadway stages are getting more and more diverse, “Caucasians continue to be the only ethnicity to over-represent compared to their respective population size in New York City,” the report concluded.

ARTISTS AT PLAY

Artists at Play is a collective of Asian American creative professionals who have come together to curate quality theatre in Los Angeles. They present theatrical productions that would otherwise be missing from our local landscape and that tell the stories of communities underrepresented in theatre. Artists at Play aims to challenge, engage, and broaden the theatrical experience for the Los Angeles community.



Artists at Play



Leah Nanako Winkler



FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Why do you think the “white people by the water” genre is so popular? Why do playwrights and screenwriters keep going back to it?
- In *Two Mile Hollow*, a white family is played by actors of color—Asian American and Pacific Islander actors in particular. How did the production make it clear that these were white characters? And how were the casting choices essential to this play’s production?
- Why do you think the character Charlotte, a woman of color, was played by a woman of color?
- What did you think of the acting style in *Two Mile Hollow*? How did it relate to the satirical text?

IF YOU LIKED TONIGHT’S PERFORMANCE, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT

- Leah Nanako Winkler | leahwinkler.org
- Artists at Play | artistsatplayla.blogspot.com
- Some of L.A.’s other theatrical producers and venues

centertheatregroup.org	playwrightsarena.org
eastwestplayers.org	coeurage.org
thelac.org	celebrationtheatre.com
geffenplayhouse.org	companyofangels.org

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

LISA MARIE CROW of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about tonight’s performance. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. journal articles and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

BOOKS

- Jarcho, Julia. *Writing and the Modern Stage: Theater Beyond Drama*. New York: New York University, 2017.
- Jasper, Jennifer, Martyna Majok, Will Arbery, Kelly Younger, Leah Nanako Winkler, and Skylar Fox. *Off Off Broadway Festival Plays: 39th series*. Samuel French Acting Edition. New York: Samuel French, 2015.
- Winkler, Leah Nanako. *Kentucky*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2017.

DATABASES

- Asian American Drama
- North American Theater Online
- Digital Theater Plus

JOURNALS

Available in print in Doheny Memorial Library and online at libraries.usc.edu.

- Journal of American Drama and Theatre*
- Modern Drama*
- Theater*