

AAPAC responds to "The Nightingale"

July 9, 2012

Though AAPAC is primarily concerned with Asian American representation on New York City stages, we felt the current Page to Stage production of "The Nightingale" at La Jolla Playhouse is relevant to our mission and warrants our attention.

The story of "The Nightingale" is set in China. Of 11 cast members, however, only 2 are Asian American; the rest of the cast is made up of other races. We are deeply disappointed that in the rare instance of a new musical set in an Asian country, the creative team (Moises Kaufman, director; Duncan Sheik, composer; Steven Sater, lyrics) did not decide to cast all or mostly Asian actors. We do not in any way blame or begrudge the actors currently cast for their involvement - this is not about them. We simply find it baffling and frustrating that unlike "The Lion King" or "Bombay Dreams", musicals where the majorities of their multicultural casts have been comprised primarily of African- and Indian-American actors respectively, the creative team would not consider it an artistic or social priority to find and cast Asian Americans in the majority of roles for a story set in Asia. That Moises Kaufman was a part of this decision - an artist who has long been concerned with giving voice to an oppressed minority and speaking their truth - is even more disappointing.

We want to know: Why was this decision made? Was there a perception on the part of the creative team that the Asian American talent pool was inadequate? Was it based on fear that there wasn't enough of a box office draw with an all Asian cast? Was there not even that much thought given to telling the story with an Asian American cast in the first place?

"The Nightingale" is a glaring example of the continued lack of employment opportunities given to Asian American actors. This invisibility reinforces how Asian artists are often denied a voice in shaping how Asians are represented, particularly when it comes to the appropriation of Asian cultures and themes. We urge all of our friends and supporters to speak out against cases of exclusion like these. Stand with us in our opposition to minorities getting excluded from future projects under the seemingly benevolent guise of "multi-cultural casting."