

# Asian American Performers Action Coalition Deems 2015-16 Theatre Season Most Diverse on Record

 [www.broadwayworld.com/article/Asian-American-Performers-Action-Coalition-Deems-2015-16-Theatre-Season-Most-](http://www.broadwayworld.com/article/Asian-American-Performers-Action-Coalition-Deems-2015-16-Theatre-Season-Most-Diverse-on-Record-20180115)

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The Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC) released its annual report, "Ethnic Representation on New York City Stages" today for the 2015-16 theatre season. The report detailed the ethnic breakdown of actors on Broadway and at the 16 largest non-profit theatre companies in New York City. The report also tallies numbers for disabled actors. This year's report amasses 10 years of data, tracking hiring practices from the 2006-07 to 2015-16 seasons. It is the only publicly available report of its kind.

The 2015-16 New York theatre season was the most diverse on record. 35% of all roles went to actors of color and disabled actors, a new high. The breakdown was as follows:

- Caucasian actors: 65% of all roles
- African American actors: 23% of all roles
- Latinx actors: 7% of all roles
- Asian American actors: 4% of all roles
- Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) actors: 0.83% of all roles
- American Indian actors: 0.08% of all roles
- Disabled actors: 0.67% of all roles

Caucasians actors continue to be the only ethnicity to over-represent compared to their respective population size in New York City. However, it seems safe to say that there is an upward trend in the casting of minority actors after four years in a row of exceeding the 10-season average.

Non-traditional casting numbers also reached new highs this season after largely remaining stagnant for the past 10 years. On Broadway, 14% of all available roles were cast without regard to race specificity. Among the non-profit theatres, 17% of all available roles were cast without regard to race specificity.

The 2015-16 season was Broadway's most diverse on record, filling 36% of all its roles with minority actors, the first year it has broken through the 30% marker. The season of the diversely cast *Hamilton* also included large numbers of African American performers in *The Color Purple* and *Shuffle Along*; an all-Latinx cast in *On Your Feet*; a predominantly Asian American cast in *Allegiance* (marking the first time an Asian American composer was produced on Broadway); and large numbers of hearing impaired actors in *Deaf West's Spring Awakening*.

The casting for straight plays vs. musicals, however, provided a stark contrast. Only 16% of roles in plays went to minority actors in Broadway plays, and of that, 14% were secured by African American actors, helped by productions such as *Eclipsed* (which also brought the rare instances of an African American female director and an African American female playwright to Broadway), *The Gin Game* and *The Crucible*. Only one Asian American actor and one MENA actor was cast out of all Broadway plays.

The non-profit theatre companies filled 35% of all its roles with minority actors in the 2015-16 season, a 3-point drop from the season prior. This is the second year in a row that they have exceeded their 10-year average of 26%, a sign that more conscious efforts are being made to increase diversity.

African American performers were represented across more companies than in years past including *Skeleton Crew* at the Atlantic Theater Company, *Funny House of a Negro* at the Signature Theatre, *Barbecue and Eclipsed* at The Public Theater and *Familiar* at Playwrights Horizons, among others. The only specifically Latinx story this season was *Daphne's Dive* by Quiara Alegria Hudes at the Signature Theatre. There were no Asian-specific stories and no Asian American Playwrights produced. Numbers for Asian American actors dropped this season; they were the only minority group to fall below their 10-year average.

The following theatre companies hired the greatest number of minority actors in the 2015-16 season based on the percentage of available roles.

1. Classic Stage Company (58%)
2. Second Stage Theater (53%)
3. The Public Theater (50%)
4. Theatre For A New Audience (48%)
5. Primary Stages (38%)

The following theatre companies hired the lowest number of minority actors in the 2015-16 season based on the percentage of available roles.

1. Roundabout Theatre Company (5%-tied)
1. MCC Theater (5%-tied)
2. Manhattan Theatre Club (12%)
3. Atlantic Theater Company (16%)
4. York Theatre Company (18%)

Classic Stage Company, after coming in below the industry average for the previous 9 years, tops this season's Most Diverse list largely thanks to their production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* as well as more non-traditional casting than in previous years. The companies

taking home the diversity crowns when looking at the 10-year perspective are the Signature Theatre (48% of all roles went to minority actors) and The Public Theater (36% of all roles). Almost 25% of all available roles at The Public Theater have been non-traditionally cast in the last 10 years, more than any other theatre company in the survey.

In contrast, MCC Theater's and the Roundabout Theatre Company's positions at the bottom of the diversity race are consistent with their performances over the last 10 years. Only 8% of all roles at MCC in the last 10 years went to minority actors; 9% at the Roundabout. In addition, non-traditional casting has rarely been employed at either company. Of MCC Theater's 166 roles in the last 10 years, only 8 were cast non-traditionally. Of the Roundabout Theatre Company's 824 roles in the last 10 years, only 17 were cast non-traditionally.

More details can be found in the full report, available for download at [www.aapacnyc.org](http://www.aapacnyc.org).

Heather Hitchens, President & CEO of the American Theatre Wing has released a statement in response to the AAPAC's findings, which can be read below:

*We applaud our colleagues at AAPAC for compiling this report and continuing to hold all of us in the theatre community accountable as we strive to create a fairer and more inclusive industry.*

*From its founding day in 1917 up until the present day, the Wing has been committed to diversity and inclusion. Founded by women at a time when national suffrage was yet to be realized, the Wing boldly established an interracial policy at its Stage Door Canteen six years before the armed forces were integrated. More recently, the Wing established the Andrew Lloyd Webber Initiative to provide grants to schools and scholarships to a diverse group of students who will strengthen our professional pipeline and help make our stages be more reflective of the country we are living in. Much more needs to be done and this report from AAPAC makes that very clear.*

*In the coming months, the American Theatre Wing's Diversity Committee, led by our chairman, David Henry Hwang, will reflect on this data and work on expanding the study to include offstage vocations, gender diversity, and other similarly important topics of inclusion. By the close of 2018, we hope to announce new partnerships, programs, and strategies that will help us continue to move the needle. We urge our colleagues in the theatre to do the same. It is not only a matter of doing what is fair and just; it is absolutely critical to the vitality of our field.*

The mission of Asian American Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC) is to expand the perception of Asian American performers in order to increase their access to and representation on New York City's stages. AAPAC publishes the only publicly available statistics on minority representation in the NYC area and has been a leader in discussions and forums on diversity with artistic institutions and the Broadway community. [www.aapacnyc.org](http://www.aapacnyc.org)