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Christine and Cindy: Worth Your Attention and Here is Why

Posted by [Julie Huang](#) on Fri, Sep 07, 2012 @ 07:46 AM

A local theater house in the San Diego, California decides to produce a mostly non-Asian Americans cast of its current musical production set in China.

Sounds like something that would have happened after 1882 when Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. Who would have thought that something like this actually happened in 2012.

Here's the story: How did a theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, in San Diego produce The Nightingale, a musical set in China without an Asian American cast? What would have happened if this was a play being produced in a local community theater in 2012 about the history of slavery in the US? or a love story in Puerto Rico? or a family in Germany? or the Middle East?

Can something like this happen today in any other community without drawing backlash?

In response to the social media fury unleashed by Asian Americans and actors/audience goers of all backgrounders, La Jolla Playhouse hosted a free public forum on July 22, 2012. You can bring yourself up to speed by reading the media clips from [Playbill](#) and [Backstage.com](#).

Two established New York City-based actresses, Christine Toy Johnson and Cindy Cheung, who are members of the Asian American Performers Action Coalition, put their busy work schedules on hold, got on a plane to San Diego to participate in this panel discussion to ask the production team and casting director, in front of a live audience, to explain why. Christine and Cindy were joined by Andy Lowe, founder and producer of Chinese Pirate Productions.

[The LA Times](#) reported that Christine said that the incident reminded her of "how invisible we still are" and that Asian Americans were "not invited to sit at the table" for this production. The same article noted that Cindy said, "she reacted to the casting with "dismay and disgust and confusion" and that the casting of the musical as "unacceptable."

- Here's the full [video of the public forum](#).
- Here's a video of La Jolla Playhouse's [apology](#) after the public forum. The production has casted 2 Asian American actors out of a
- Ken Choy from Hyphen Magazine published this [write-up](#), "La Jolla's 'Nightingale' Doesn't Sing and Apology does sway many APIAs".

I was simply moved by the energy that Christine and Cindy put into this. I hope we share this story with others about how two women stepped forward to move fair and equitable casting forward for all actors.

So who is Christine Toy Johnson and who is Cindy Cheung?

Take a step closer to get to know these women and the work they do.



1. Christine Toy Johnson - she's written plays and performed in plays and musicals. She and her husband Bruce Johnson directed and produced a documentary about Transcending: The Wat Misaka Story, the first basketball player of Asian descent and the first non-Caucasian person to play to be drafted into the NBA around the time when 120,000 innocent Japanese Americans were incarcerated into internment camps by the US government during World War II. This film is playing at the RightsFest, a pan-ethnic civil rights film festival sponsored by the Korematsu Institute for Civil Rights and Education on Friday, September 7, 2012 at 7pm. Buy your tickets in advance [here](#) or own purchase the DVD [here](#).

"I believe in society's inclusion of every citizen of our world with every fiber of my soul. Anti-discrimination advocacy, especially through the arts, has become a large, wonderful and enriching part of my life." - a quote from Christine Toy Johnson found on her website.



2. Cindy Cheung is an actress, writer, singer who has worked in theater, film, and TV. Cindy will be performing live for the All for One Theater Festival in New York City on Sunday, September 15 at 2:00pm and Saturday, September 23 at 7:00pm in her critically-acclaimed one-woman show, "Speak Up Connie", directed by BD Wong. This is not a typo. Her name is Cindy and the show is about Connie. Cindy had me in stitches and in tears and I just loved it. So glad that folks will have a chance to see what they almost missed. Bring your parents to see this play. Tickets and more info can be found [here](#).

"Ms. Cheung brings an open-hearted humor to her description of the many death-by-a-thousand-cuts incidents of conscious and unconscious racism that she has encountered. No matter what your background, you will find yourself thinking, yes, *absolutely!*"

- StageBuzz.com

Speaking out is what gets change to happen. Christine and Cindy framed and shared their perspective on this Nightingale controversy in a way that encourages anti-discriminatory, equitable and fair treatment in casting decisions for all. I hope they continue to take the lead on these issues and I hope the rest of us can follow and do the same in our respective industries.

Disclosure: Kaimen Company does not represent Christine Toy Johnson or Cindy Cheung or their respective projects.