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Why are Asian Americans invisible on New York stages? Feb. 13 industry town hall confronts the powers-that-be.

Posted on January 30, 2012

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NEW YORK CITY (<http://maps.google.com/maps?ll=40.7166666667,-74.0&spn=0.1,0.1&q=40.7166666667,-74.0> (New%20York%20City)&t=h):

The Asian American (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian_American) Performers Action Coalition (AAPAC (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Aapac-Asian-American-Performers-Action-Committee/274685732556028>)) released today a slew of statistics which they argue constitute the smoking gun that Asian American performers are not part of “the trend toward more inclusive casting” in New York theater.

In a prepared statement, the coalition states that:

- “Asian American performers are the least likely among the major minority groups to play roles that are not defined by their race”;
- “[In terms of casting], Asian American performers saw their numbers drop, from 3 percent of all roles five years ago to 1 percent in the 08/09 and 09/10 seasons with a slight up tick to 2 percent this past year.
- “While they [Asians] were as likely as their Latino colleagues to be non-traditionally cast five and four years ago, in the past three years, the numbers of non-traditionally cast roles increased for Latinos while they decreased for Asians”;
- “Asian Americans comprise 12.9 percent of New York City and is the city’s fastest growing major minority group, yet Asian American actors accounted for only 1.6 percent of all available roles in new productions on Broadway, 3.2 percent of roles at non-profit companies and 2.3 percent of roles when looking at the industry as a whole”; and
- “ There were only 18 principal Broadway contracts for Asian American actors in the last five years.”

This is not the first time that Asian American actors have spoken out en masse and using numbers to back up their claims. This time though, they come equipped with graphs and pie charts.

<http://randygener.wordpress.com/2012/01/30/why-are-asian-actors-invisible-on-new-york->

[stages/broadwaynonprofitpast5years/](#)

Casting comparisons of Broadway and Non-Profit Theaters over the past five years

Since September 2011, Asian American actors have been banding together to address the problem of a lack of representation of Asian American actors on New York City's leading stages during the past five years. Two town-hall-style meetings were held at LaMaMa E.T.C.

The first meeting, which attracted some 150 actors, was held to gauge interest and build a coalition among the actors, who broke off into separate groups so that they can voice their individual issues.

The second meeting, held a month later, involved a few directors and playwrights (Adam Bock was one of them). Casting agents and casting directors were not invited.

Enter [David Henry Hwang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Henry_Hwang) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Henry_Hwang), one of America's greatest living playwrights and author of the most outstanding play of 2011 (*Chinglish*).

Hwang will moderate a discussion, "RepresentAsian: The Changing Face of New York Theater" on Monday February 13th at 7 p.m. at the Pope Auditorium at [Fordham University](#)

([http://maps.google.com/maps?](http://maps.google.com/maps?ll=40.8608333333,-73.8844444444&spn=0.01,0.01&q=40.8608333333,-73.8844444444(Fordham%20University)&t=h)

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Among those with longer memories, Hwang's participation echoes the *Miss Saigon* controversy, which not coincidentally Hwang semi-fictionally tackled in his brilliant, Pirandellian family drama *Yellow Face*.

(<http://randygener.wordpress.com/2012/01/30/why-are-asian-actors-invisible-on-new-york-stages/rolesnon-traditionallycastyrbyethnicgrp-aapac2012/>)

Roles non-traditionally cast, comparison year to year by ethnic groups | Courtesy of AAPAC

With Hwang leading an industry panel (names yet to be announced), AAPAC's full report about the ethnic make-up of casts will encompass all shows that recently opened on Broadway and on 16 of the largest non-profit theaters in New York City. These companies include [Atlantic Theatre Company](#) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre>), [Classic Stage Company](#), [Lincoln Center Theatre](#) ([http://maps.google.com/maps?](http://maps.google.com/maps?ll=40.772311,-73.983403&spn=0.01,0.01&q=40.772311,-73.983403(Lincoln%20Center%20for%20the%20Performing%20Arts)&t=h)

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([New%20York%20Theatre%20Workshop](http://maps.google.com/maps?ll=40.726564,-73.990088&spn=1.0,1.0&q=40.726564,-73.990088(New%20York%20Theatre%20Workshop)&t=h))&t=h), [Playwrights Horizons](#), [Primary Stages](#), [Public Theatre](#), [Roundabout Theatre Company](#)

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roundabout_Theatre_Company), [Second Stage](#), [Signature Theatre](#), [Theatre for a New Audience](#), [Vineyard Theatre](#) and [York Theatre Company](#).

If I were the artistic director or trustee of those non-profit companies, I would be worried; I've seen the stats of how many Asian actors they've hired in past seasons. They are nothing to write Mama about.

(<http://randygener.wordpress.com/2012/01/30/why-are-asian-actors-invisible-on-new-york-stages/piechart/>)

The good news is that “the percentage of minority actors in relation to total number of roles has increased, hovering at or near 21 percent for the past four years compared to 14 percent five years ago,” according to the AAPAC report. “The percentage of minority actors cast in roles which were not racially specific (what is commonly referred to as non-traditional or inclusive casting) rose year to year, an indicator of creativity within the casting process and, possibly, the breaking down of traditional racial stereotypes.”

[\(http://randygener.wordpress.com/2011/10/27/randy-gener-leads-anatomy-of-a-breakout-panel-with-broadway-talent/hwang/\)](http://randygener.wordpress.com/2011/10/27/randy-gener-leads-anatomy-of-a-breakout-panel-with-broadway-talent/hwang/)

David Henry Hwang

Compared to Asian American actors, African-American performers were more fortunate. They’ve been employed more often than Asian or Latino actors are. In the 2008-09 and 2009-10 seasons, the percentage of black actors to total number of roles doubled (to 16 percent) compared to the situation five years ago (8 percent). Last year, that percentage was 14 percent.

The report continues:

“African-Americans were far more likely than any other minority group to be cast in a role that did not specify race. Though far behind in total numbers, Latino performers also doubled their visibility, accounting for 4 percent of total roles this past season compared to 2 percent five years ago.

“Only 10.6 percent of all roles this past year were cast without regard to race and very few minority actors were seen in leading roles. With very few ethnic and minority stories in mainstream New York theatre during this period, expanding non-traditional casting seems to be the best way to secure more employment opportunities for minority actors. Numbers for Native American (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_and_ethnicity_in_the_United_States_Census), Arab American/Middle Eastern and disabled actors were negligible and practically non-existent.”

AAPAC’S mission is “to expand the perception of Asian American performers in order to increase their access to and representation on New York City’s stages,” states a prepared statement. “This report will hopefully be used to track casting trends and to raise awareness where any inequities exist.”

AAPAC and Fordham University present
“RepresentAsian: The Changing Face of New York Theater”
Monday, February 13th, at 7:00 pm
The Pope Auditorium at Fordham University
60th St/and Columbus avenue, just inside main entrance

To RSVP, send an email to aapacrsvp@gmail.com (<mailto:aapacrsvp@gmail.com>) Seating is limited.

Roundtable participants are currently being confirmed and will be announced in the next week.

To check the latest updates and to submit questions for roundtable participants, go to:
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Aapac-Asian-American-Performers-Action-Committee/274685732556028> (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Aapac-Asian-American-Performers-Action-Committee/274685732556028>)

(<http://randygener.wordpress.com/2012/01/30/why-are-asian-actors-invisible-on-new-york-stages/aapac/>)

"RepresentAsian" poster of AAPAC: Asian American Performers Action Coalition

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