

**PORTLAND  
CENTER STAGE  
AT THE ARMORY**

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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Lauren Yee's Sharp and Funny Play *The Great Leap*  
Brings Portland Center Stage and Artists Repertory  
Theatre Together Once Again**



**Previews Begin Jan. 15 | Opening Night is Jan. 21 | Closes Feb. 13**

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**December 20, 2021 — PORTLAND, OR.** Portland audiences have the chance to experience the work of award-winning playwright Lauren Yee — among the most-produced and widely celebrated playwrights in the country in recent years — through a co-production with Portland's largest and oldest theater companies: Portland Center Stage and Artists Repertory Theatre, respectively. *The Great Leap* is directed by Zi Alikhan, ART's artistic directing fellow, and the production marks his Portland directorial debut.

*The Great Leap* begins preview performances on January 15, opens on January 21, and runs through February 13, on The Armory's U.S. Bank Main Stage. Tickets are on sale now.

"We're thrilled to partner with Artists Rep to launch this fantastic, boisterous play. It has been a joy to collaborate with ART and support the deeply creative work of director Zi Alikhan. *The Great Leap* uses bright humor and a celebration of the unsung heroes of basketball to unearth complexities around the violence embedded in entrenched political systems, both in the U.S. and in China," PCS Artistic Director Marissa Wolf said.

"We are so pleased to co-produce this feisty, funny play with Portland Center Stage. *The Great Leap* examines facets of the U.S./Chinese relationship and how our presumptions and lack of understanding distort and poison it. At a time of rising anti-Asian violence, this conversation about missteps of the past feels especially vital if we are to collectively find a better way forward," ART Interim Artistic Director Luan Schooler said.

*The Great Leap* brings together basketball, politics, and history to explore personal identity, cultural ties, and relations between the U.S. and China. The play is loosely inspired by the real-life adventures of Yee's father, whose basketball heroics led him to visit China in the 1980s. Its fictional plot — set in Beijing and San Francisco in two different time periods — also incorporates a monumental historic event, the Tiananmen Square uprising of 1989, for a moving story that keeps the tension rising right up until the final buzzer.

*The Great Leap* had its world premiere in 2018 and, prior to the COVID-19 shutdown, it was one of the most-produced new plays on stages across the country in 2019-2020. Since then, social unrest and political events continue to bring a renewed immediacy to this biting and timely story. Portland audiences get to see this show at a unique time when sports and politics are also playing out on the world stage; *The Great Leap* opens on the eve of the Beijing Winter Olympics, which is currently being boycotted by the U.S. government.

The *Los Angeles Times* called *The Great Leap* “stunning” and noted that it “lures us in with its humorous focus on ordinary characters — basketball coaches and players — then pans out to locate them in a cataclysmic moment in history.” *Stage and Cinema* said *The Great Leap* “fires on all cylinders and succeeds on many levels,” raving that, “as with *Cambodian Rock Band*, Lauren Yee, a genius playwright with a perfect touch, finds the truths in tiny stuff and big reveals. [*The Great Leap*] is just that. It lands hard and true.”

## **ABOUT THE PLAY**

Basketball standout Manford Lum is a fast-talking, dominating teenager on the street courts of Chinatown. But when he elbows his way onto a college team traveling to Beijing for a “friendship” game, the outcome isn’t what anyone expects. Traversing history that is both personal and political, this sharp and funny play pits a U.S. coach against his Chinese counterpart — and country-wide protests and cultural revolution against their deeply personal tolls and generational fractures.

## **PLAYWRIGHT LAUREN YEE**

**Lauren Yee** is a second-generation Chinese American playwright, screenwriter, and TV writer, born and raised in San Francisco. Her play *The Great Leap* has been produced at the DCPA Theatre Company, Steppenwolf, Seattle Repertory, Atlantic Theatre, the Guthrie Theatre, American Conservatory Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre, Arts Club, and InterAct Theatre. Honors include the Doris Duke Artists Award, Whiting Award, Steinberg/ATCA Award, American Academy of Arts and Letters Literature Award, Horton Foote Prize, Kesselring Prize, Primus Prize, a Hodder Fellowship at Princeton, and her plays *The Great Leap* and *Cambodian Rock Band* were featured as the #1 and #2 plays on the Kilroys List in 2017. She's a Residency 5 Playwright at Signature Theatre, a New Dramatists member, a Ma-Yi Writers' Lab member, and a Playwrights Realm alum. Yee's TV credits include *Pachinko* (Apple) and *Soundtrack* (Netflix). **Yee's new play *Young Americans* was commissioned by PCS and is currently in development.**

## **DIRECTOR ZI ALIKHAN**

Zi Alikhan is a queer, first-generation, South Asian-American, culturally Muslim theater director, educator, and leader. He is the inaugural artistic directing fellow at ART, where he also serves as director of its DNA: Oxygen, an initiative dedicated to the development and production of new work generated by, led by, and featuring artists of color. Honored as a 2021 TCG Rising Leaders of Color, Alikhan's directing credits include Manik Choksi's *The Ramayan* (currently in development at Ars Nova), *Ragtime* (Playmakers Repertory Company), *The Flick* and *Red Speedo* (Juilliard), *House of Joy* (New York Stage and Film), *Shabash!* (LCT3), *Lady Apsara* (filmed for Prospect Theatre Company), *The Wild Party* (Yale), and *Les Misérables* (Pace). Alikhan was also a resident director for the *Hamilton* National Tour. He is an alum of the Drama League Directors Project, Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab, Drama League Artist Residency Program, MTC Alper Directing Fellowship, Williamstown Directing Corps, and a graduate of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.

## **THE CAST**

Making their PCS/ART debuts are Tommy Bo (CBS's *FBI: Most Wanted*) playing the teenage basketball protege Manford; Sami Ma (*Vietgone* at American Stage Theatre Company) as Manford's cousin, Connie; and Kenneth Lee (*The Machine* at Park Avenue Armory) as Wen Chang, coach of Beijing University's men's basketball team. Portland comedic standout Darius Pierce returns to play Saul, the coach of the University of San Francisco's men's basketball team and Wen Chang's colleague-turned-rival. Completing the cast are Brian Burger (*The Rocky Horror Show* with Lakewood Theatre Company) as the understudy for Saul; Wynne Hu (*Eclipsed* at Corrib Theatre) as the understudy for Connie; and Mac Schonher (Warner Media's *Bronxopolis*) as the understudy for Manford.

## **THE CREATIVE TEAM**

In an exciting first for PCS, the entire design team is made up of artists who are Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander. Bringing the worlds of *The Great Leap* to life are Choreographer Sunny Min-Sook Hitt (co-creator of *Body Of Work*, an exploration of dance and economics); Set Designer Chika Shimizu (*The Great Wave* at Berkeley Repertory Theatre); Costume Designer

Nicole Wee (*Martin Luther on Trial*, National Tour); Lighting Designer Cha See (*The Fever* at Minetta Lane/Audible Theater); Sound Designer and Original Composer Fan Zhang (*At the Wedding* for Lincoln Center Theatre's LCT3); Associate Director Barbie Wu (ART resident artist, education manager, and star of ART's recent play *The Chinese Lady*); and PCS and ART regular, Stage Manager Kristen Lyn Mei Kuk Mun.

## TICKET AND PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

**When:** January 15 – February 13, 2022\*

\*Opening Night/Press Night: Friday, January 21, at 7:30 p.m.

Preview Performances: January 15, 16, 19, and 20 at 7:30 p.m.

Pay What You Will Performances: January 16 and February 10 at 7:30 p.m.

**Where:** On the U.S. Bank Main Stage at The Armory, 128 NW Eleventh Ave, Portland, OR.

**To Purchase Regular Tickets:** Prices range from \$25 to \$87 and tickets may be purchased at [pcs.org/the-great-leap](https://pcs.org/the-great-leap), 503.445.3700, or in-person from the box office. *Prices vary by date and time and are subject to change.*

**ART Members:** Contact the ART Box Office at 503.241.1278 or [boxoffice@artistsrep.org](mailto:boxoffice@artistsrep.org).

**Ticket Specials:** Visit [pcs.org/deals](https://pcs.org/deals) to view ticket specials, including Rush Tickets, Pay What You Will, Arts for All, Active Duty, Military Veteran, Student, Under 30, The Armory Card, Groups of 10+, and more.

**Please Note:** This production is recommended for ages 13 and up; it contains adult language. Learn more by calling 503-445-3700.

**Accessibility:** Learn about accessibility options at [pcs.org/access](https://pcs.org/access).

## PORTLAND CENTER STAGE

**Portland Center Stage** was established in 1988 as a branch of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and became independent in 1994. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Marissa Wolf and Managing Director Cynthia Fuhrman, the company produces a mix of classic, contemporary, and world premiere productions, along with a variety of high-quality education and community programs. As part of its dedication to new play development, the company has produced 28 world premieres, many of which were developed at its JAW New Play Festival. Portland Center

Stage's home is The Armory, a historic building originally constructed in 1891. After a major renovation, The Armory opened in 2006 as the first building on the National Register of Historic Places, the first performing arts venue in the country, and the first building in Portland to achieve a LEED Platinum rating.

**Portland Center Stage is committed to identifying and interrupting instances of racism and all forms of oppression, through the principles of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA). Learn more at [pcs.org/idea](https://pcs.org/idea).**

**Portland Center Stage's 2021-2022 season** is funded in part by Season Superstars the Regional Arts and Culture Council and the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation; Season Sponsors the Oregon Arts Commission, a state agency funded by the state of Oregon and the National Endowment for the Arts, and US Bank; and Producing Sponsors Ellyn Bye, Ray and Bobbi Davis, Jess Dishman, and Ronni LaCrute. Further support comes from Production Sponsors Mark Spencer, Argyle Winery, and Deschutes Brewery.

## **ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE**

**Artists Repertory Theatre's** (Artists Rep or ART) mission is to produce intimate, provocative theatre and provide a home for a diverse community of artists and audiences to take creative risks. Artists Rep (est. 1982) is Portland's oldest professional theatre company and has become a significant presence in the U.S. regional theatre with a legacy of world, national, and regional premieres of provocative new work with the highest standards of stagecraft. In 2016, ART became the 72nd member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) and is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN). Plays developed by ART have subsequently been produced in New York, Chicago, London, and throughout the country. Recognition for ART developed plays includes the Dramatists Guild Foundation Award, the Edgerton New Play Award, NEA Funding, the Mellon Foundation National Playwright Residency Program, American Theatre Magazine's Most-Produced Plays, and coverage in the New Yorker and the New York Times. In 2021, the Oregon Media Production Association (OMPA) honored Artists Rep with the Creative Innovation Award for the company's pivot to digital mediums in response to the

COVID-19 Pandemic. ART recognizes that we are a predominately white organization and operate within systemic racism and oppression, and that silence and neutrality are actions of complicity. We commit ourselves to the work of becoming an anti-racism and anti-oppression organization, and will work with urgency to end racial inequities in our industry and our culture. To learn more about our organization and programs, please visit <https://artistsrep.org/about/>

**Artists Repertory Theatre** receives generous support from our community of patrons, including significant leadership gifts from The Robert & Mercedes Eichholz Foundation; The James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation; Ronni Lacroute; The Oregon Legislature, The Oregon Cultural Trust and The Multnomah County Cultural Coalition; David & Christine Vernier; The Oregon Community Foundation; The Shubert Foundation; and the Regional Arts and Culture Council. Additional Corporate and Foundation support comes from The Kinsman Foundation; National Endowment for the Arts; The Cowlitz Tribe Education and Arts Fund; Oregon Arts Commission; US Bank; The Jackson Foundation; PGE Foundation; Sheri and Les Biller Foundation; and Rafati's Catering.

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