A NOTE FROM THE CREATORS

Our journey in creating Masters of the Currents began with meeting Innocenta Sound-Kikku over a decade ago and, through her, getting to know the Micronesian community in Hawai‘i. The play was created with the contributions of many multi-generational voices and stories from this community, including elementary school children, story circles with elders, workshops with at-risk youth, and interviews with community leaders and scholars. TeAda’s methodology is to gather stories shared with us and to collaborate with the community to create today’s performance. We are proud to say that all of the cast members in the show have been part of this multi-year process, and this performance is a continuation of a voyage to deepen and expand horizons.

When we began this process, one of the first things we learned is that the Micronesian community is incredibly diverse. It is very difficult to represent the community in a single story or play, when there are so many languages, ethnicities, islands, states, and countries listed under this one geographic region and category—a region and category that has been imposed and not chosen by the people. We hope our performance can be a catalyst for dialogue toward understanding, compassion, and connection to one another that launches a wave of many more creative conversations to come.

We are so grateful to Daria Yudacufski and Marie-Reine Velez and the USC Visions and Voices staff for their belief in and support of community-engaged work and presenting us. This play would not be possible without acknowledging the importance of our community and cultural navigator, Innocenta Sound-Kikku. She is a leader in the community and founder of Pacific Voices in Kalihi, who opened doors for us to find individuals and groups that were willing to share their stories. We also want to give a huge MAHALO to Eric Johnson and the Honolulu Theatre for Youth and to George Kon of T-Shirt Theatre for helping in the early development of the work with community workshops, open rehearsal performances, and time exploring with their ensembles while in residence in Honolulu and Kalihi Valley.

TeAda Productions is a theater of color rooted in the stories of immigrants and refugees. We are committed to healing and honoring the lives of the displaced, exploited, and overlooked. Our artistic process starts and ends with conscious listening, community building, and creative courage. We believe in the transformative power of the arts. In these challenging times, it is vital for us to create, perform, and take a stand.

Mahalo nui loa,

Leilani Chan & Ova Saopeng
Jermaine/Aukai Pangelina
Leimomi/Maria/Leialoha Tumbaga
Leimomi Herrell

The creators and cast dedicate tonight’s performance to Iremamber Sykap and his family. On April 5, 2021, Iremamber, a 16-year-old Chuukese boy, was murdered by a Honolulu Police officer. Sykap’s death highlights the racism, racial profiling, and extreme poverty faced by Micronesian youth in Hawai’i. Much like the death of George Floyd, Iremamber’s death has mobilized his community to speak out and organize against the hatred faced by so many Pacific Islander youth in Hawai’i and across the continent. We hope that tonight’s performance will spark dialogue, raise awareness, and begin healing for the community. #JusticeforIrememberSykap
A BRIEF HISTORY OF TEADA

TeAda Productions is a Los Angeles–based, non-profit theater company created to expand awareness of issues affecting underserved communities through the development and presentation of performances by people of color. TeAda is a nomadic theater of color rooted in the stories of immigrants and refugees, committed to healing and honoring the lives of the displaced, exploited, and overlooked. Our artistic process starts and ends with conscious listening, community building, and creative courage. Through theater workshops and performances, TeAda offers acts of service that are transformative and impactful.

TeAda’s national touring productions include Refugee Nation and Global Taxi Driver. Created in 2005, Refugee Nation was the first nationally touring play about Laotian refugees in the U.S. Gathered from Lao-American oral histories, the interdisciplinary theater performance explores the impact of war, refugees, global politics, and U.S. citizenship. For more information, visit www.teada.org.

BIOS

Leilani Chan (Playwright, Co-creator) is an award-winning performance artist, actor, playwright, director, cultural worker, and Founding Artistic Director of TeAda Productions. During 2021 she has been a guest faculty teaching at University of Hawai‘i at Manoa and Cal State University, Long Beach. Leilani received her third National Performance Network Creation Fund led by Intermedia Arts and Co-commissioned by East West Players for Global Taxi Driver, a transnational community-based ensemble performance exploring immigration and mobility in the 21st century. Leilani is co-creator of Refugee Nation, the first nationally touring play about Laotian refugees in the U.S., which was commissioned through MAP Fund, NPN Creation Fund, and Legacies of War. Leilani is currently serving as Board Secretary for the Consortium of Asian American Theaters and Artists (CAATA). Leilani received the 2009 Rainbow Award from the Los Angeles Women’s Theater Festival. She currently resides in Los Angeles, CA. Born and raised in Hawai‘i, Leilani attended Hampshire College and obtained her MFA from UC Irvine in 2004.

Emeraldrose Hadik (Eva) grew up on the island of Kosrae, where she was born in the one and only hospital. She has been to many other islands but will always consider Kosrae her home. Emerald’s family is half American, half islander. Her family’s cultural style is a mixture of Kosraean and American. She celebrates many American traditions and also celebrates and shows full respect towards island cultures and traditions.

Jayceleen Ifenuk (Soso) is a native of Chuuk, one of four Federated States of Micronesia. She arrived in her new land of Honolulu, Hawaii, and was raised in Kalihi, which is known as a rough neighborhood. She is a graduate of Kalaheo High School, and continues to pursue a Sociology and Political Science degree at the University of Hawaii. In the midst of negativity, she has clung to role models who inspire hope and belief that anything is possible—even for a small island girl. Jayceleen wants nothing more than to share these same lessons to the next generation of Micronesian youth.

Jermine M. Lisua Kaipat (Alanso) was born on the island of Saipan, the largest island of the Northern Mariana Islands, a commonwealth of the U.S., but raised on the island of Hawaii. He is familiar with a lot of traditions through his culture, especially dance. Jermine has danced for several cultural groups including other Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Fiji, and Hawaii. He also enjoys spending time with friends and jamming out on the ukulele. He is a proud graduate of Farrington High School and an alumni of local theater company T-shirt Theatre. Maika‘i ke akua, aloha.

Kiki Rivera (Tinana) was born and raised in Lualualei, Oahu, Hawaii, and works and plays within the intersections of culture and arts of Oceania, theatre, activism, education, poetry, and playwriting. They are passionate about capacity building for all indigenous artists and nurturing the growth of future Pasifika creators. They hold a BA in Theatre and MFA in Playwriting from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM), and is also a member of the 2018 ArtEquity cohort. Original plays include Fa‘alavelave: The Interruption. Published plays include “Puzzy” (featuring award-winning New Zealand playwright Victor Rodger) found in the anthology Samoan Queer Lives, “To Our Black and Brown Babies of Ocean and Islands” in the anthology We’re Not Neutral, and “Kumu Kukui” in Lighting the Way: An Anthology of Short Plays About The Climate Crises. Kiki currently works as a storyteller with Empowering Pacific Island Communities (EPIC).
Joan Osato (Video Designer) has played a pivotal role in local and national theater for over two decades and has been a core member of Youth Speaks since 2001. At Youth Speaks she produces live performance events for the organization, including Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Festival as well as Life is Living in cities around the country. She has brought her production and design talents to Living Word Project Repertory works such as The Break/s, Word Becomes Flesh, Scourge, Tree City Legends, Spirituals, and Chasing Mehserle, as well as create work as an ensemble member of critically acclaimed theater group Campo Santo. She was the inaugural recipient of the San Francisco Arts Commission Artist and Communities Partnership Grant (2007), Theater Bay Area Award for Excellence in Video Design (Tribes by Nina Raine, directed by Jonathan Moscone at Berkeley Rep), and the Surdina Foundation’s Artists Engaged in Social Change Award for NOGALES with Richard Montoya and Sean San Jose. She is an awardee of prestigious grants from the MAP Fund, the Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation, SFAC’s Individual Artist Commission, NEFA National Theater Project, and the National Performance Network/Visual Artists Network Creation Fund. She is honored to be a part of this amazing project!

Ova Saopeng (Tamana, Co-creator) is an actor, teaching artist, associate artistic director, and producer with Los Angeles–based TeAda Productions. Born in Savannakhet, Laos, and raised in Hawaii, he has a B.A. in Theater from the University of Southern California. With his partner in life and art, Leilani Chan, the dynamic duo are champion leaders for equity, diversity, and inclusion in the field of theatre. Ova is co-creator of Refugee Nation, a play about the Lao-American refugee experience. Previous works with TeAda Productions include Kalo Projects, Native Immigrant, TeAdaWorks, Delicious Reality, and Refugee State—all works that focus on highlighting the refugee and immigrant experience. He has performed in the world premiere of Global Taxi Driver at Intermedia Arts in Minneapolis and the west coast premiere at East West Players in Los Angeles. Ova was one of six playwrights selected to write for Our American Voice, a part of the Smithsonian Institute’s exhibit I Want the Wide American Earth at the Japanese American National Museum exploring Asian American immigration. He has worked with national theatre companies including Children’s Theater Company, Center Theater Group, East West Players, Pangea World Theatre, and Lower Depth Theatre. He has toured colleges, universities, and primary schools with Asian American–led hereandnow theater company, and children’s theaters We Tell Stories and Waters Edge Theater. His film credits include Disney’s Pirates of the Caribbean: World’s End, Love is Good, Burmese Refugee, Seeds of Hope, Go to Sleep: A Lao Ghost Story, and Warsol. You can follow him on IG at @og_ova.

Innocenta Sound-Kikku (Community Navigator) is a community leader in Hawai’i, originally from the beautiful island of Lukunor in Chuuk State, Federated States of Micronesia. With 10 years of law enforcement as her background, she is an active advocate, storyteller, interpreter, teacher, and cultural navigator with a particular passion for women and children. Innocenta is founder of the intergenerational youth program “Pacific Voices” at Kokua Kalihini Valley (KKV), and Vice-Chair of the Micronesian Health Advisory Coalition. She plays a key role in connecting her community to resources and cultural support and advocates for their rights to health and culture.

Maximiliano Urruzmendi (Lighting Designer/Technical Director) was born in Atlanta to Uruguayan immigrants, and fell in love with performance at a young age. Since moving to the Bay Area, he has had the privilege of working alongside an amazing community of artists, theaters, and professionals in creative and technical capacities. He is currently lucky enough to be the PM/TD/LD for Teada’s Masters of the Currents, Contra-Tiempo’s JoyUS JustUS, and Youth Speak’s Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam Festival.

Jade Puga (Producer) manages and produces TeAda’s Los Angeles programming, including TeAda’s Performing Artist Impact Fellowship and the Los Angeles community collaborations with the Program for Torture Victims. She is a graduate of USC School of Theater and is a 2021 Los Angeles region California Arts Council Administrators of Color Fellow.
KINISOU & MAHALO & THANK YOU

Fran Lujan and Pacific Islander Ethnic Arts Museum, Heidi Quenga, Audrey Alo, Ualani Hoopai, Alisi Tulua, Rita Scanlan, Charlene Kazner, Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, Chaslyn Kuena-Ludwig, John Akapito, Kara Miller and COFA Alliance National Network.


DEVELOPMENT PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Alliance for Drama Education is a non-profit organization, managed by one of its founders, whose mission since 1980 is to “help young Hawai`i rehearse for life by mastering performance skills needed to win jobs, justice, and joy.” Its flagship project T-Shirt Theatre, is a community of practice which engages Kalihi youth from middle school to young adult, to transform their lives through drama and reflective practice. This practice focuses on devising home-grown theatre, as a lab to foster life skills and grow contributing adult citizens. The vortex of our Kalihi community is Farrington High School, whose motto is “Enter to learn, go forth to serve.” For more information, visit www.rehearseforlife.com.

Pacific Voices of Kokua Kalihi Valley works to perpetuate cultural art forms and history through after-school programming, performances, and team sports. Hula classes are providing a venue for youth of all backgrounds. Housed at Kuhio Park Tower B-105, Pacific Voices serves as a Cultural Center for Pacific Islanders. For more information, visit kkv.net/index.php/youth-a-family.

Micronesian Health Advisory Coalition (MHAC) is a volunteer-based organization that advocates for the health and well being of Micronesian to improve their quality of life in seeking justice and equality for the Pacific Community. MHAC promotes a healthy lifestyle through All Mike Sports and provides information about helpful programs and procedures through professional interpreters. MHAC also supports cooperation between Healthcare Providers and the Micronesian Clients who speak many different languages.

Honolulu Theatre for Youth (HTY) produces professional theatre and drama education programs that make a difference in the lives of young people, families, and educators in the state of Hawai‘i. HTY believes that drama education and theatre are unique, socially based education and art forms that help their participants and audiences walk in the shoes of others, allowing them to expand their imaginations, enrich their lives, and discover the infinite possibilities in the world. HTY works towards a future for Hawai‘i in which people are culturally literate and imaginative critical thinkers and inventive problem solvers with a respect for history and a sense of place in a complex world. Founded in 1955, HTY is one of the oldest and most respected children’s theatres in the country. Over 300 new plays for young audiences have been commissioned by HTY. For more information, visit www.htyweb.org.
This play was made possible with funding by the New England Foundation for the Arts’ National Theater Project, with lead funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Masters of the Currents is a National Performance Network / Visual Artists Network (NPN) Creation Fund co-commissioned by Maui Arts & Cultural Center.

Additional support was provided in part by funding from the California Arts Council, a state agency learn more at www.arts.ca.gov, California Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, Los Angeles County 2021–22 Second Supervisorial District Arts and Culture Recovery Grant Program, LA Arts Recovery Fund, Sundance Institute, National Endowment for the Arts, Network of Ensemble Theaters’ Travel & Exchange Network (NET/TEN), The MAP Fund, supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Hawai’i People’s Fund, and Kim Coco Fund for Justice of the Iwamoto Family Foundation.

Funding has been provided by
**KNOW BEFORE YOU GO**

*Masters of the Currents*, created by Leilani Chan and Ova Saopeng with Innocenta Sound Kikku and members of the community, is the first nationally touring play about Micronesians in the United States.

**MICRONESIA**

Micronesia is a subregion of Oceania, which comprises thousands of small islands in the western Pacific Ocean. The Micronesian community is very diverse, with many languages, ethnicities, islands, states, and countries listed under this imposed regional name and category, which was not chosen by the people.

**A TIMELINE OF COLONIALISM AND IMPERIALISM IN MICRONESIA**

**16th Century:** Spain first explores the Micronesian region  

**1874–1898:** Spain proclaims sovereignty over the Marshall and Caroline island groups; Germany challenges Spain, moves into the Marshall Islands, and the two countries share power in Micronesia until the Spanish-American War  

**1899:** Defeated in the Spanish-American War, Spain cedes Guam to the United States and “sells” Micronesia to Germany  

**1914:** At the outbreak of World War I, Japan moves militarily to take over from Germany and incorporate Micronesia into its empire  

**Early 1940s:** The region becomes a strategic battleground during World War II; after Japan’s defeat, the United States remains in control of the islands  

**1947:** The region’s islands become a United Nations trusteeship under U.S. administration

**COMPACT OF FREE ASSOCIATION (COFA)**

One of the biggest influences on the opportunities and challenges facing modern peoples of the island nations of Micronesia is the Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the United States. The Compact of Free Association came into being as an extension of the UN trusteeship. Under the compact, the U.S. federal government provides guaranteed financial assistance in exchange for full international defense authority and responsibilities with the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. These treaties were partially established as compensation for the loss of life, health, land, and resources due to numerous nuclear weapons tests on the Marshall Islands and Bikini and Enewetak Atolls conducted by the United States from 1946 to 1958.

Citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau are admitted to the U.S. as nonimmigrants. They are neither truly “immigrants” nor U.S. citizens or nationals. They are permitted to freely enter, seek employment, go to school, or establish residence in the United States without a visa, as well as access some social and health services. They cannot vote in U.S. elections, but they are required to pay U.S. taxes. In comparison, people living in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam are U.S. citizens.

When the Compacts of Free Association were originally signed, citizens of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Palau were admitted to the United States as nonimmigrants. They are neither truly “immigrants” nor U.S. citizens or nationals. They are permitted to freely enter, seek employment, go to school, or establish residence in the United States without a visa, as well as access some social and health services. They cannot vote in U.S. elections, but they are required to pay U.S. taxes. In comparison, people living in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam are U.S. citizens.

Between 1946 and 1958, the United States conducted 67 nuclear bomb tests in the Marshall Islands, including, in 1954, Castle Bravo, which was about 1,000 times more powerful than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima. The radiation levels in many of the atolls remain extremely high—up to 7600 milligrays (mGy) compared to 10 mGy in the United States.

Representatives of the Compact states meeting in Kolonia, Micronesia, in August 2019. Left to right: American Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Micronesian President David Panuelo, Marshallese President Hilda Heine, and Palauan Vice President Raynold Oilouch.
Islands, and Palau were eligible for Medicaid and other federal programs. However, these migrants were excluded from benefits as a consequence of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996. Currently, they have limited access to healthcare benefits and are not eligible for federal public benefits (except emergency and disaster services).

MICRONESIANS IN HAWAI‘I TODAY

Many of the recent newcomers to Hawai‘i come from Micronesia. Many of them came to the United States because of pre-existing health conditions that could not be addressed in their home countries and/or as a result of economic or environmental pressures. Micronesians have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tensions have arisen between new arrivals and established communities in Hawai‘i, which has resulted in discrimination, racial profiling, and educational disparities. As tensions come to a head in schools, students from Micronesia have been especially vulnerable to being caught up in the school-to-prison pipeline. Micronesian youth have been targeted by police, and in April 2021 a teenager named Iremembar Sykap was shot and killed by Honolulu police. A concerned group of Micronesian ministers, parents, advocates, and allies have appealed to the mayor to fully investigate racial disparities in the use of force by the Honolulu Police Department that have harmed their community.

MASTERS OF THE CURRENTS

Masters of the Currents combines community-based story collection and social justice practices with ensemble techniques to create a theatrical performance built with the involvement of the community. The production was created with the contributions of numerous voices and stories from the Micronesian community in Hawai‘i, including elementary-school children, elders, at-risk youth, and community leaders and scholars. Stories were collected through interviews, story circles, and workshops. Community members played important roles in every aspect and phase of production.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What is the place you call “home”? What do you know about the history of that place? What is/are the culture/s of that place?
- What is the relationship between climate change and migration? Between economics and migration?
- What is the school-to-prison pipeline? How could a project like Masters of the Currents help to disrupt it?
- How is Masters of the Currents different from other theatrical productions you’ve seen?
- Why do you think TeAda Productions is committed to community-based storytelling?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- TeAda Productions teada.org
- Artists at Play artistsatplay.org
- East West Players eastwestplayers.org
- The L.A. Theatre Center thelatc.org
DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

LISA CROW of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this evening’s event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS
- Therese M. Quinn et al., *Art and Social Justice Education: Culture as Commons* (Florence: Routledge, 2004).

ARTICLES

JOURNALS
- *Oceania*
- *The Journal of Pacific History*

WEBSITES
- TeAda Productions | www.teada.org
- Artists at Play | artistsatplay.org
- East West Players | eastwestplayers.org
- The L.A. Theatre Center | www.thelatc.org
- Trailer for Masters of The Currents National Touring Production | vimeo.com/266971752