

UPSTAGE

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PACIFIC OVERTURES



**MEET THE
MINDS
BEHIND
THE MASKS**

What are the effects in Japan from assimilating to a more American culture?

For a long time Japan thought their choice was right because they were a rich country and assimilation gave them things they did not have before. So when the Japanese economy crashed in the late 1990's, their outlook suddenly changed. Some people saw this as a miserable thing, but I think it is a very good turning point for the Japanese. It led the Japanese to ask, "Who are we," "Where are we going now?" Reflecting on the current Japanese state of mind is a very important part of this show. When I produced this show in 2000 at the New National Theatre in Tokyo, Sondheim and Weidman came and said they would love to see it produced in New York. We brought the show to Lincoln Center and Kennedy Center, but by that time 9/11 had greatly affected the society. The American flag meant something different, so we worried that the American audiences would perceive a different message. A huge flag is brought on stage and it scares the Japanese characters. Maybe that symbolizes how people in Iraq or the Middle East felt. This story is about Japan, but after 9/11, this show has come to symbolize what happens when totally different cultures meet.

Why do you think Japan could it not stay isolated anymore?

Many countries were interested in opening Japan because whale fishing was popular at that time. Russia was trying to open Japan to trade and America became

involved so that Japan wouldn't form an alliance with Russia. At that time, most Asian countries were opened by various Western countries. Japan was one of the last countries to remain closed. Throughout history, and still today, countries go to other countries for materialistic things like oil.

Do you think that Japanese people today have had an identity crisis because of America's influence?

To be honest, I think at the end of the 1990's Japanese people felt they were losing their identity. After 2001, the whole world is changing at a very high speed. After 9/11, Japanese and non-Japanese were thinking about Japan differently because as such a spiritual country we have something to offer.

Maybe the popularity of the show is because people want to try to understand that phenomenon.

At the Lincoln Center production, in the last scene, I was surprised to see that so many members of the audiences were crying. After watching the show many audiences were thinking, "We are living in materialistic society, but what's next? What do we want next?" At the end of the show, the number is "Next." After the show, the audiences think about their own "next."

Is it different or difficult working with an American cast this time?

I think it is different. I think the members of the

Timeline of Japanese History

EDO PERIOD 1603-1868

EVENT	1853	1854	1858
	First arrival of United States	Second arrival of United States	United States/Japan Treaty - amity and commerce
SHOGUN	Tokugawa Iyeyoshi (1793-1853), 12th Tokugawa shogun, held office 1837 - 1853	Tokugawa Iesada (1824-1858), 13th Tokugawa shogun, held office 1853 - 1858	Tokugawa Iemochi (1846-1866), 14th Tokugawa shogun, held office 1858 - 1866
EMPEROR	Emperor Komei (1831 - 1867) was the 121st imperial ruler of Japan, who reigned from 1846-1867. He was a conservative and anti-Western emperor.		

American cast express themselves more. I would not use the word submissive, but Japanese actors tend to follow the director's lead. American actors express themselves as much as they can. They want to be part of the work, to collaborate. I like working with them very much.

There is a lot of cultural diversity in your current cast. Is it difficult or different to have such a varied cast?

They always make me excited to be there. The cast includes actors who are Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Filipino. Of course, like in a play, each actor and their movements are different. Today we had a discussion before we started rehearsal and I asked how and what they think about their country, America. I was interested in the fact that we all have a different backgrounds, so we each bring something different to the table. Everyone is playing Japanese in this show, but they bring their own history as a Korean-American, Chinese-American and Japanese-American onto the stage.

How did you decide to become a director?

I went to a theatre school. I decided I wanted to be a director at the age of 18. I was a dancer at 24, and then I became a director. When I was a teenager, I did not go to school for a while. I would just sit in my room and listen to many CDs from musical theatre. I could imagine so many things. My head was so full of musical theatre images it was about to explode. I did not

understand much English, but the music created so much emotion inside of me. I realized I wanted to put all these emotions on the stage. I realized that maybe "to direct" means to express emotions and thoughts on stage. That was my education. ●



American warship, woodblock print ca. 1854 (Nagasaki Prefecture)

MEIJI PERIOD 1868-1912

1859

Japan opens commercial trade with other nations

Tokugawa Yoshinobu (1837-1913),
15th Tokugawa shogun, held
office 1866 - 1867

1867

Fall of the Tokugawa shogunate -
Emperor Mutsuhito (Meiji) ascends the throne

Emperor Meiji (1852-1912)

was the 122nd imperial ruler of Japan,
who reigned from 1867-1912.

1868

Meiji Restoration, beginning
of the Meiji period

B.D. Wong

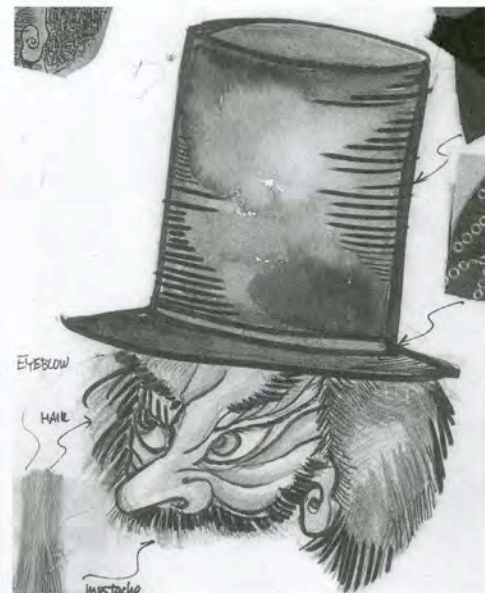


Go East, Young Man

**UPSTAGE DISCUSSES PACIFIC OVERTURES
WITH ACTOR, B.D. WONG**

UPSTAGE: Could you share some of your thoughts about the role of The Reciter in *Pacific Overtures*?

B.D. WONG: This is a very unique role in the context of it being a role in a musical. It has a lot of elements of storytelling and drama that are non-musical. The Reciter is a bit like a unifying bridge from the acting company to the audience, so finding a tone that is familiar enough to engage the audience and not betray the formality of the culture is interesting to me.



Do you sense that The Reciter has an arc in the journey of the play, and if so, does he change?

I sense that he has an arc in the journey of the play that is a little bit different than a regular character's arc because as the storyteller he's not naively going through the journey of the play. He knows how it ends, he knows how it begins, he knows, I think, how the company is going to tell this particular story. So, he's a traditional narrator in that he's supposedly a step ahead of the audience, but as a man from this particular culture, he does experience the story simultaneously, rediscovers it, as an individual every night.

When you accepted the role, what did you sense the piece was about?

The play, to me, is about selling out. And the play is about trying in whatever world you live in to maintain a sense of your own integrity in the face of outside forces. We're dealing with these very issues of the play, quite literally, in our own times and that makes the play much more accessible than it was when it was originally produced in 1976. I do think that your average person seeing it can't help but understand the parallel between what is actually happening with our country, and what our country is doing overseas, and what's happening in the play. I also strongly responded to being a member of this company because *Pacific Overtures* is one of those rare plays in which Asian-American actors feel no shame whatsoever attached to being part of it. It is only an incredible gift to perform this material.

As someone from Chinese ancestry, what type of work did you have to do to become Japanese? Is it complicated?

No, it's not complicated. It's part of the actor's journey. It's no different from what Meryl Streep does to become Polish or French. For some reason it isn't widely understood that this is the same thing.

I will say that I think that people don't really realize how rare a production of a play like *Pacific Overtures* is; directed by a Japanese director with a Japanese set designer and a Japanese costume designer – what that really means. So often in our careers as Asian-American actors we are being directed and manipulated as artists to create a non-Asian version of something that is Asian – whether it be Japanese, Chinese, Korean, etc. Aside from the Japanese or Asian issue, that's a rare thing to experience as an actor, that the director and the production embody the point of view of the play itself. There's a feeling of authenticity to it that I've never experienced before.

One of the themes is assimilation, especially with "Next." From your perspective, what do you think we give up when we assimilate?

We had at least one discussion about "Next" as a company and we all come to it from different points of view. Amon encourages maintaining all of those different points of view in his direction of the number. I'm always struck whenever I see "Next" at how the statistics of Japan's progress always resonate to me as bittersweet. They never feel to me like accomplishments. The price that Japan paid was that its assimilation was



Left to right: Research, design and creation of mask for the British Admiral by Rumi Matsui. Far left: Two of several Japanese paintings ca. 1854 used as inspiration.

accelerated by someone else's wishes or aggression. And that always makes me sad. Maybe it's because as a person I always like to evolve naturally and I don't like my process or my progress to be accelerated by others. That's why whenever "Next" comes around, I think, "That's so painful."

Do you relate to a cultural identity?

When I was a young person I really had a lot of struggle with my identity as an Asian-American and as a gay American. I went through a lot of issues where I judged myself or I wished I were something else. It's only through very recent adulthood and fatherhood that I've been able to embrace these aspects of myself and actually celebrate them and turn them into something extremely positive which allows my work as an actor to grow, as my creativity, my joy in my work, my joy in living in general also grow. In both cases, these aspects of my personality, of my identity, are related in some way to issues of assimilation - that I'm making my happiness dependent on popularity or a feeling of belonging. Where I got in trouble as a kid was assuming I couldn't be happy unless I was something that I wasn't. That pressure is similar to the West taking over an Eastern culture. It wasn't until very recently that I could get comfortable with who I was and block out the influences from popular ideas and say, "No, no, no, what's really great about me and what makes me a true contributor to my society and my art form is my ability to hold on to who it is that I am and to try to be more of a teacher than a learner." I think what's also in the play is that Japan then becomes the teacher by being so

incredibly resilient and by rebuilding itself and overcoming all these Western influences by creating its own identity. "Let the pupil show the master, Next, Next..."

Do you have any advice for young people wanting to be performers?

I discovered when I was about 13 or 14 that I wanted to be a performer. When I was 15 or 16, a touring company of the original Broadway cast of *Pacific Overtures* came to my hometown, San Francisco, and I saw this production. That was an eye-opening experience for me because this was the first play I'd ever seen, and probably one of the only plays I have ever seen, in which Asian-American actors were celebrated and their talent was truly accessed. They glorified their own culture and they celebrated their own uniqueness. It was only positive. It really gave me a tremendous sense of hope and changed my negative thinking about the possibility of enjoying a career. The same advice that people gave me when I was younger definitely still applies, which was that there's no point in being an actor unless you care intensely about it and want to live a life of creativity balanced by the challenges of getting work or those inevitable times in which you experience self-doubt or fear of failure. For me, that mission to become an actor, of being a messenger and a storyteller, was worth all of those seemingly difficult things. The other thing I would say is that no matter what anyone says about it, after all these years of doing it, I really believe that it is a potentially noble and wonderful thing to do with your life. ●

John Weidman

CULTURES COLLIDE

**UPSTAGE DISCUSSES PACIFIC
OVERTURES WITH BOOKWRITER,
JOHN WIEDMAN**

UPSTAGE: I'd like to know the history of the play.

JOHN WEIDMAN: In 1965 I took a survey course in East Asian history at Harvard. John Fairbank taught the China part and Edwin Reischauer, who had just returned from Japan, taught part of the Japanese part. This course, which I had intended to take simply to fulfill a requirement, was like opening a window on a whole part of the world about which I knew absolutely nothing. It was so fascinating that I decided to major in East Asian history. Later, I attended law school and quickly decided that I wasn't really interested in

becoming a lawyer. What could I do? One of the things I thought I could do was sit down and write a play. I had gone to the theatre my whole life and my dad had worked briefly in the theatre, but I was not one of those kids who was in the drama club or spent his life onstage in high school; I was an audience member, an enthusiastic one, but that's all. But I figured I had nothing to lose. I had always seen Perry's expedition to Japan and what Japan did in response to the Perry expedition as an extraordinary story. I wrote a straight play, which I sent to Hal Prince, and he read it and called me and we talked about it and he actually decided to produce it. It was wild!

How different is the musical version from the original play?

Well, the ideas that are explored in the musical are essentially the same as the ones that were explored in the play. The play, however, had much more of a linear, well-made play structure. Although it was told from a Japanese point of view, using a lot of these same Japanese theatrical techniques, it confined itself to the events which occurred between Perry's arrival to deliver his letter and his departure, after the letter had been delivered. It did not move, as the second act of the musical does, into the events which subsequently took place in Japan. And now the show really brings Japanese history up to the present day. So in that sense it was quite different.

When it was becoming a musical, did you have a sense of what you wanted it to be about, what the themes were? Was it just a historical piece or was there something more you were going after?

From the beginning, and this was true of the play but was emphasized in conversations among me and Hal and Steve when we started to talk about turning it into a musical, what intrigued all of us was the fact that Japan had this enormously sophisticated, pure culture which had had a wall built around it for 250 years and then suddenly that wall was kicked down by the United States. What we were exploring was what happens when cultures collide. What happens in the name of progress—what's gained, what's lost, what are the consequences? We poured those ideas into the story of what happens to Kayama over the course of the piece and what happens to Manjiro over the course of the

piece and then dealt with them directly in the second act and particularly at the climax of the second act. But *Pacific Overtures* was always about those themes, whether the story was being told in the form of a play or in the form of a musical.

Given that desire to theatricalize that idea, do you think people will see parallels between what is happening between America and Iraq?

Some will and some won't. When *Pacific Overtures* was first produced in 1976, we were still dealing with the war in Vietnam—the use of American force in Asia was

something everyone had been living with, and we are now living with the use of American force not Asia, but in the Middle East. Those are the contexts in which the show has been produced. And some members of the audience will make those connections and draw those parallels. But *Pacific Overtures* tells its own story. It was not a musical/play about Vietnam when it was written and it's not a musical/play about Iraq now.

I wanted to ask you a little bit about the quote 'cultural arrogance'

I think it harkens back to a feeling that we all had in 1976. In order to tell this story most interestingly, we had to tell it from the Japanese point of view, the point of view of the culture that was being encroached on rather than the familiar point of view of the American culture that was doing the encroaching. That took a certain amount of 'chutzpah', because I had never been to Japan, though I had immersed myself in Japanese culture, but only as a college student. Hal and Steve did make a trip to Tokyo before we went into rehearsal, and Steve did his homework in terms of what Japanese music was all about. Nevertheless, the idea of stepping inside Japanese culture and telling the story from that point of view took a certain amount of nerve. I think as

IN ORDER TO TELL THIS STORY MOST INTERESTINGLY, WE HAD TO TELL IT FROM THE JAPANESE POINT OF VIEW, THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE CULTURE THAT WAS BEING ENCROACHED ON RATHER THAN THE FAMILIAR POINT OF VIEW OF THE AMERICAN CULTURE THAT WAS DOING THE ENCROACHING.

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"Tell Him What I See!"

UPSTAGE DISCUSSES *PACIFIC OVERTURES* WITH SET DESIGNER, RUMI MATSUI



Above: "Welcome to Kanagawa" set design for *Pacific Overtures*. Right: Japanese painting of Commodore Matthew C. Perry, ca. 1854 used as inspiration for Rumi Matsui's mask designs in *Pacific Overtures*.

How did you come up with the concept for your design?

RUMI MATSUI: I wanted to create a space that represents the peaceful, quiet, delicate, holy elements of Japanese culture. We have what is called "kamidana" in Japan, which means altar. I wanted to create a huge version of it, though they are actually really small. Japan used to have one in every house and that's where God is supposed to be. So the design is like a big altar where God's spirit resides. And that altar is floating on water because Japan itself is an island in the middle of the Pacific.

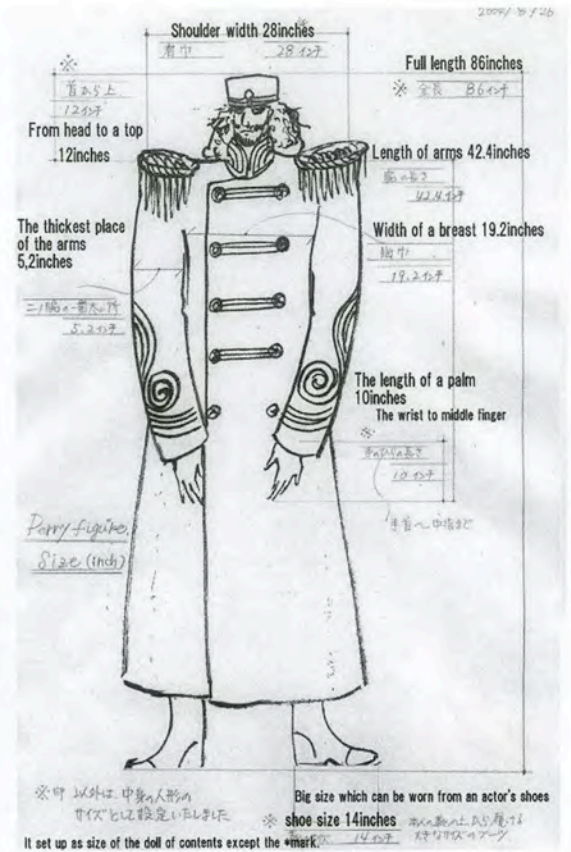
How do you do the ships coming in? Do we see the ships?

To the Japanese, Americans coming to Japan was very scary. So what I am going to do, is not present the ship itself, but create the fear the Japanese people felt then. I am going to have a huge American flag come on the stage and then the shadow will come over the Japanese people and will represent the ships. Whenever Americans or Westerners come to Japan a black iron panel will flip over onto the stage, to show their coming to Japan.





Illustration of Perry's Figure mask



Rendering by Matsui of Perry "doll". Actor wears "doll" with a harness.

Like a gangplank?

Yes! And it is invading the holy shrine made with cypress wood. Also for this particular production at Studio 54, we decided to use the concept of the entire theatre itself as America and that little space right there on stage, that is Japan.

Can you talk to a little bit how the Noh style of theatre influenced your choices?

As for color, I got the inspiration from Noh theatre. The floor from Noh theatre is made from cypress, very blond wood. That color is the exact color of a Noh stage.

Masks are used in the show. Did it come from a particular tradition of Japanese theatre?

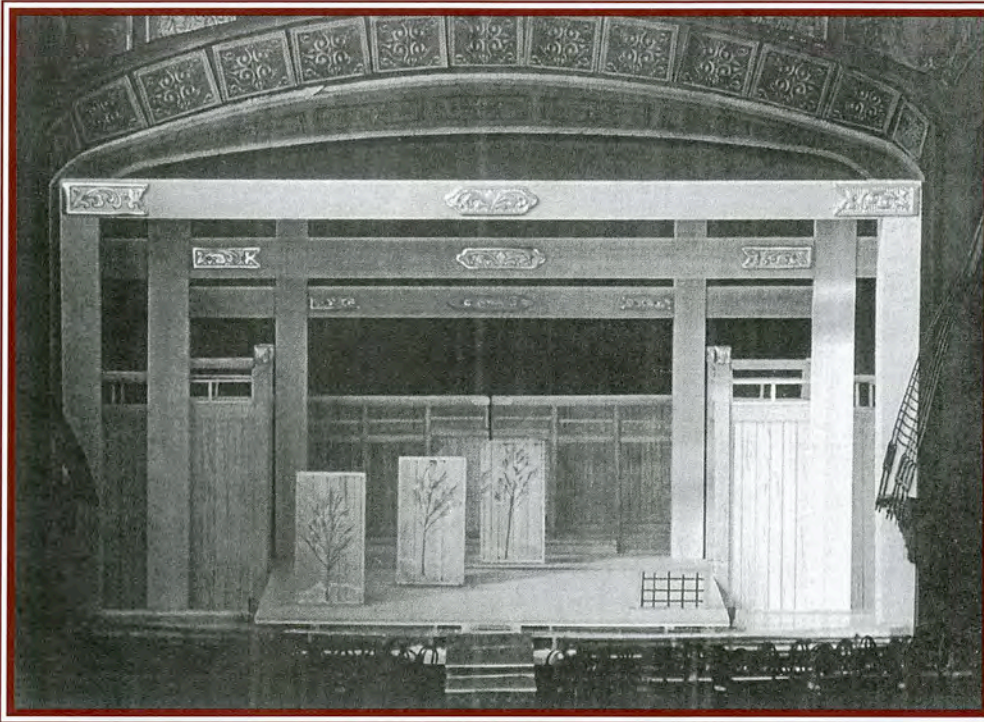
I designed about twelve masks. They are based on Japanese paintings from 1853 when they actually saw the Americans arrive.

There is a theme of assimilation in the show. I know you're from a different generation than 1853, but do you have feelings about how American culture has been assimilated in Japan? Was it a good thing, a bad thing?

Well, this might not be the perfect answer to your question, but this musical was written by an American about Japan from an American's point of view, but this time Amon and I came up with an idea to do it by having those Americans come to Japan and see it through Japanese eyes. We wanted to show the fear of Japanese people in 1853. That's why I came up with the huge masks with aquiline noses because that's how the Japanese, at that time, felt about Americans.

What do you think the Japanese have adapted, more than anything, of American culture? Is it our movies, our entertainment, our clothing?

As you can see in the last scene of this musical, after World War II everything in Japan shifted towards the



Set design for *Pacific Overtures* by Rumi Matsui

KAMIDANA – SHINTO ALTAR

Made of Hinoki, Japanese cypress. Many people in Japan have a small Shinto shrine, Kamidana in their house. A kamidana, a shelf (dana) for the spiritual power (kami) usually occupies a central place in the home. In more elaborate family altars, a Shinto altar would consist of the sacred rope (shime-nawa) which is hung above the altar, a pair of vases containing sprigs of the sakaki tree, a mirror symbolizing the kami and offerings of rice wine (sake).

American way, so I can't pick really one particular thing, because everything has been Americanized.

Can you talk about the difference in terms of designing for plays and for musicals?

When I work on a play, I have to intensely read the script and I have to come up with an idea. But when I design for a musical it is more of a collaborative process, so that I listen to the music, read the script and talk to the director and listen to his or her idea and then I come up with my designs.

How do you like working in this country? Is it different from working in your own country?

We were talking about it last night. There is quite a big difference because the way we think and the way Americans think. The way we do things and the way they do things are totally different, sometimes in the opposite way. Working here is a great experience. ●



Illustration of Dutch Admiral mask

Stephen Sondheim

ORIENT EXPRESSIONS

UPSTAGE DISCUSSES *PACIFIC OVERTURES* WITH LYRICIST & COMPOSER,
STEPHEN SONDHEIM

UPSTAGE: I understand *Pacific Overtures* was written as a play by John Weidman and that Harold Prince, the original director, decided after working on it for a year that it should have music. What made you believe it was a musical?

STEPHEN SONDHEIM: I didn't believe it was a musical at first. I really thought it should be a play with incidental music but Hal kept pushing me, so I reread it and thought about it for a couple of weeks and finally figured out a way to make songs work in it.

Did you have to do research?

Once I decided to do it, I went over to Japan and I got some recordings there of native Japanese instruments and learned something about the Japanese tuning scales. I also was experimenting with a harpsichord one night and realized, sort of accidentally, that if I leaned very gently on the manuals they made a kind of un-patterned plinking sound which had a curiously Oriental feeling to it. So the very first song I wrote, I

I WANTED THE SCORE TO START OUT AS ORIENTAL SOUNDING AS POSSIBLE, AND THEN AS THE WESTERNIZATION OF THE COUNTRY TAKES OVER, WHICH HAPPENS IN THE SECOND ACT, THE MUSIC GETS MORE AND MORE WESTERN.

used a prepared piano. I put paper and thumbtacks inside the strings to give it a kind of shamisen sound, the shamisen being a plucked Japanese instrument, similar to the guitar. I also saw that there was a relationship between the chief Japanese mode, which sounds minor, and the Spanish guitar tuning, which I like very much. It was those circumstances that gave me an entry into the way to write the music.

What about the musical style?

I wanted the score to start out as Oriental sounding as possible, and then as the Westernization of the country takes over, which happens in the second act, the music gets more and more Western. But it was always meant for Western ears because Asian music and Japanese music, the music of that whole area of the world has nothing to do with Western music. In terms of Western ears, we could never utilize it in a Broadway theatre. We did use some authentic Japanese instruments on the side of the stage in the original production; a shamisen and a shakuhachi, which is a wooden flute, and some percussion. I wanted to combine the shakuhachi with the orchestra in a number called "There is No Other Way," but it couldn't work because the tunings are so different that it just sounds like somebody is making a mistake. So we imitated the shakuhachi with a regular western wind instrument when it came time for the shakuhachi to play with the orchestra. We only used the shakuhachi when it was solo.

I understand that you saw Amon's production in Tokyo. What intrigued you about his interpretation?

It's impossible to describe until you see it. It's enormously theatrical, and wonderfully original, and elegant and very powerful. John and I saw it quite by chance. We happened to be in Japan on the last two

days of its run at the National Theatre. Then I did something I've never done before: I came back to the United States and I hustled it. I called the Kennedy Center and I called Lincoln Center and I also approached BAM but it was too expensive for them. Lincoln Center and the Kennedy Center were able to raise the money. I got the Japanese National Theatre to send an archival videotape that they had of the production so that both Kennedy Center and Lincoln Center could see it and the minute they saw it they both wanted to import it.

Could you describe your relationship with musical director, Paul Gemignani? What do you look for in your musical director?

In Paul's case, enthusiasm about the score and the way he energizes an orchestra and the way he makes them play better than they play for anybody else.

Could you give some advice to young people who might want to write for the theatre - music and lyrics? Can you talk a little bit about your training?

Well, if they are going to be composers, they should get thorough classical training. I think you have to know the rules in order to break them. Also, if you get thorough classical training, you're more able to write in your own voice, rather than in somebody else's. If you only listen to what everybody else is writing and do that, you are just going to be imitating other people. Music is an art form that has tools that you can learn. It is better to study than to be self-taught because you have many more tools at your command. As far as lyrics go, however, you have to learn by doing. I'm sure there are people who teach courses in lyric writing, but the only way to learn is by writing and putting the work in front of audiences, or in front of strangers. The more you write the better you get. ●

MAN ON A MISSION

Commodore Matthew C. Perry,

commander of the United States Navy's East India Squadron, was a staunch expansionist. In 1852 he warned President Fillmore that the British, who had already taken control of Hong Kong and Singapore, would soon control all trade in the area. Perry recommended that the United States take "active measures to secure a number of ports of refuge" in Japan – a country that had been isolated from the outside world since the 17th century. President Fillmore agreed and ordered the Commodore to open negotiations with the Emperor of Japan.

In 1853, a small fleet of American warships commanded by Commodore Perry steamed into the bay at Edo (now, Tokyo) and presented representatives of the Japanese Emperor with a proposed commercial and friendship treaty. The Japanese rejected Perry's demands and Perry withdrew. Perry returned to Japan in February 1854. This time he appeared with seven ships and one thousand, six hundred men. Threatened by the warships, Japan signed a trade treaty with the U.S that established "permanent friendship" between the two countries. The treaty opened the opportunity for trade between Japan and the United States and also guaranteed that the Japanese would save shipwrecked Americans and provide fuel for American ships. Within five years of Perry's visit, Japan signed trade treaties with Great Britain, Russia, France, and Holland.

In the 1860's the ruling shogun was overthrown, and a 15-year-old emperor named Mutsuhito took the throne. For his rule, he chose the name Meiji, meaning "enlightened reign". Meiji's supporters' slogan was "rich country, strong military." In the 45 years of Emperor Mutsuhito's reign, Japan went a long way toward achieving both goals. By the end of the 19th century the nation had a new political system with a parliament and a constitution, a modern army and navy, and growing industries. ●



Top: Commodore Matthew C. Perry.
Daguerreotype by Matthew Brady (detail) ca.
1865 (Library of Congress).

Middle: "Portrait of Perry, a North American,"
woodblock print, ca. 1854 (Nagasaki Prefecture)

Right: "U.S. JAPAN FLEET. Com. PERRY Carrying
the 'GOSPEL of GOD to the HEATHEN, 1853" by
James G. Evans, oil on canvas (Chicago
Historical Society)



CULTURES COLLIDE CONTINUED

the show drove to its conclusion in 1976, we all had (I don't know if Hal and Steve would agree with me on this), but I think we all had a vague feeling that Coca-Cola and Frito Lay were somehow going to bulldoze other cultures into the ground. The force of popular American culture was not just going to undermine or alter other cultures, it was going to obliterate them. And I think that what we've all learned in the last thirty years—I certainly feel I've learned it from my several trips to Japan—is something more nuanced. The Japanese, as they have throughout their history, are geniuses at adopting aspects of other cultures and adding them to their own. But the notion that somehow the basic beliefs and tastes and everything else that had animated their culture for so many years was going to be obliterated by an American soft drink, that notion represented a kind of arrogance, certainly on my part, and has clearly proven not to be true.

What does it take to be a librettist?

The librettist's basic job is to create a dramatic structure which serves the score, which makes the score possible. And as a bookwriter, I think you have to draw your primary satisfaction from the knowledge that you've done your work and done it well and that the people with whom you're working appreciate that. That's where the rewards tend to come from.

Anything you would like to say about this piece that I haven't asked?

Yes, I'd like to emphasize that what the Roundabout is doing here is not just another production of *Pacific Overtures*—a good production of *Pacific Overtures*, or an exciting production of *Pacific Overtures*. What I think is most satisfying about this production is that it is a genuine collaboration between the two countries about which the show was written. We have here a brilliant Japanese director working with brilliant Japanese designers, coming to New York to stage a musical written by a couple of Americans, to be presented to an American audience, with an Asian-American cast. The show is about one culture, the United States, kicking a door down, and discovering this other culture behind it: those two cultures are now collaborating with each other, first onstage in Japan, and now onstage back in the United States, and I think that makes this production unique and—for me—hugely satisfying. ●

Activities

BEFORE YOU GO TO THE THEATRE:

- ◆ Think about various aspects of your culture that are an important part of your identity.
- ◆ Think about how other cultures influence your choices (ex. Music you listen to...clothing styles, foods)
- ◆ Think about a specific time that you needed to change your style to fit into a particular environment (school? family environment? a social environment?) How did you change? What did you accomplish by making that change?

AT THE THEATRE:

- ◆ Notice the elements of Japanese culture that were strongly present prior to Commodore Perry's arrival.
- ◆ Notice changes that occur during the production in terms of costumes? Set? Language? Music?
- ◆ How do those changes parallel the changes that transpire in the story regarding Japanese culture?

AFTER THE SHOW:

- ◆ Choose a character from the show and from their perspective write a monologue that demonstrates their opinion in response to the following statement: *Progress isn't always a good thing.*

Send your work to Roundabout, and we'll share it with the artists who created *Pacific Overtures*.

Mail it to: Education Department
Roundabout Theatre Company, 231 W. 39th St., Suite 1200,
New York, NY 10018

Or email to: lindsay@roundabouttheatre.org

