

SEATTLE  
REP



# MOTHER RUSSIA

BY LAUREN YEE

## Youth Guide

## Welcome to Seattle Rep!

Thanks for joining us for the world premiere of *Mother Russia*. This season, Seattle Rep has six Apprentices working with us through the Winky Hussey Professional Arts Training Program, which offers young theater artists early career training with hands-on experience and mentorship in a professional environment. Four Apprentices worked on this show.

Directing Apprentice Lauren "LD" Dong assisted and observed the director and creative teams. Assistants are integral to the rehearsal process, helping to shape performances, refine blocking, and track any changes. LD shared some questions for you to consider as you watch *Mother Russia*, based on their work and conversations with the director:

- **Capitalism:** What role does this economic system play in shaping lives and relationships?
- **Power Dynamics:** How do people in power stay in power?
- **Systemic Inequities:** Why do political and institutional systems consistently favor those in power, even when leadership changes?
- **Resistance:** What events or conditions spark resistance?
- **Self-Determination:** How can individuals break free from paths that seem predetermined by societal expectations?
- **Possibility of Change:** Is meaningful change achievable on personal, local, and global levels, and what does it require from us?

Interested in a theater career? Remember that Apprenticeships offer one potential path as you consider your education and future! For information on all educational opportunities at Seattle Rep, check out [seattlerep.org/education](http://seattlerep.org/education).

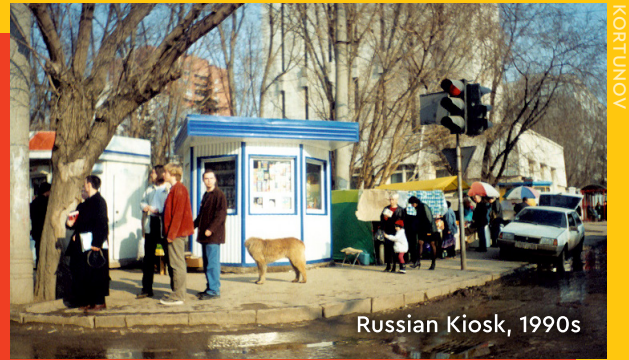


**Deanna Martinez**  
Education & Community  
Programs Director

# The World of the Play

*Mother Russia* is set in St. Petersburg in fall 1992, a period of profound and rapid change. The **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics** (U.S.S.R., also known as the Soviet Union), a group of republics that had united in 1922 as a single country under Communist Party rule, officially dissolved in 1991. Russia and other former Soviet member nations began to transition from **Communism**, an economic system in which the government owned nearly all farms and factories and controlled what was made and sold to consumers, to **capitalism**, a "free market" economic system in which consumers choose which goods and services they want to buy from private producers.

This story centers on Evgeny and Dmitri, two friends who had been planning on jobs in government but—with the collapse of the Soviet regime—end up on a different path. When they meet Katya, a former pop star, they get entangled in a love triangle and web of mistaken identities, all while grappling with the unfamiliar freedoms and challenges of the new capitalist landscape.



Russian Kiosk, 1990s

KORTUNOV

## What's a World Premiere?

A **world premiere** is the first-ever fully produced performance of a play in front of an audience, marking its official debut. Here's how a play like *Mother Russia* could reach its world premiere:

### THE IDEA AND WRITING THE SCRIPT

Every play starts with an idea. The playwright creates a story, characters, and dialogue to bring their vision to life. This is the script, which might go through multiple drafts as the playwright refines their work based on feedback from trusted readers or collaborators.

### WORKSHOPPING AND DEVELOPMENT

Before a play is ready to debut, it often goes through **workshops** or **readings** with actors reading or performing parts of the script in front of a small audience. This helps the playwright see what works and what needs improvement, like tweaking lines, pacing, or character development.

### FINDING A THEATER COMPANY

The playwright or their representatives (like a literary agent) pitch the play to theater companies. These companies decide which plays to produce based on their artistic vision, audience interest, and budget. If a theater company believes in the play's potential, they commit to producing it.

### ASSEMBLING THE TEAM

The theater company assembles a **creative team**: a director, designers (for sets and props, costumes, lighting, sound, etc.), and a cast of actors. The director leads the production, shaping the way the play is interpreted and performed. During rehearsals, the actors practice their roles, and the creative team works on bringing the play to life. During this stage, adjustments may still be made to the script to fine-tune the play.

### THE WORLD PREMIERE

Once rehearsals are complete, the play is performed for the first time ever in front of a live audience—this is the **world premiere**! It is usually a big event, often accompanied by press coverage and reviews and a celebratory opening night.

### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

After the world premiere, the play might continue to be performed at the same theater or travel to others. If successful, it might be published, performed internationally, or even adapted into other forms like film.

## AN EXCERPT FROM

# ***Mother Russia* Finds a Home at Seattle Rep**

By Todd Matthews, Encore Media

You might assume that Lauren Yee is a Seattle playwright. Since 2010, local theater companies, small and large, have lined up to produce her work—from SIS Productions' staging of *Ching Chong Chinaman* at the Richard Hugo House in 2010 to the world premiere of *King of the Yees* at ACT Theatre in 2017, to *The Great Leap* at Seattle Rep a year later, and *Cambodian Rock Band* at ACT Theatre in 2023, a co-production with The 5th Avenue Theatre.

Yee returns to town in March with Seattle Rep's world premiere production of the quirky and provocative comedy *Mother Russia*. Evgeny and Dmitri are two young men living in St. Petersburg, Russia, and looking forward to simple lives holding comfortable government jobs circa 1992. Instead, the pair navigate a new reality, thanks to the fall of Russia and the collapse of communism, that favors free market capitalism over government strongmen. Add to the mix Katya, an alluring former pop star with a secret agenda, and the result is a political farce involving a love triangle, mistaken identities, and slapdash espionage.

"It's a play with big political themes that make you think, but it's also wrapped in the ridiculousness of these three people's lives," explained Yee. "Compared to some of my other plays that have debuted in Seattle, which I would describe as very funny dramas with a certain lightness and humor, *Mother Russia* is much more of a heightened farce."

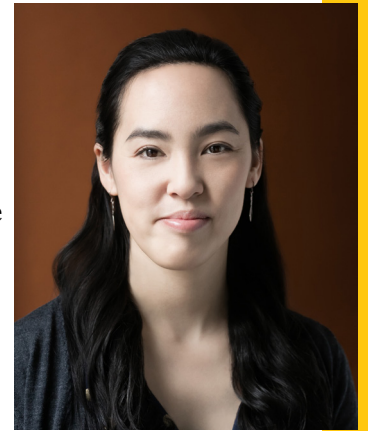
Russia seems an unusual setting for a playwright most known for writing plays with strong connections to Asia. *Cambodian Rock Band* weaved together a young Cambodian American woman, her father who survived the Khmer Rouge, and surf rock. Inspired by her father's short-lived basketball career, *The Great Leap* followed a Chinese American college

basketball player's trip to Beijing for a "friendly" game during China's post-Cultural Revolution. But Yee sees a common thread between these plays and *Mother Russia*.

"One thing I've noticed, and I don't think I was even aware of as it was happening, is that I've been writing a play cycle about communism throughout the 20th Century," she explained. "I feel like my exploration into this collision between communism and Western pop culture is a strange, backward way of exploring Americanism and what it is to see our culture through another lens."

Yee started writing *Mother Russia* while attending the Colorado New Play Festival in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, in 2017. The La Jolla Playhouse was ready to stage *Mother Russia*'s world premiere in September 2020, but the pandemic shut down public performances. It was rescheduled for April 2022 but pulled by the theater company due to concerns over Russia's invasion of Ukraine a month earlier.

"Looking back at the long, winding history this play had, it finally feels like I understand the play in a way I don't think I would have five years ago," she said. According to Yee, that period allowed her to dig deeper into the history, further explore the themes of political and societal collapse, and think about what rises in the wake of those events. "In a satisfying way, it feels like I've finally been able to figure out the play."



Playwright Lauren Yee

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To read the full article, scan here:



## **Go Beyond the Show**

Scan here for other resources to enhance your experience of *Mother Russia*, including a media list curated by librarians at Seattle Public Library!

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# What Do You Know After the Show?

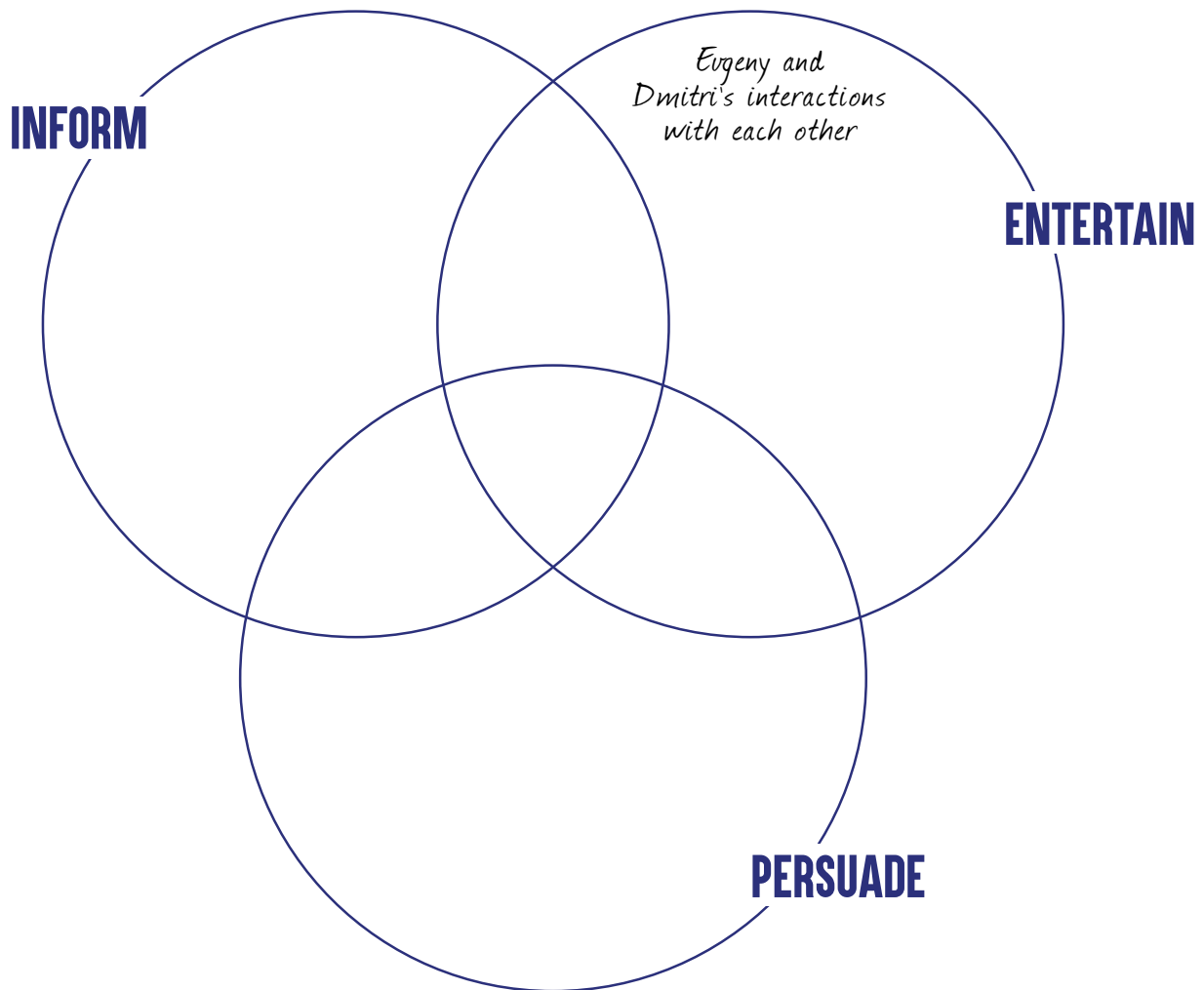
Let's take a moment to think about the author's purpose: Why do you think Lauren Yee wrote this play, and what evidence does she offer to support that answer? Writers often create with a purpose in mind. Understanding that purpose will help you connect with the story and its deeper meaning.

## What is the Author's Purpose?

The author's purpose is why they created their work. For plays, this often includes:

1. **To Entertain:** The play might aim to captivate the audience through humor, drama, or thrilling moments.
2. **To Inform:** Sometimes, playwrights use their work to teach us about history, culture, or important issues.
3. **To Persuade:** A play can challenge our beliefs or inspire us to think differently about a topic.

Reflect on key plot points, characters, and pieces of dialogue, and design elements (sound/light/set/costumes/props). Make notes by sorting reflections into the diagram.



What do you believe is the author's purpose of this play? How can you tell? Use evidence from your Venn diagram notetaking to support your response.

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