

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

There may be some debate whether *Banana Boys* is a classic Canadian play or not. If there is, I'm not interested in having it. In my world, where I've spent more than half of my career dedicated to the proliferation of Asian Canadian theatre and its artists on our country's stages, it is. It just is.

Banana Boys, the novel, became an instant success when it hit the shelves. Why? Because it did something very rarely done in literary circles: it talked about contemporary Asian Canadians... and it talked about Asian Canadian men; the often disenfranchised, exotified, hyper-stereotyped subculture of Canadian multiculturalism. They're either that too-keen railroad worker kid volunteering for that uber dangerous job sticking dynamite inside the mine shaft, or the unattractive nerd (the bad kind) who is the side kick of the best friend (but still the butt of all the jokes at their high school), or – if they're lucky – the sexy can't-tell-what-kind-of-Asian-he-is dude driving that awesome fast car (sans Hello Kitty dangling on the mirror) but has all of 10 lines in the movie. This summates the Asian North American experience in contemporary entertainment over the last several decades.

Banana Boys – both the novel and the play – captured the “in-between-ness” essential to the Asian Canadian male identity. Handsome (yes, handsome) young men, trying to find their place in this world. Some sidekicks, some fools, but none of them a foil for a White hero. They talk about sex and ambition and love. They deal with loss and guilt and shattered dreams and everyday demons. They are modern day lovers, fighters, thinkers. Depicting Asian Canadian men like that was new territory 11 years ago. And here we are now, still trying to carve out this little space in between.

The first production of *Banana Boys* was a watershed moment for the next generation of Asian Canadian theatre artists. It was a bold, unapologetic (in structure and form), angry, loud and wildly funny play for a generation who grew up without a voice. What seemed like a fun, crazy, epic experiment for all of us back then is, eleven years later, a compelling, moving and ultra complex tale of five young people trying to find their place in this world. As we were, then.

In the spirit of nakedness, I'm looking forward to putting the playwright's text front and center, rediscovering the beats and intentions, making sense of the impossible stage directions, allowing the fantastical to be just as fantastical as it was before and, really... embracing the complexity of it all. Because *Banana Boys* is complex and a monster of a play. It's also a hard play, it requires us to let go of all of our preconceived notions of how an Asian Canadian story should be told.

We've gotten older and I think now, more than anything, I'm excited to share the talents of these five next-NEXT generation Asian actors with our audiences. It's a rare and sublime pleasure to go back and attack the text with wiser directorial eyes, and find a whole new layer to the ever changing Asian Canadian identity. Enjoy the manic, fun ride, listen with open ears and let your imaginations run wild.

Wo ei ni,



Nina Lee Aquino
Director