

East West Players | \$100,000 | Two-year core operating support

People Helping People Tell Untold Stories

If it wasn't for East West Players, David Henry Hwang would not have become a Tony Award-winning playwright. "East West Players showed me that Asian Americans could be actors and writers involved in theatrical arts," said Hwang, whose play, "M. Butterfly," inspired by the opera, "Madame Butterfly," won the 1988 Tony Award for Best Play.

"It's hard to overstate the importance of East West Players in creating a community of artists who are the Asian American faces we see today," said Hwang, born in Los Angeles to Chinese American immigrants. "Most of us wouldn't be doing what we're doing today if it wasn't for East West Players."

East West Players mentored Hwang and introduced him to a community of Asian American artists with whom he would later collaborate. In 1980, East West Players staged Hwang's first play, "F.O.B." (an acronym for Fresh Off the Boat), which marked the start of his rise as a playwright. "It's hard to overstate the importance of East West Players in creating a community of artists who are the Asian American faces we see today," said Hwang, born in Los Angeles to Chinese American immigrants. "Most of us wouldn't be doing what we're doing today if it wasn't for East West Players."

East West Players is the country's first Asian Pacific Islander American theater group that nurtures Asian American talent and produces plays on issues that are seldom portrayed in mainstream media.

It does this by telling untold stories, and storytelling is what East West Players does best. For example, one evening after East West Players staged "Yohen," about an interracial marriage between an African American war veteran and a Japanese woman, the theater troupe's courtyard bustled with energy. Several interracial couples made a point of thanking artistic director Tim Dang for showing a slice of their lives that is rarely seen. "They said their stories had never been told on stage before," Dang said. They told him they often felt uncomfortable showing affection in public for fear of being judged and the play made them feel more understood.

"Yohen" is a story about a couple's struggle to invigorate their relationship after 25 years of marriage. Yohen refers to a term often used in pottery meaning an accident in kiln firing that changes the pot design. The play also honed in on cultural misunderstandings between spouses. "It was a simple story—there were no special effects," Dang said. But it hit a chord nevertheless.



Nobu McCarthy and Danny Glover in *Yohen*.
Courtesy of East West Players, 1999.

"East West Players' characters are different from the characters we see in the mainstream. I see somebody like me on stage."

—Alison de la Cruz, Filipina poet, playwright and artist

East West Players has staged plays about Japanese American internment, Korean "comfort women," growing up as an Indian American teenager in Calabasas, being a mixed-race adoptee with white parents, and the Philippines' former First Lady Imelda Marcos.

