

PRESS RELEASE

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CASTING SET FOR STUDIO THEATRE'S US PREMIERE OF DARK CORPORATE COMEDY *WHITE PEARL* BY ASCENDENT PLAYWRIGHT ANCHULI FELICIA KING

White Pearl

US Premiere

Written by **Anchuli Felicia King**

Directed by **Desdemona Chiang**

Runs November 6-December 8, 2019

Press performance: November 10, 2019 at 2pm

“*White Pearl* is a little gem...bracingly funny”
—*The Guardian*

“A machine gun of a play... it has a boldness, ambition and acerbic humour on a scale that makes you sit up and pay attention.”
—*Time Out*

“A scathing, gleefully nasty corporate satire.”
—*The Stage*

In her **US premiere**, rising Thai-Australian playwright **Anchuli Felicia King** takes a scathing look at the ugliness of the beauty industry in *White Pearl*, produced by **Studio Theatre** beginning **November 6, 2019** and directed by **Desdemona Chiang**. A draft ad for a new skin-whitening cream from Clearday, a fast-growing cosmetics startup based in Singapore, leaks on YouTube, amassing views and scorn that send the company's all-female executive team into a frenzy as they try to contain the story before it hits the US market. Scapegoats are named, coverups planned, press statements written, crisis meetings convened, and alliances forged as the six women try to make this nightmare disappear. With swagger and dark humor, *White Pearl* interrogates globalism, millennial corporate culture, and whiteness as beauty's gold standard.

“You probably haven't heard of Anchuli Felicia King yet, but this Thai-Australian writer is premiering three plays on three continents this season, and we're thrilled to present the US premiere of *White Pearl* at Studio,” said Studio's Artistic Director **David Muse**. “Felicia's dialogue is smart, fast, and vicious—I think DC is a great home for this story about corporate culture and accountability in a globalized age. Felicia says she wants to write like David Mamet, and I understand the comparison—she's not afraid of ugliness and she's interested in both the brutality of cutthroat capitalism and the stories of humans inside these larger systems.”

The company's six executives are all Asian women under 35 from different countries, and with varying backgrounds and relationships to the English language. The women powering Clearday are Priya Singh (26, Indian-Singaporean), Sunny Lee (24, Chinese-Singaporean), Ruki Minami (22, Japanese), Built Suttikul (23, Thai-American), Soo-Jin Park (33, South Korean), and Xiao Chen (29, Chinese). As such, Studio has cast several actors for whom—as their characters—English is at least a second language.

Making up the cast of *White Pearl* are **Shanta Parasuraman, Jody Doo, Resa Mishina, Diana Huey, Narea Kang, Jenna Zhu,** and **Zachary Fall** as Marcel Benoit, the techy ex-boyfriend with a plan to make this disastrous ad disappear.

King was inspired to write the play after several racist advertisements—two for skin-whitening creams, another for laundry detergent—went viral in 2016. These ads became an entry point for a critique of global capitalism and corporate culture. King also drew from her international upbringing; she grew up in the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia, seeing ads like these with no public outcry. These influences coalesce in the “move fast and break things” culture of fictitious cosmetics company Clearday, whose Singapore headquarters gave King a setting to bring together very different kinds of Asian characters than she'd seen on stage before.

White Pearl had its world premiere at the Royal Court Theatre in London in May 2019. This fall, *White Pearl* will have its Australian premiere in a co-production between Sydney Theatre Company and the National Theatre of Parramatta and its US premiere at Studio Theatre.

About *White Pearl*

Clearday is a cosmetics company on the rise: Based in Singapore, launching a global skincare line, and bringing a start-up mentality to the big leagues. But a draft ad for their latest skin whitening cream surfaces on YouTube, gathering views and outrage. As morning news in the U.S. market—19,643 views. 467,327. 654,398.—Clearday's all-female team hustles to contain the damage before BuzzFeed weighs in. Someone's definitely getting fired. A comedy from rising Thai-Australian writer Anchuli Felicia King about toxic corporate culture, selling whiteness, and shame as both a cultural commodity and canny marketing strategy.

About Anchuli Felicia King

Anchuli Felicia King is a multidisciplinary artist of Thai-Australian descent who works primarily in live theatre. Felicia has worked as a writer, dramaturg, sound designer, projection designer and creative consultant with a wide range of companies including Punchdrunk, PlayCo, Roundabout Theater, 59E59, Ars Nova, the Obie Awards, The Builders Association, Ensemble Studio Theater, and Red Bull Theater. The Royal Court Theatre in London's mainstage production of *White Pearl* marked her professional debut in May 2019. *White Pearl* also had its Australian premiere at Sydney Theatre Company in October and will have its US premiere at Studio Theatre in November 2019. Her play *Golden Shield* premiered at Melbourne Theatre Company in August 2019, making her the first writer to have their NEXTSTAGE commission produced. Felicia's play *Slaughterhouse* was selected as part of Melbourne Theatre Company's Cyber Electric 2018 readings. *Slaughterhouse* had its premiere in October 2019 at 25A at Belvoir Theatre. In 2019 Felicia's play *Keene* was the recipient of the American Shakespeare Centre's Shakespeare's New Contemporaries Award and will be produced in 2020. Felicia explores linguistic hybrids, digital cultures, and issues of global urgency, and is a member of EST's Youngblood Group, Ars Nova's Play Group, and Roundabout's Space Jam Program. Areas of interest include emerging technologies, 2D animation, VFX and projection design, music production, and writing for performance. Felicia works globally with companies such as Playwriting Australia (Sydney), Yellow Earth Theatre (London), House of North (Berlin), and SHIFT Festival (Shanghai).

About Desdemona Chiang

Desdemona Chiang is a stage director based in Seattle, WA and Ashland, OR, and is co-founder of Azeotrope (Seattle). Her directing credits include the Guthrie Theater, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Pittsburgh Public Theater, Baltimore Center Stage, California Shakespeare Theater, Seattle Rep, PlayMakers Repertory Company, Long Wharf Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, ACT Theatre, American Shakespeare Center, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Heritage Theatre Festival, Book-It Repertory Theatre, Aurora Theatre Company, Seattle Public Theater, Shotgun Players, Crowded Fire Theater, Azeotrope, Impact Theatre Company, Playwrights Foundation, Golden Thread Production, Washington Ensemble Theatre, One Minute Play Festival, Ohio Northern University, University of Washington, and Cornish College of the Arts. Her assistant directing and dramaturgy credits include work at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, PlayMakers Repertory Company, ACT Theatre, California Shakespeare Theater, Arizona Theatre Company, Intiman Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, Magic Theatre, Theatreworks, and Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre. She is an Intersection for the Arts Triangle Lab Artist-Investigator and an adjunct faculty member at Cornish College of the Arts. Her awards and honors include the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise, the Gregory Award for Outstanding Direction, a Stage Directors and Choreographers Society Sir John Gielgud Fellowship, a Drama League Directing Fellowship, and she is a Young Leader of Color (Theatre Communications Group). She is affiliated with Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab and Directors Lab West. She earned a BA at the University of California, Berkeley and an MFA in directing from the University of Washington School of Drama.

ABOUT THE CAST

- **Shanta Parasuraman** (Priya Singh) recently appeared as #8 in *The Wolves* at Studio Theatre. Other productions include the national tours of *The Buddy Holly Story* and *Remarkably Normal, Outside of Eden* at the New Ohio Theatre, *Yentl* at Theater J, and *Not Enuf Lifetimes* with The Welders. Shanta received a BA in Theatre/Drama and Telecommunications from Indiana University and was an Allen Lee Hughes Artistic Development Fellow at Arena Stage.
- **Resa Mishina** (Ruki Minami) is making her Studio Theatre debut in *White Pearl*. She is a proud native of Yokohama, Japan, and spent her childhood years in Singapore. Theatre credits include, *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*, *Annie*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *9 to 5*, and *The Music Man* at Flat Rock Playhouse; *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* at Slow Burn Theatre Company; *Miss Saigon* at Interlakes Summer Theatre; and *TEXAS!* at Texas Musical Drama. Resa has a BFA in Musical Theatre from Rider University.
- **Narea Kang** (Soo-Jin Park) makes her Studio Theatre debut with *White Pearl*. Select regional credits include *Caught* at Intiman Theatre; *The Hard Problem*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *John* at American Conservatory Theater; *The Tempest* at Livermore Shakespeare Festival. Television credits include *Blue Bloods* and the upcoming HBO series *Betty*. Narea holds an MFA from the American Conservatory Theater.
- **Diana Huey** (Built Suttikul) most notably played Ariel in the first National Tour of *Disney's The Little Mermaid*, where she made international headlines for facing racism over her casting as an Asian American actor and her activism for diversity in the arts. Other favorite roles and productions include Kim in *Miss Saigon* at the Signature Theatre and Flat Rock Playhouse, Sherrie in *Rock Of Ages* at the 5th Avenue Theatre, Kira in *Xanadu* at Hangar Theatre and originating the role of Spider in Pasek and Paul's *James and the Giant Peach* at Seattle Children's Theatre. She has also appeared on TNT's *Leverage* and Netflix's *It's Bruno!* Diana is the proud recipient of a Helen Hayes Award for *Miss Saigon* and a Gregory Award for *The Little Mermaid*.
- **Jody Doo** (Sunny Lee) is a born and raised Singaporean. She has appeared as Jocasta in *Oedipus* at the American Theatre of Actors. Other productions include Gabriele in *Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, Lady Nijo in *Top Girls*, and two years as a comedic actor at Universal Studios Singapore. She's also been spotted on Syfy, Oxygen Channel, Comedy Central and in

international commercials for Maybelline, Huawei, and L.L. Bean. This summer, Singapore's top radio channel, Kiss92 FM, invited her by to talk about her career and life. Jody graduated from Circle in the Square Theatre's Professional Workshop and has a BA from University at Buffalo.

- **Jenna Zhu** (Xiao Chen) was last seen in *BAD NEWS! i was there...* directed by JoAnne Akalaitis at NYU Skirball in cooperation with the Guthrie Theater. She has also appeared in *You Across From Me*, *The Rust Belt Bronies Meetup Group for Adult Fans of My Little Pony*, *The Soul of the World*, *Spell It Out*, *The Sandwich and the Rock*, *Pyrphoros*, and *Persuasion* at the Actors Theatre of Louisville. Additional credits include *In Someone Else's Shoes* directed by Annie Saunders at the Oculus, *American Scoreboard* co-directed by Christopher Burney and Fran Kirmser at HB Playwrights Theatre, *The Crucible* and *Titus Andronicus* directed by Eric Tucker at Bedlam, and readings/workshops for Lincoln Center, Manhattan Theatre Club, Playwrights Horizons, The New Group, Clubbed Thumb, The Drama League, Musical Theatre Factory, The Lark, The Juilliard School, and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, among others. Jenna has a BA from Swarthmore College with High Honors in Political Science and Psychology and is an alumna of the Professional Training Company at the Actors Theatre of Louisville.
- **Zachary Fall** (Marcel Benoit) recently appeared in the award-winning *Subject Mater* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Other UK stage credits include *Tartuffe* at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in London's West End, a trilogy of Tennessee Williams plays entitled *Kingdom of Earth* at the Rosemary Branch Theatre, and Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* at the Barons Court Theatre. French stage credits include *Richard III* with La Manufacture touring France and Switzerland and *Dans La Foule* with Adesso e Sempre (currently in pre-production). Television credits include *Poldark*, *Versailles*, *Genius: Picasso*, *Guilt*, *Crossing Lines*, *Immortality*, and *Reinas*. Film and gaming credits include *Allies*, *The Division 2*, and *A Plague Tale: Innocence*. His production company, Woven Voices, recently won a Scotsman Fringe First Award for its production of *Subject Mater*. Zachary received a BA in Acting from the Drama Centre London.

ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM

- **Debra Booth** (Set Designer) has a long relationship with Studio Theatre, where she has designed *If I Forget*, *Translations*, *The Wolves*, *The Father*, *The Hard Problem*, *Moment*, *Constellations*, *The Apple Family Cycle*, *Jumpers for Goalposts*, *Belleville*, *Cock*, *Edgar & Annabel*, *Bachelorette*, *Moonlight*, *Blackbird*, *My Children! My Africa!*, *The Pillowman*, and many others. Her international work includes premiere opera *Marco Polo* (Tan Dun/Martha Clarke) in Munich, Hong Kong, and New York. Regionally, Debra's credits include *Small Mouth Sounds* at Round House Theatre; *Richard III*, *The Collection*, and *The Lover* at the Shakespeare Theatre Company; *Marisol* at Hartford Stage and The Public Theatre; *Trying*, *The Illusion*, and *Happy Days* at Portland Stage Company; the New York premiere of *Angels in America* at The Juilliard School; *Broken Glass* at Philadelphia Theatre Company (Barrymore Award nomination); and *Moon for the Misbegotten* at Yale Repertory Theatre. Debra is the recipient of the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities Artist Fellowship, National Endowment for the Arts Design Grant, and a graduate of the Yale School of Drama.
- **Helen Q. Huang** (Costume Designer) will design her 29th show at Studio with *White Pearl*. She recently worked with Desdemona Chiang on a production of *The Winter's Tale* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Her work has been seen locally at The Washington Ballet, Ford's Theatre, Woolly Mammoth, Folger Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Arena Stage, and Signature Theatre. She has also worked with Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Children's Theatre Company, the Guthrie Theater, Classic Stage Company, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Philadelphia Theatre Company, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Disney Entertainment, Syracuse Stage, PlayMakers Repertory Company, and Boston Lyric Opera. Helen's international work includes set and costume design at National Opera House of China and the Central Television of China. She is a

receipt of a Helen Hayes Award and an Ivey Award. Helen is also a professor of MFA Costume Design at the University of Maryland, College Park.

- **Wen-Ling Liao** (Lighting Designer) has worked as a lighting designer for major theater companies both in the US and abroad, including Dallas Theater Center, SpeakEasy Stage Company, Stoneham Theatre, The Nora Theatre Company, Hibernian Hall, Long Island Opera, East West Players, Marin Theatre Company, San Diego Repertory Theatre, Tirgan Festival (Toronto, Canada), HERE Art Center, TANZINOLTEN (Switzerland), Malashock Dance, Avignon Festival Off (France), and Taipei Fringe Festival (Taiwan). Wen-Ling was the company lighting designer for Patricia Rincon Dance Collective. She earned her MFA from the University of California, San Diego and BA from National Taiwan University. This will be Wen-Ling's first time designing at Studio.
- **Matt Carlin** (Properties Designer) is working with Studio for the first time with *White Pearl*. Regional credits include *FAME en Español* at GALA Hispanic Theatre. Off Broadway credits include props for *Happy Birthday*, *Wanda June* at The Duke on 42nd Street. Other New York credits include props for *Spring Awakening* at Gallery Players, *The Sea Concerto* with Flux Theatre Ensemble, and *Beauty and the Beast* at White Plains Performing Arts Center. New York set design credits include *Worse Than Tigers* at The New Ohio Theater, *So Happy Together* at Bristol Valley Theater, and *The Wild Party* at Schaeberle Studio Theatre.
- **Melanie Chen Cole** (Sound Designer) is a San Diego based freelance sound designer. Her recent regional credits include *Noura* at The Old Globe, *Silent Sky* at Tantrum Theatre/Ohio University, the 2019 WOW Festival *PDA* and 2019 POP Tour *Light Years Away* at La Jolla Playhouse, and *Buzz* (world premiere) and *Romeo & Juliet* at Alabama Shakespeare Festival. Other regional credits include Dallas Theater Center and PlayMakers Repertory Company. Melanie holds an MFA in Sound Design for Theatre & Dance from UC San Diego.
- **Rasean Davonte Johnson** (Projections Designer) is a Chicago-based video artist and theatrical designer. He has had the opportunity to work regionally with institutions such as Woolly Mammoth, Olney Theatre Center, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Yale Repertory Theatre, Geva Theatre Center, Berkshire Theatre Group, McCarter Theatre Center, Alliance Theatre, Drury Lane Theatre, Court Theatre, the Kitchen Theatre, Writers Theatre, Manual Cinema, and internationally with the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (Scotland), Ningbo Song and Dance Company (China), and B-Floor Theatre (Thailand). Additionally, his video and installation work has been seen at the Yale University Art Gallery, The Bridgeport Film Festival, and the Logan Center for the Arts. He has an MFA from the Yale School of Drama.
- **Adrien-Alice Hansel** (Dramaturg) is the Literary Director at Studio, where she has dramaturged the world premieres of *Queen of Basel*, *The Remains*, *No Sisters*, *I Wanna Fucking Tear You Apart*, *Animal*, *Laugh*, *Red Speedo*, *Dirt*, *Lungs*, and *The History of Kisses* as well as productions of *The Children*, *Cry It Out*, *Curve of Departure*, *The Effect*, *Wig Out!*, *Straight White Men*, *Cloud 9*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Jumpers for Goalposts*, *Bad Jews* (twice), *Invisible Man*, *Sucker Punch*, *The Golden Dragon*, and *The New Electric Ballroom*, among many others. Prior to joining Studio, she spent eight seasons at the Actors Theatre of Louisville, where she headed the literary department as well as serving as production dramaturg on roughly 50 new, contemporary, and classic plays, including premieres by Naomi Wallace, Kirk Lynn and Rude Mechs, Alice Tuan and New Paradise Laboratories, The Civilians, Anne Bogart and SITI Company, Rinne Groff, Jordan Harrison, Gina Gionfriddo, and John Belluso. She is the co-editor of eight anthologies of plays from Actors Theatre and editor of 10 editions of plays through Studio.
- **Madison Bahr** (Production Stage Manager) has worked on a number of productions at Studio Theatre, including *Queen of Basel*, *The Remains*, *Moment*, *Murder Ballad*, *Chimerica*, and *The Torch Song Trilogies*. Other regional credits include *Cabaret* at Olney Theatre Center; *Billy Elliot: The Musical* at Signature Theatre; *Charlotte's Web* and *The Little Mermaid* at Imagination Stage; *Kiss* and *Guards at the Taj* at Woolly Mammoth; *Our Suburb* at Theater J; *ReEntry*, *Next*

Fall, and Glengarry Glen Ross at Round House Theatre, and *In the Heart of America* at Rep Stage. Madison holds a BA in Theatre with a focus in Stage Management from the University of Maryland, College Park.

- **Marielle Burt** (Assistant Director) is a director, choreographer, and playwright. Her recent directing credits include *The Wolves*, *Helens of Troy New York*, and *Psychopsychotic* at Brown University. Marielle has previously worked in the artistic departments of Trinity Repertory Company, the New York International Fringe Festival, and Nightdrive theatre company. She recently graduated from Brown University with a BA in Gender Studies and Literature. Marielle also studied directing at The National Theatre Institute at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center and devised/avant-garde performance at Bard College Berlin.
- **Charles Cicchino** (Assistant Stage Manager) previously served as the Assistant Stage Manager of *Doubt: A Parable* at Studio Theatre, as well as the ASM of *The Three Musketeers* at RhinoLeap Productions. His stage management credits include *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Us/Them*, and *Macbeth* from his time at Wake Forest University.

INFORMATION

Where: Studio Theatre's Milton Theatre, 1501 14th St NW, Washington, DC 20005

Performances: Tuesday-Saturdays at 8pm; Saturdays and Sundays at 2pm; Sundays at 7pm

There will be no matinee performance on November 9 and no evening performance on November 10 or 28.

Tickets: \$60-\$90

Runs November 6-December 8, 2019

Press performance: November 10, 2019 at 2pm

STUDIO THEATRE

Studio Theatre is Washington's premier venue for contemporary theatre, "where local audiences will find today's edgiest playwrights" (*Variety*). One of the most respected mid-sized theatres in the country, Studio produces exceptional contemporary drama in deliberately intimate spaces. Drawing inspiration from great ensembles—where people work together with a spirit of generosity and professional rigor—Studio brings characteristic thoughtfulness and daring to its work onstage and off, through its new work incubator and engagement, education, and workforce training initiatives. Studio serves nearly 75,000 people each year, including more than 1,000 youth and young adults through community engagement initiatives. Founded in 1978, the quality of Studio's work has been recognized by sustained community support, as well as 70 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in professional theatre.

GENERAL INFORMATION Location: 1501 14th Street NW (northeast corner of 14th and P Streets)

Parking: Studio has a parking partnership with Washington Plaza Hotel at 10 Thomas Circle NW, three blocks south of Studio; patrons who park at the hotel's parking garage can purchase a \$13 voucher at the box office. Street parking is extremely limited; arrive early to increase your options.

Metro Stops: Red Line: Dupont Circle, Orange/Blue Lines: McPherson Square, and Green/ Yellow Lines: U Street/Cardozo

Accessibility: Studio's theatres are all wheelchair accessible; seats are available by reservation. Assistive listening devices are available for all shows at the Box Office. Call the Box Office at 202.332.3300 for more information.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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